Hindutva Self-fashioning: Young Hindu Nationalists of India

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Abstract

This project examines the processes of socialisation and the everyday lives of the members of India's largest Hindu nationalist coalition, the *Sangh Parivar* (Sangh Family). For this, I study the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP; All India Students' Committee). Founded in 1949, the ABVP is the student wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; National Volunteers Corp). The RSS is the most influential fountainhead of the Hindu nationalist movement. With approximately three million members, ABVP is one of the most prominent student organisations in India. The ABVP is an essential part of the *Sangh Parivar* because it socialises its most active participants: university students. These students are socialised as political Hindus who can defend the ideology, agitate and use violence for their beliefs. Through this active engagement of the students, the ideology is able to reach other sets of demographics that were previously inaccessible to the Sangh: university students, urbane residents, distinct caste groups, women with access to higher education, and students who describe themselves in the light of a modern, aspiring India, as ideological warriors and political agents.

Through an ethnographic engagement with students in two universities, I have three goals. First, I document a crucial historical moment for Hindu nationalism in India. I add to the literature on the movement through my analysis of the emerging contemporary form of urban *Hindutva* (the Hindu nationalist ideology) in relationship with the democratic and increasingly neoliberal state. Secondly, I study a manifestation of the ideology in the way it finds voice and is transformed by young and university-educated people in contemporary India. By analysing how the ABVP retains its role as a student organisation in universities while performing an imperative role for the larger Hindu nationalist movement, I add to the literature on student and campus politics of the ABVP. Thirdly, I analyse how young individuals engage with the ideology to articulate their own dreams and aspirations. I show the disparity and the heterogeneity of the ways and aims of Hindutva in the lives of the young people in a Hindu nationalist organisation in urban India. Additionally, this study adds to the rich literature on women of the Hindu nationalist organisations. Through my study, I show how ABVP women add another shade to the roles and ways of participation in the Hindu nationalist movement: as students, as unmarried or single women, holding on tightly to the Hindu (and related caste) identity.

Zusammenfassung

Dieses Projekt zeigt die Sozialisationsprozesse und den Alltag der Mitglieder der größten hindu-nationalistischen Koalition Indiens, der *Sangh Parivar* (Sangh-Familie). Zu diesem Zweck untersuche ich die Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP; All India Students' Committee). Die ABVP wurde 1949 gegründet und ist der studentische Flügel der Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; Nationaler Freiwilligenverband). Der RSS ist federführend in der nationalistischen Hindu-Bewegung. Mit rund drei Millionen Mitgliedern ist die ABVP eine der bedeutendsten Studentenorganisationen in Indien. Die ABVP ist ein wesentlicher Bestandteil der *Sangh Parivar*, weil sie deren aktivste Teilnehmer sozialisiert: die Studenten. Diese werden als politische Hindus sozialisiert: solche, die die Ideologie verteidigen, agitieren und für ihre Überzeugungen auch Gewalt anwenden. Durch dieses aktive Engagement der Studenten ist die Ideologie in der Lage, andere Bevölkerungsgruppen zu erreichen, die zuvor für den Sangh unzugänglich waren: Studenten, Stadtbewohner, verschiedene Kastengruppen, Frauen mit Zugang zu höherer Bildung und Studenten, die sich selbst im Lichte eines modernen, aufstrebenden Indiens als ideologische Kämpfer und politische Akteure beschreiben.

Durch eine ethnografische Auseinandersetzung mit den Studenten an zwei indischen Universitäten verfolge ich drei Ziele. Erstens dokumentiere ich einen entscheidenden historischen Moment für den Hindu-Nationalismus in Indien. Durch meine Analyse der sich herausbildenden zeitgenössischen Form der urbanen *Hindutva* (der hinduistischen nationalistischen Ideologie) in Verbindung mit dem demokratischen und zunehmend neoliberalen Staat, trage ich zur aktuellen Forschungsdebatte über diese Bewegung bei. Zweitens untersuche ich, wie die Ideologie von jungen Menschen mit Hochschulbildung im heutigen Indien geäußert und verändert wird. Indem ich analysiere, wie die ABVP ihre Rolle als Studentenorganisation an den Universitäten beibehält, während sie gleichzeitig eine wichtige Rolle für die größere hindu-nationalistische Bewegung spielt, leiste ich einen Beitrag zur Literatur über die Studenten- und Campus-Politik der ABVP. Drittens analysiere ich, wie junge Menschen sich mit der Ideologie auseinandersetzen, um ihre eigenen Träume und Bestrebungen zu artikulieren. Ich zeige die Heterogenität der Bedeutung von Hindutva im Leben der jungen Menschen in einer hindunationalistischen Organisation im städtischen Indien auf. Darüber hinaus ergänzt diese Studie die umfangreiche Literatur über Frauen in hindu-nationalistischen Organisationen. Anhand meiner Studie zeige ich, wie ABVP-Frauen neue

Formen der Beteiligung an der hindunationalistischen Bewegung schaffen: als Studentinnen, als unverheiratete oder alleinstehende Frauen, die fest an der hinduistischen (und damit verbundenen Kasten-)Identität festhalten.

Table of Contents

Glossary

Word	Literal translation	Context
Aastha	Faith	According to some of my interlocutors, what distinguishes their ideology from the left or communism is element of spirituality and faith- in the land, in the universe etc.
Aayam	Initiative	Different initiatives of the organisation: e.g., SEIL, Students for Seva etc. for the ABVP.
Abhyas Varg	Workshop	Workshops for *karyakartas* as introduction or primers in a camp-like setting.
Adhiveshan	Session	ABVP conference; can be of different durations.
Akhand Bharat	All of Bharat/India	*Akhand Bharat* is one of the central ideas of Hindutva- an idea that espouses spatial integrity of the subcontinent, with the belief that the land is divinely blessed. Since the land holds spiritual value, the partition and any conversation about disintegration cuts at the heart of the ideology.
Bachpana	Childhood	Here, it is the state of immaturity before one acquires *samajh* or wisdom for values considered more valuable in the Sangh schema.
Bhaiya	Older brother	A way to refer to an older, male member in the organisation; might not necessarily be related in a kinship way.

Chhatra	Students	*Chhatra Shakti* (Students' Power) is the magazine and a motto of the ABVP.
Dayitv	Responsibility	*Dayitv* is a way to indicate someone's position in the organisational hierarchy. It is a way to indicate that the position is to serve the nation, that self comes later.
Desh	Country (embodies an affective feeling)	In this case, refer to the definition of *Akhand Bharat*.
Dhaba	Eating joint, usually serving fast meals	*Dhabas* and many other eateries are patronised by students, often acquiring the position of a geographical landmark in the campus. For example, Ganga *dhaba* in JNU.
Didi	Older sister	A way to refer to an older, female member in the organisation; might not necessarily be related in a kinship way.
Ikai	Unit	College units in the ABVP schema.
Ikai adhyaksh	Unit head	President of the college unit.
Ishwar	God	God or higher power.
Judaav	Connection	*Judaav* as a connection imbibed with feelings of affection, respect and as representative of the connection to the movement and its symbols.
Name + Suffix -ji	Form of respect	To address peers and older members.
Kar seva	Service through hands/work	Mobilisational work for the Ram temple movement and the demolition of the Babri Mosque; also, *kara seva, kara sewa*.
K.K.M. (Karyakari Mandal)	Working committee	Central working committee of the RSS.
Karyakarta	Worker	Activist member of the ABVP.

Karyalaya	A place of work	The head or main office of the Sangh organisation.
Kurta	Long, loose shirt/tunic	
Mann	Mind/Concentration/Intention	Motivation/sincerity into a concept/activity.
Mazbooti	Strength	Ability to mobilise resources to fight student union elections.
Padsanchalan	March	Groups of people organised to walk a distance or a specified route as a way of protest or ideological dissemination.
Parcha	Paper	Pamphlet; an informational document used by student groups to circulate their ideas.
Parantha	Flat bread	Flat bread, sometimes with a filling.
Pracharak/Pracharika	Apostle, somebody who does broadcasting or propagation	Full-time worker of the Sangh family.
Prant	Region	Region/district.
Prant Pramukh	Regional head	
Ram Janmabhoomi	Ram's birthplace	The movement for claiming a land in the name of Ram, which was speculated to have been taken over by a mosque in the 16th century.
Rashtriya punarnirman	National reconstruction	A goal of the ABVP, on the lines of the Hindutva vision.
Samikaran banna	To make an equation	The four-member panel from each student party for contesting student union elections.
Saaf	Clean	A clean, groomed look expected of male student politicians.

Sampoorna Kranti	Total Revolution	Name and goal of a student-led movement in the mid-1970s.
Sangathan Mantri	Leader of the group	An official, influential position in the *Sangh Parivar*, Organising Secretary.
Shakti pradarshan	Demonstration of strength	Demonstrating one's *mazbooti* in the election process.
Seva	Service	Service or work for the betterment of others; also, *sewa.*
Shakha	Branch	In the Sangh infrastructure, *shakha* is the smallest unit of community. *Shakhas* are regularly scheduled meetings where members learn about the ideology, play games, learn different skills- all under the gaze of their revered teacher *Bhagwa Dhwaj* (the saffron flag).
Swadeshi	From one's own land	Movement to produce and consume from one's own country.
Tapasya	Generation of heat or energy	The hard work that goes into preparing for one's dreams. Here, it is used by students fighting the student union elections.
Tayyari	Preparation	Preparing to fight for the student union elections, always a multi-year process.
Vaampanthi	Left-leaning	Communist.
Vasudeva Kutumb	All the world is a family	
Vibhag	Section	
Vichaardhaara	Way of thought	Ideology.
Vistarak/Vistarika	Someone who amplifies, expands or explains	Someone who has devoted a part of their time to the Sangh.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full name	Translation/Explanation
ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad	All India Students Committee
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party	National People's Party
BJYM	Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha	BJP's Youth division
DU	Delhi University (University of Delhi)	
DUSU	Delhi University Students Union	
*Non-DUSU college		Colleges in the University of Delhi that do not participate in electing the DUSU
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University	
JNUSU	Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union	
Lyngdoh	A supreme court mandated committee formed under Chief Electoral Commissioner James Michael Lyngdoh	Lyngdoh guidelines for conducting university student union elections
Parishad	ABVP	Group; colloquially also used in place of ABVP.
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh	National Volunteers Corp
Samiti	Rashtra Sevika Samiti	National Women Volunteers
Sangathan	Sangh	Group; colloquially also used in place of the *Sangh Parivar*

Chapter 1:

Introduction

India is at a very crucial moment in its history: shifting power centres, post-pandemic economic and social conditions, democracy and majoritarian impulses. Due to its strategic position and influence, the events in India have repercussions for countries and people beyond its borders. The Bharatiya Janata Party (the Indian People's Party; hereon, the BJP) currently sits at the epicentre of power. The BJP has won two successive Lok Sabha (House of People) elections (in 2014 and 2019) with an 'absolute majority' (Chatterji, Hansen & Jaffrelot, 2019: p. 1). The BJP in the present historical moment holds 'unprecedented' power (ibid). But the success of the BJP is not its alone. BJP's victory is a testament to the crystallisation of power and influence of the Hindu nationalist movement in India. And leading this movement is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteers Corp; hereon, RSS).

The RSS has been the pioneer and the most prominent ideological influencer of the Hindu nationalist movement in India. The RSS was founded in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889-1940) in central India (in present-day Nagpur).[1] According to his biography, Hedgewar was engaging with questions of the identity of the nation. B.V. Deshpande and S.R. Ramaswamy (2017: p. 66) write:

> Though Dr. Hedgewar was in the thick of the various front of the freedom struggled (sic), his mind was engrossed in searching for answers to deeper questions: what is the true nature of our nation, for whose freedom we are fighting? What are its traits? And again, what is the root cause of our national downfall and slavery?'

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[1] Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was a physician who devoted his life to founding and working for the RSS. He was part of the anti-colonial struggle against the British in India. His family was originally from the present-day Telangana region of south-east India. His grandfather and other prominent Brahmin families moved to Nagpur under the patronage of the Bhonsle dynasty rulers (1739-1853), reportedly to escape the '… neglect and penury suffered by them under the Mughals' (Deshpande & Ramaswamy, 2017: p. 2). He was deeply influenced by Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) and his view of a more aggressive approach to the independence struggle (ibid: p. 66). Influenced by Tilak, he centred the Hindu identity and symbols at the heart of the struggle.

Keeping these questions at the heart of his worldview, he envisioned a group that would work to reinvigorate the 'innate Hindu spirit' (ibid: p. 67).[2] This group was set up to establish the Hindu nation or *Hindu Rashtra* (ibid: p. 66) based on the ideas of Hindutva, the Hindu nationalist ideology. This idea finds many epistemological roots (Jaffrelot, 2007: p. 7) but was most famously conceptualised by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) in his book 'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu' (1923).[3] [4]

Hindu nationalism seeks to create a specific vision of India through an articulation of the *tejasvi Hindu rashtra* (glorious Hindu nation). Hindutva is a religious-territorial ideology that seeks to develop the social, public and political life of those living in the subcontinent of India.[5] 'Character building' is one of the core goals of the movement (Mathur, 2008: p. 82). This is done through physical and ideological training (*baudhik*; meaning intellect) at regular meetings (*shakha*; meaning branch). *Shakhas* have a local character and form the smallest unit of the RSS.

Hedgewar sought to establish a group that would be modelled on 'an ideal Hindu family' (Deshpande & Ramaswamy, 2017: p. 106). Over the years, this vision has been expanded to include interests of different demographic groups within the movement. The RSS has grown tremendously and together with its affiliates it is called the *Sangh Parivar* (Sangh Family). Rashtra Sevika Samiti (National Women Volunteers; hereon, Samiti), an organisation

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[2] Vinayak Damodar Savarkar wrote of 'Hindus' as those who were born in the subcontinent of India. Hedgewar's definition of 'Hindu' also follows from the same definition.

[3] In his book *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu* (1923), Savarkar outlines the contours of the Hindu nationalist ideology. Harking back to an undefined time of Aryans settling in the fertile plains by the river Indus, Savarkar uses this time to define the culture of the people. He wrote, 'At least the great mission which the Sindhus had undertaken of founding a nation and a country, found and reached its geographical limit when the valorous Prince of Ayodhya made a triumphant entry in the Ceylon and actually brought the whole land from the Himalayas to the Seas under one sovereign sway' (Savarkar, 1923 in Jaffrelot, 2007: p. 91).

[4] Borrowing from Hedgewar's biography, the authors also note the influence of V.D. Savarkar and his ideas on the RSS. Before the founding of the organisation. Hedgewar reportedly had several meetings with Savarkar in Ratnagiri, present-day Maharashtra (where Savarkar was in home detention) (Deshpande & Ramaswamy, 2017: p. 71).

[5] Christophe Jaffrelot sees Hindutva as a '… superimposition of religion, a culture, a language and a sacred territory- the perfect recipe for ethnic nationalism' (Jaffrelot, 2007: p. 15). Under BJP, India sees 'majoritarianism' as the dominant ideology, as an 'ethnic democracy' (Jaffrelot, 2019: p. 41).

exclusively for women, was established in 1936 by Lakshmibai Kelkar in Wardha (present-day Maharashtra). It was the first affiliate of the RSS. Today, Walter K. Anderson and Shridhar D. Damle note 36 official affiliate organisations as part of the *Sangh Parivar* (2018: p. 258).

This project examines the socialisation processes and everyday lives of members of India's largest Hindu nationalist coalition, the *Sangh Parivar*. The organisation I am studying, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP; All India Students' Committee) is the student wing of the RSS. It was established in 1949 by prominent members of the RSS (famous *Pracharaks* (celibate, full-time members) of the RSS such as Balraj Madhok, Devidas Didolkar) and under the second Sanghsanchalak, Madhao Sadashiv Golwalkar (1906-1973). ABVP is a prominent students' collective in India today with over three million members. It operates in the form of college 'units' (*ikai*) in different colleges and universities in India. The motto of the organisation is 'Students Power, Nation Power'.

There are many theories suggested by scholars of Hindu nationalism as to why the need for a student affiliate arose for the RSS. One reason suggested was 'to counter communist forces on campus' (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 135). The second reason was to politicise the educated university students and increase the presence of Hindu nationalist activities in the university campus. The third reason was that ABVP was a student organisation that could advance the work of the RSS during the years it was banned (the organisation was banned after the assassination of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in 1950 by an ex-RSS and Hindu Mahasabha member), and some scholars suggest that this was the real reason of its inception (ibid).[6]

According to Sarkar (2019: p. 146), the affiliates 'provide oxygen and energy for the mobilizational programmes of the RSS family'. Following this, ABVP is perhaps one of the most dynamic organisations within the *Parivar* – tackling university issues alongside upholding the Hindu nationalist agenda. It has existed longer than most Sangh affiliates and has implemented the Sangh's agenda in different ways across the decades of its existence. Unlike other Sangh-affiliate organisations where men and women work separately, members in the ABVP work together. Here, the *shakha* is not the unifying and organising principle of the organisation. The ABVP is an essential part of the *Sangh Parivar* because it socialises

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[6] This aspect is detailed in chapter 2.

university students. These students are socialised as political Hindus: ones who can defend the ideology, agitate, and use violence for their beliefs. Through this active engagement of the students, the ideology is able to reach other sets of demographics that were previously inaccessible to the Sangh: young people, urban residents, distinct caste groups, women with access to higher education, and students who describe themselves in the light of a modern, aspiring India, as ideological warriors and political agents.

ABVP has relatively more mobility within the Sangh family. During fieldwork, the connections between local RSS, BJP and ABVP units were seamless. The *Sangh Parivar* truly functions like a *Parivar*. Many ABVP members have gone on to acquire positions in the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM; Indian People's Party's Youth Division; the youth wing of the BJP) and the BJP.[7] Due to its alumni in the BJP currently holding state power, ABVP is extremely influential. It should also be mentioned that ABVP is not the student's wing of the BJP.[8] It emerged out of the efforts of the RSS and therefore is its student wing. ABVP and the BJP are both affiliates of the RSS, BJP being the electoral wing. BJP took the reins in the Indian Parliament in 2014 (and again, with a historical majority in 2019). With many incidents following the election of the Modi government, the nuance has given way to a view that sees ABVP as the mouthpiece of the BJP on university campuses and a mere appendage to the party in power.[9] [10] With the support of the ruling dispensation behind it, ABVP surges on with its Hindu nationalist agenda in university campuses.

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[7] Prominent among them are the present Home Minister of India Amit Shah, Jagat Prasad Nadda (the current president of the BJP), late Arun Jaitley (former Finance Minister of India), and the president of the BJYM, Tejasvi Surya, among many others. Please see the detailed list in the appendix.

[8] BJP has a youth wing under its umbrella called the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morch (BJYM; Indian People's Party's Youth Division). Many ABVP veterans move towards the BJYM as a next step in their quest for success in electoral politics.

[9] Sirur, S. (2020) Rise of ABVP in Left bastion JNU has a lot to do with Vajpayee and Modi govts at Centre, *The Print*, https://theprint.in/india/rise-of-abvp-in-left-bastion-jnu-has-a-lot-to-do-with-vajpayee-and-modi-govts-at-centre/346573/ [accessed on 5 October 2020].

[10] Indian universities have a diversity of student political bodies across the political spectrum: ABVP upholding Hindu nationalist interests along with Other Backward Classes Federation (OBCF) and Sevalal Vidyarthi Dal (SLVD); NSUI (National Students Union of India) as a wing of the Indian National Congress; All India Students Association (AISA), Students Federation of India (SFI, the stronger left presence on UoH campus) form different factions of the Left; the Ambedkar Students Association (ASA), Bahujan Students (BSF), and Dalit Students Union (DSU) as the anti-caste and Dalit students group; and Tribal Students Forum (TSF). Anti-Hindutva groups

Shubh Mathur writes in her seminal work on Hindu nationalism, 'Hindu nationalism should be understood through the lives of its actors and victims…' (2008: p. 10). Mathur tells us that the answers to understanding the power of Hindutva lie in its activities in the cultural sphere. Sumit Sarkar (2002) also notes that the strategy of Hindu nationalism is focused on the civil society. To understand the power of this gargantuan almost-century old institution, it is important to understand the lives of its 'actors'. As I will show in the thesis, it is the people and their role in structures that sustain the movement. Therefore, to understand the success of the movement, the relationship of the members to the organisation needs to be further examined. In this thesis, I will focus on how young people get socialised in the organisation, how they get embedded and remain part of the movement. How are young Hindu nationalists engaging with the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement? How do they balance their own aspirations along with the goals of the movement? These are the starting points of this thesis.

Research Question

The focus in the research will be to delineate the structures, practices, and relations that make up the social and everyday lives (Das, 2006) of ABVP members. This study examines the Hindu nationalist habitus, its networks and individual aspirations. Being the most prominent co-educational organisation in the Sangh family (that does not hold separate wings and meetings for men and women), ABVP was also chosen to understand another shade of Hindu nationalist womanhood and ABVP women's influence on the movement today. Previous anthropological work on the Hindu nationalist movement in India has focused primarily on the ways in which the ideology pervades the lives of the members. Focus has also been on creating silos of participation for members within single organisations that cater to specific gender groups. I felt the need to increase my purview from one organisation (Samiti, the earlier focus of my research) (Tyagi, 2020) to focus on the networks and different modes of participation that form a part of the lives of Hindutva activists within the *Sangh Parivar*.[11] Until now, ABVP has been studied in primarily two ways: either as a student organisation involved in university

such as Muslim Student Federation (MSF) and the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind– Students Islamic Organisation (SIO) are also present. Regional student party such as Telangana Vidyarthi Vedika (TVV) has also formerly associated with anti-ABVP alliances in the university elections.

[11] This is due to questions of access. Originally, I wanted to include young women from the Samiti in the study, but it was not possible due to two main reasons: first, there were very few university-going women in the Samiti; secondly and more crucially, my access to the organisation was abruptly curtailed by influential gatekeepers.

politics (Jha, 1998; Yuganthar, 1970) or dismissed as foot soldiers for *Sangh*-BJP combine on campus (Anderson & Damle, 1987; Rai, 2019: p. 276). A motivation to study the ABVP was to understand the everyday lives of young, university-going people in the Hindu nationalist movement, a demographic that was not readily available in the Samiti. Studies on members of the right-wing activists have focused on the nature of participation in the organisations. Atreyee Sen's work on Shiv Sena women (2007) showed how participation in such organisations was through networks and a carefully thought-out mechanism also for personal material gains. Gaurav Pathania (2018) has also shown the material benefits students tapped into through the networks they gained as Telangana activists. I continue in this vein and elaborate on everyday life, motivations, socialisation networks and practices of Hindutva activists.

Lisa Wedeen's work has been useful in understanding ideology in practice (that there is not a clear bifurcation between 'material' and 'ideational') (2015: pp. xvi-xvii). Borrowing from Louis Pierre Althusser (1971), Wedeen writes that ideology is located in the material because it is '…inscribed in practices' (ibid: p. 12). In her work on Syria, Wedeen critiques the idea of 'legitimacy'. She notes that regimes do not necessarily need to cultivate legitimacy and can do 'without it' (ibid: p. xvii). She instead locates the ruling regime's dominance through 'compliance' (ibid: p. 6) and practices of offering an '… attractive rational choice account…' (ibid: p. xviii). Instead of focusing on explicit and direct modes of control, she notes, '… indirect mechanisms of social control…proved useful- economizing on actual deployments of coercion by generating disciplinary-symbolic practices in which citizens advertised to one another their compliance' (ibid: p. ix). My hypothesis is that there are mechanisms, processes and practices through which ideological socialisation takes place, and this involves material and everyday pragmatic concerns and aspirations.

In this research, I seek to answer two questions: how are young people socialised in the Hindu nationalist habitus and how do they learn the desired practices (Bourdieu, 1977)? What are the different networks, structures, and practices through which they participate and contribute to the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement? Through an ethnographic engagement with the ABVP students in two universities, I have four goals:

1. In this thesis, I document a crucial historical moment for Hindu nationalism in India, what Thomas Blom Hansen and Srirupa Roy refer to as 'New Hindutva' (2022: p. 1). I

add to the literature on the movement through my analysis of the emerging contemporary form of urban *Hindutva* (the Hindu nationalist ideology) in relationship with the democratic and increasingly neoliberal state (Katju, 2003; Sen, 2007; Chatterji, Hansen & Jaffrelot, 2019; Narayan, 2021; Hansen & Roy, 2022; Basu & Sarkar, 2022).

2. I am studying a manifestation of the ideology in the way it finds voice and is transformed by young and university-educated people in contemporary India. By analysing how the ABVP retains its role as a student organisation in universities while performing an imperative role for the larger Hindu nationalist movement, I add to the literature on student and campus politics of the ABVP (Martelli & Parkar, 2018; Pathania, 2018).

3. I analyse how young individuals engage with the ideology to articulate their own dreams and aspirations.

4. This study adds to the rich literature on women of the Hindu nationalist organisations as well. Previous portraits of Hindu nationalist women have been able to capture varying degrees of participation—from violent appendages to the movement to silent familial activists (Sarkar, 1991; Bachhetta, 1993; Butalia & Sarkar, 1995; Basu, 1999; Katju, 2003; Sen, 2007; Menon, 2012; Bedi, 2016; Basu & Sarkar, 2022; Saluja, 2022). Through my study, I show how ABVP women add another shade to the roles and ways of participation in the Hindu nationalist movement: as students, as unmarried or single women, holding tightly to the Hindu (and related caste) identity.[12]

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[12] Throughout my fieldwork, I have seen women associated with the ABVP (and Samiti) make more mentions of the way one needs to be a woman in the present, existing nation than for an imagined, Hindu nation. Further, their 'pragmatics' (Metcalf, 1999) are linked to mobility, aspiration and material or status gains, rather than adhering to an ideology in the form of abstract ideas. Young women's association with the term Hindutva and its ideas were only brought forth when I mentioned them in questions. The conversations they aimed at were looking more towards understanding and expanding their influence in public life through networks within the organisation and memberships cutting across different affiliate organisations in the *Sangh* Combine. Young women's participation can also be situated within a broader literature on memberships of historically marginalised groups in traditionally powerful and hegemonic organisations. Hence, not just restricting ourselves to women and 'patriarchal' structures, but establishing links between Bahujan groups and the Sangh (Thachil, 2014; Sen, 2006; Teltumbde, 2005), Republican party and African Americans/women, young women in China ('Little Pinks') and the Chinese State (Fang & Repnikowa, 2018), to argue why their logic is not rooted in 'false consciousness' but in carefully thought-out rational interests ('attractive rational choice' as Wedeen (2015) notes). See: Evelyn, K. (2020) How Black Republicans are debunking the myth of voter monolith, *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/12/black-republicans-african-american-voters [accessed on 9 October 2020]; Zhou, L. (2020)

Literature Review

This thesis engages with two questions: what are the ways in which young people are socialised and become members of the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement in India? What are the different networks, structures, and practices through which they participate and contribute to the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement? This study engages with scholarship on three themes: student activism in university campuses (with a focus on nationalist activism), anthropological literature on right-wing groups and activists, and the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement. Based on the intersection of the three themes, my study aims to show the lives of Hindu nationalist men and women who are university students, and the ways in which they are socialised, mobilised and grow within the organisation.

a) Youth and Politics: Student Activism in India

ABVP is part of the large and vibrant student political groups in India. In this section, I will outline the major contributions of scholarship in this area and highlight the gaps in literature that my research question and thesis seek to fill. There is a dichotomy assumed between the university and the 'real world' and that students do not necessarily understand what it takes to bridge the gap. Thus, when they do choose to speak on issues of national importance, it is not given a lot of meaning by people who hold former views.[13] Student activism was also seen as an expression of 'juvenile delinquency' (Jayaram, 1979: p. 696) and a ploy by foreign

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Why more Republican women are running for the House than ever before, *Vox*, https://www.vox.com/21262150/house-republican-women-candidates [accessed 9 October 2020].

[13] Student activism finds mentions in the fight against British colonialism in the subcontinent. It is telling that in a Sedition Committee report of 1918, 84 out of 186 arrested in Bengal were affiliated to the universities and were primarily students (Weiner, 1963). Prominently mentioned are student groups like the 'Young India movement' in Bengal by Henry Derozio or the activist culture in Dayanand Anglo Vedic (DAV) college in Lahore (the most famous student activist of pre-Independence India being Bhagat Singh (1907-1931) from this college). Ghanshyam Shah (2004) finds that the literature on student protests before independence was tellingly classified under 'student indiscipline' (Shah, 2004: p. 104). After 1947, there was not one single aim that different student groups were fighting for (Altbach, 1968). Literature that came out on student protests after independence was increasingly referred to as 'student indiscipline'- seemingly giving the impression that students were only viable till the independence and after that, their protests were coming in the way of development (much like the narrative against student protests today) (Shah, 2004: p. 105). Claims of the scholars were that these movements have become 'non-ideological' and 'disruptive'. Further, the fragmentation of the student groups could no longer qualify such mobilisations as a 'movement' (Jayaram, 1979: p. 683).

governments to destabilise the country (ibid: p. 695).[14] [15] [16] Philip G. Altbach's work has been prominent in the field of student and youth activism. An important contribution of Altbach (1991) is '… where student activism is traditionally accepted as a legitimate element of the political system, it is more likely to have an impact' (Altbach, 1991: p. 25).[17] Scholars of student politics have noted that campus politics cannot be detached from the society (Altbach, 1984: p. 637; Pathania, 2018). In fact, Alaine Touraine (1971: p. 332) argues 'it is society'. To quote Altbach (1992), 'Students often provide articulation for much more widely held views and concerns. Their movements are frequently the conscience of at least the educated segment of the population' (Altbach, 1992: p. 142).[18]

Students have shaped key events in Indian history after India's independence.[19] Madhav Nayar (2020) divides student activism in India (after independence) into five phases: he sees

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[14] Students that have been found to be at odds with the current ruling regime have been labelled 'anti-national and even booked under the Act of Sedition. See: Majumdar, S. (2016) Why an Indian Student has Been Arrested for Sedition, *The BBC*, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35576855 [accessed on 26 July 2020].

[15] Bhagat Singh wrote a document on the importance of students being involved in larger politics in 1928 called 'Students and Politics' as a response to the opinion that students should be in Marxist politics. See also: Syed, I. H. (2020) Bhagat Singh on Students and Politics, Indian Academy of Sciences, http://confluence.ias.ac.in/bhagat-singh-on-students-and-politics/ [accessed on 26 July 2020].

[16] India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru shortly after India's Independence, urged the students to 'go back to studies' (Pathania, 2018). Interestingly, this was the same stand that Sangh, its affiliates, and sympathisers took against JNU (named after the Prime Minister) when it was surrounded by controversies 75 years later. As chapter 2 on the history of ABVP will show, it was a stand that was conveniently appropriated depending upon students' success in national politics. The overwhelming narrative that was supported by Hindu nationalists in 2016 was that JNU was not doing the job it was supposed to: to make students study. Instead, they indulged in politics- they spoke on issues of national importance, rather than be docile student-subjects.

[17] This contribution is important, especially if seen in the context of student protests that have rocked India in the recent years, one would see that there is a serious attempt by the governments to delegitimise students' participation in political issues. See also: Kumar, K. (2020) JNU Violence: Politics Must be Outlawed at Universities, *WION news*, https://www.wionews.com/opinions/jnu-violence-politics-must-be-outlawed-at-universities-273176 [accessed 22 July 2020].

[18] The trends of success of the student movements and activism are slightly less coherent. Altbach (1991, 1992) offers that student activism can have a significant impact on the politics of 'new nations'. Nations that face 'legitimacy deficit', whether 'first or second' or even 'third' world, there is a scope for student movements to have considerable impact.

[19] The student-led events that have characterised Indian history: the Naxalbari Uprising (1967), Telangana movement (from 1969 onwards), *Navnirman* (rebirth; in Gujarat) and *Sampoorna Kranti* (complete freedom; began in Bihar) movements in early 1970s, protests against the Emergency (1977-1979), Assam Agitation (1979-

Naxalbari Uprising (that began in Naxalbari, West Bengal) as the first major event of student activism. The movement was active in Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha in the 1960s. The second phase is the declaration of the 'Emergency' and the years that followed (1975-1979). Under the Indira Gandhi regime (the third Prime Minister of India (1966-1977 and 1980-1984)), student leaders were targeted and subjected to state repression, unless they managed to go 'underground' (literally, hide from the state). N. Jayaram (1979) sees the 1970s as emblematic of the tremendous impact student activism had on India's history. Many leaders that currently walk the corridors of the parliament emerged from the Emergency experience.[20] [21] The third phase is the classification of student movements as 'militant': the involvement of students in the Khalistan movement of Punjab and the All-Assam Students Union (AASU, the group that contributed significantly to the Assam Accord) in the late 1970s-early 1980s.[22] The fourth phase Nayar (2020) refers to involves two movements that were mainly concentrated on the Hindi-speaking belt in north India but continue to have repercussions to the present day: the Mandal agitations by mainly dominant-caste men against 'reservations' and the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Referred to as '*Kamandal*',

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[1985], Mandal agitations (1990), Ram Janmbhoomi movement (late 1980s-1992), India against Corruption (2010), the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act mobilisations (2019-2020) etc, just to name a few. In the recent years, students from universities have spearheaded resistance against state repression. In doing so, they are not only addressing 'local' issues but also, 'students protesting against the CAA and NRC find themselves part of a momentous historical moment' (Nayar, 2020).

[20] Consecutive student movements in the 1970s invited increasing repression from the central and state governments over the course of the year, until the final crackdowns that began after the Emergency in June 1975. During this time, many student leaders faced illegal arrests and repression (much like the hunting of student activists under the current regime). Torture, admission denial and expulsion of student leaders or those seen as unsympathetic to the state, was common. Reminiscent of today, intelligence agencies walked campuses in plainclothes to report any suspicious activity (Jayaram, 1979: p. 687). Further, there were constant clashes between faculty and student on one side versus the university authorities on the other. The Students Federation of India (SFI) in JNU, and the ABVP in DU (they had won the university elections that year and were targeted because they were student union leaders of the university) primarily led the resistance movement in their campuses (Jayaram, 1979: p. 689). Campuses did not hold any elections and semester system was threated to be introduced in the universities. This period of history has been discussed extensively in the following chapter. Fictional retellings of the everyday life during the Emergency have been extremely helpful in understanding the conditions of repression. See also: Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* (1991), Amitav Ghosh's *The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi* (1995), and Vishwajyoti Ghosh's graphic novel *Delhi Calm* (2010).

[21] Phukan, S. (2015) Emergency's Class of 1975: Activists Then, Leaders Now, *NDTV*, https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/emergencys-class-of-1975-activists-then-leaders-now-775056 [accessed July 28, 2020].

[22] Significantly, the NRC in Assam is 'an outcome of this movement and the subsequent accord' (Nayar, 2020).

Pathania (2018: p. 20) argues that although these movements were mainly restricted to the north of India, the 'Mandir-Masjid and Mandal' politics is crucial to understand student politics. The last phase is what Jean-Thomas Martelli and Khaliq Parkar (2018) refer to as 'post-liberalisation student movements and agitations'. This is the phase that is currently under review in this thesis.

Student movements are interesting in the way that they represent the most modern form of protest and are adaptable to the regime they interact with. From mobilising traditional forms of collectivising to using social media to gain an increase in membership, student movements lead the way in how protest and issues are raised. Protests are a strategy and different protests serve different purposes. Ghanshyam Shah (2004) identifies five types of protests that students primarily engage in: political, economic, moral, educational and, lastly, for fun (Shah, 2004: p. 106). Protests also becomes affective sites of the groups coming together (Virchow, 2007). I borrow from these findings to understand and classify the diversity of protests and how they are designed and executed for ideological and personal reasons. Further, this thesis will show the relevance of protests for individual members, the ABVP and the larger Hindu nationalist movement (chapter 5). I show that protests nullify internal cliques and differences among groups, a strategic intervention for a more influential assertion on university campuses.

The scholarship on student movement shows that student movements are transitory because of the temporary nature of organisations. True, students are on campuses for a limited number of years and this political mobilisation in a university setting would be different than a mobilisation outside campus. In India and especially for student parties linked to national groups (in this case, ABVP to BJP and RSS), this case becomes interesting because there are designated parties on university campuses that belong to set ideologies and hence, the 'transitory' nature of movements and organisations might not necessarily hold true. Scholars have pointed out that student movements, because of the 'transient' nature of student hood and university life, are unsustainable. One of the ways in which organisations sustain through decades is through the maintenance of 'network cultures'. There is a consensus among scholars who study student activism that activists emerge from 'networks' (Pathania, 2018: p. 118). As will be shown in this thesis and has been highlighted in literature on student movements, student activists retain networks to keep issues alive, long after they have left campus (chapter 4). Further, student groups affiliated to political parties retain larger political interests and

oscillate between campus and broader societal issues (chapter 5). What I show through my thesis is that the Hindu nationalist movement incorporate the student leaders into its hierarchy through BJP and BJYM—a key reason why many aspiring student politicians are active and make investments for their political career in the ABVP (chapter 4). Further, ABVP straddles its role as a Hindu nationalist organisation and as a student party through this very oscillation (chapter 5).

In my thesis, I show how kinship, habitus, and religiosity within the university allow for political socialisation of students (chapter 3), a previously unexplored site in the scholarship. Mario Diani and Doug McAdam (2003) found the correlations between prior 'private' and 'public' social ties to the movement and the eventual involvement as the 'most established findings in social movement research' (Diani & McAdam, 2003: p. 8). To encourage newcomers, establishing 'trust' becomes an important factor to extend networks and sustain movements. These networks become important sources of companionship and comfort, especially in university campuses that draw students from different backgrounds and away from their homes (Pathania, 2018: p. 119). To inculcate a sense of belonging and commonality, student activists find various ways to connect: through physical meetings, connecting over social media and regular protests and rallies. There are also 'everyday' ways of socialisation that occur, initially to conform and then slowly internalised to create a sense of community. Established student activists reach out to new students through common interests, pre-existing backgrounds connections or by strategically being the first point of entry to the daunting space of the university by mediating university bureaucracy and the 'outside world' (for example, the socialisation for the university not only occurs in classrooms but also hostels and spaces outside campuses, also regulated by older students).[23] For example, Pathania (2018: p. 132) found hostels in Osmania University were primary places of socialisation for institutional and non-institutional issues.

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[23] Prominent in Indian campuses is the image of the student leader who has outgrown his university age but stays within the campus to fight politics (the figure of the 'permanent student', as coined by Altbach (1991)), a narrative that mobilised heavily against anti-Hindutva Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) students in the '9 Feb' incident in 2016.

The literature on student activism has tried to understand the psycho-social reasoning for the making of the student activist.[24] The literature and my own fieldwork experience (chapter 4) confirms that being an 'activist' signifies honour, higher social status and earning symbolic and material capital (Pathania, 2018: p. 112). Relatedly, an aspiration for politics (and the multitude of aspects that entails) encourages students to seek networks.[25] Another trend that Martelli and Parkar (2018) find is that students with backgrounds in grassroots movements or activism (through families) tend to be politically active as well, a finding that I found recurring among ABVP respondents. In this regard, I show how students, through the figure of being a *karyakarta* or an activist, are attempting to mobilise different forms of capital to create a space for themselves in politics (chapter 4).

How have Hindu nationalist students participated and contributed to these developments? My thesis fills this gap in literature and shows the participation and transformation of the ABVP (and through it, the larger Hindu nationalist movement) in shaping the politics of India (chapter 2). The ABVP manages to water down a strict ideology for a young and urban demographic and that is its biggest strength. As chapter 2 will demonstrate, India's present politics and especially the leaders of the BJP were involved in crucial historical moments. ABVP has gained prominence in the movement because it has been actively furthering Hindu nationalist agenda in educational institutions across the country and has a ready cadre to provide numerical strength to the larger movement (chapters 2 and 5). The activists, contrary to student activists elsewhere (Martelli & Parkar, 2018), identify as Hindus and uphold caste identities (camouflaged as religious identity as 'Hindu'). The ABVP is also important because it has given leaders (late Arun Jaitley, BJP President Jayant Prakash Nadda, Home Minister Amit Shah, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, among others) to the currently governing electoral

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[24] I will not be relying on this, but I must make a mention that the psycho-social approach towards student activism and in understanding right-wing membership has been prevalent (for example, Kimmel, 2007; discussed in the section on right-wing ethnographies). Some scholars see student protests as 'negative identity formation'. Stefan Wellgraff (2014) points to the breakdown of traditional 'moral authority' and hierarchies that as a cause for student unrest. Sudhir Kakar and Kamala Chowdhary (1970) referred to this as an 'authority crisis' (Kakar & Chowdhary, 1970 in Shah, 2004: p. 106). Related, the authors also suggest that student unrest is a symptom of students wanting to establish their own autonomy. Altbach (1968) makes a related suggestion: that student unrest is born out of emotions emerging out of an inter-generational conflict (Altbach, 1968 in Shah, 2004: p. 107).

[25] Accruing of material and symbolic benefits is one of the reasons I believe students stay in the ABVP, despite the strongly hierarchical nature of the organisation. The leaders who have reaped benefits from the system are constantly hailed as examples to follow for the students in the movement.

wing of the *Parivar*, the BJP. Student organisations affiliated to larger political parties straddle their position as being a student and political party on an everyday basis. To illustrate, during university election campaigning, ABVP members must answer for the larger comments of BJP and *Sangh* members in the media on their university campuses.

Although ABVP claims to be separate from the BJP and associates itself as the student wing of the RSS (a convenient strategy, as I show in chapter 2), the aspiration of many ABVP members is to enter electoral politics through the BJP. Student wings of political parties operate to give a cosmopolitan character to the parent bodies and operate on the principle of 'catch them young' (an RSS formula as well). Ghanshyam Shah (2004) notes that student bodies are mobilised by political parties to create a 'special pressure group'. 'Several studies show the political involvement of student leaders and how political parties use them in creating disturbances on campuses' (Shah, 2004: p. 107).[26] Martelli and Parkar (2018) have illustrated the presence of multiple parties in the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU, Delhi) campus and their engagement with electoral politics. Interestingly, they note that in JNU, 'candidates representing parties that dominate the government at the centre have always lost the post of the president' (Martelli & Parkar, 2018). Where does this place ABVP in today's university landscape? ABVP, like many other student groups, gains legitimacy in the university space by capturing administrative power through elections in the form of the student union (chapter 4). A student union is a 'peculiar' kind of student body–it gains official legitimacy, and this gives it another aspect of recognition. Altbach (1966) sees 'student unions' as an important body on the university campus and that its presence allows for more radical movements to grow out of it (Altbach, 1966: p. 178).[27]

Martelli and Parkar (2018) see the deployment of radical vocabulary in the way students *do* politics. By 'radical', they point towards the demands of student agitations against present

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[26] Interestingly, there are descriptions of the Youth Congress of the 1970s in the following words, 'The Youth Congress became an umbrella organisation which sheltered a variety of goondas, thugs, pickpockets, criminals-all bad characters and anti-social elements police usually keep a record of' (Jayaram, 1979: p. 85). This has been a criticism of the ABVP across its presence in university campuses (Marvel, 2016) but also, as illustrated by Poonam (2018) in Allahabad University, where the student wings of Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and ABVP clash violently, often at the behest of their party leaders. See: Rashid, O. (2016) I'm Made to Feel like a 'Woman', *The Hindu*, thehindu.com/features/magazine/omar-rashid-talks-to-richa-singh-the-first-woman-president-of-the-allahabad-university-students-union/article8228137.ece [accessed on 28 July 2020].

[27] This would be further expanded on the chapter on ABVP and student elections (chapter 4).

systems in place. Specifically, 'it is the tendency of individuals to identify with the fringes of the political spectrum' (ibid). The authors found that the engagement with radical politics was not a temporary affair for the activists: many went on to choose professions that would enable articulation of critique of issues and institutions. By studying the major organisations on campus, they find the crux of issues that each student party stands for. What they unearth is a diverse array of issues that each party seeks to achieve through their campus activism, and argue against the homogenous view of the university as being a 'left bastion'—it is this plurality that succeeds in inducting students from diverse backgrounds into student activism. The authors too find in a lexical analysis of the pamphlets from various organisations, that the larger themes discussed are in the same vein as their parent political body. They also find that unlike popular perception, students do not necessarily join organisations to assert themselves as political activists. This narrative is in opposition to my field respondents from JNU, who largely claim that they had to 'come out' as Hindus and associating with ABVP would imply this identity.[28] Martelli and Parkar (2018) find that activism leads students towards engaging in a critique of religion and often, students tend to identify as 'atheists' and atheism is a 'form of political labelling'. My findings show a completely contrary trend (chapter 3). Relatedly, in the work of other scholars and my own field experience in Delhi University, caste identity played a role in electoral mobilisation (also Jeffrey, 2010). In JNU on the other hand, expression of historically dominant caste identity does not necessarily bring with it electoral benefits nor are the student parties explicitly organised along dominant caste lines (Martelli & Parkar, 2018; chapter 4). Anthropologically, I show how dominant-caste students activate those networks through informalisation and invest in their future through political investments.

b) <u>Ethnographies of Right-Wing Groups in Europe and United States of America</u>

Right-wing groups are important to my research because of the alliance with conservative politics and the similarities with the ideological foundation of the *Sangh* organisations. There are two ways that ethnographic work on nationalist and right-wing groups helps to answer my question: first, these ethnographies are methodological interventions that help us understand the diverse portraits of right-wing activists, everyday lives, habitus, and trajectories within the

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[28] This aspect of political awakening that my field respondents use is interesting as they describe JNU as a place where one hides their religious identity and any assertion of religious identity, especially Hindu, brings with it certain sanctions. I will be discussing this in chapter 3.

movements and organisations.[29] Second, they shed light on the motivations and trajectories of the actors in the movement.

Kathleen Blee (2007) notes that the study of social movements has largely ignored right wing or conservative movements and has focused more on progressive social movements. The engagement with far-right, she observes, has been from a distance. She insists that a fruitful way to understand these movements is to focus on 'micromobilisation' or 'internalised' studies to understand the workings of these movements. These studies help explain why right-wing groups invite members and enable socialisation into spectrum of right-wing groups. What these studies help us do is to go beyond the black and white understanding of why people join right-wing groups, and locate the actors in the complex realities that they emerge from. An area that ethnography can specifically help is to illustrate the range of emotional responses and emotionality of being part of such a movement. Blee writes, 'Ethnographic work is able to convene the feelings of such political rituals, recording both the variable levels of intensity projected by extremist leaders and groups and the variable ways in which audiences respond or fail to respond to these messages' (Blee, 2007: p. 123). Maddalena Gretel Cammelli (2017) also finds that it is the emotionality of participation that draws and keeps members in these groups. It is the focus on the emotionality of experiences in these events that draw members and reinforce a sense of belonging. These events encapsulate within them the cultural (music, dances, merchandise) and political and ideological messaging that enables the members to feel a sense of belonging and might even serve as reminders of their ideology. Fabian Virchow elaborates (2007),

> '... creation of "emotional collectives" and "collective emotions" is, at least partly, an objective of these events. Leaders of far-right organizations carefully plan these emotions to integrate sympathizers, encourage followers to get involved in day-to-day political activities, and *overcome the soci(et)al exclusions faced by members of the far right*. Equally important is their role in political socialization, as those who have just entered or are about to enter the far-right movement adopt a certain habitus and

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[29] To understand the everyday nature of activists and right-wing groups, anthropological work has been helpful. As Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer (2006) also mention, we need to see these groups beyond the binary of black and white and this can only be done when the academic discipline is able to encapsulate the complexity of life within itself (to the best ability of language).

internalize far-right ideology in a profound way' (Virchow, 2007: p. 149; emphasis elaborated in footnote).[30]

Virchow notes that early researchers ignored these 'events' as sites of importance but as his work shows, these are especially important sites to create bonding experiences for the members. I have relied on this method to understand the emotional practices and 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979) of the movement—a significant factor for its success in retaining life-long memberships.

Second, a central concern of my research is how people join ethnic or nationalist groups.[31] Blee (2007), Michael Kimmel (2007) and, Annette Linden and Bert Klandermans (2007) note that the reason for joining might also be apart from the ideological draw—a finding that echoes in my field experience as well—that the resilience of memberships draws from networks and connections (chapter 3). An important psychosocial study that has helped is from Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer (2006). They note that there are three major factors that attract an individual to a social movement. First, people may want to change the world they live in

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[30] Such events are sites where affirmation and commitment to the ideology is strengthened and renewed. When members come together for these events and see the presence of large numbers of attendees, it tends to reaffirm their own participation. I will elaborate this with two groups in different settings. First, the residential camp organised by the women's group Rashtra Sevika Samiti. Second would be the workshop function organised by the ABVP in Delhi University. In my field experience, I have found new inductees being critical and even angry at some of the messages being given by the ideologues during the initial days of the camp. But after the *padsanchalan* (marches), the exhibition of parading in the city or the workshops, that the members become much closer and echo the sentiments of the organisation more frequently. It is with this enthusiasm that they go back to their homes and begin *shakhas* or regular participation with the college unit of the ABVP. Anger turned into enthusiasm and as Virchow (2007) refers to it, such sites become the habitus to socialise members into becoming 'political soldiers'.

[31] Some scholarship sees points of convergence and divergence between left and right aligned ideological groups. Chip Berlet and Matthew N. Lyons (2000) find the placing of such groups and activists on the spectrum as 'misleading'. Antonio Chirumbolo, Nonna Mayer and Hans de Witte (2006) in the anthology of right-wing extremist discuss this very same dilemma. They write, 'Both groups display a certain level of distrust towards traditional politics, probably because it is perceived as corrupt and opportunistic' (Chirumbolo, Mayer & de Witte, 2006: p. 258), and this is where to them the similarity ends. A seminal work in this regard is by Norberto Bobbio (1996) who sees that extremism is not very different when it is on either side of the spectrum. He notes, 'Left and right primarily disagree on their conception of equality. For the left, inequalities are social and must be corrected while for the right, they are natural and should be preserved' (Bobbio (1996) in Chirumbolo, Mayer and de Witte, 2006: p. 250). In their study of extremist members in France, the authors found that the right-wingers stood out as 'most authoritarian and ethnocentric of all'. The authors found a specific identification with conservative politics across the world in the French RWE activists demand for death penalty, using education as a tool primarily for disciplining, in hailing and conforming to hierarchy and traditional values (ibid, pp. 251-252). In Denmark, there is a demand for strengthening the Danish nation and protection against immigrants (Rydgren, 2004: p. 481).

('instrumentality). Secondly, they may want to be part of the group and claim an 'identity'. Thirdly, they may want to give meaning to their world and express their views ('ideology).[32] With these three reasons (Instrumentality, Identity, Ideology), Klandermans and Mayer attempt to understand the Right-Wing Extremists (RWEs) and their attraction to extremist groups.[33] [34]

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[32] 'Instrumentality' in the movement participation refers to as an attempt to influence the political and social environment. It weighs the perceived costs and benefits ('selective incentives') of participation, 'a belief that the situation can be changed at an affordable cost' that can enable participation. 'Identity' in movement participation refers to the expression of identification with the group. It resonates with the culture, meanings, narratives, and emotion of the participant in the organisation or the movement. Identity formation in such a scenario operates in two related ways: first is identification and affiliation, and second and subsequently, to identify enemies responsible for injustices. Lastly, 'ideology' refers to group formations and collective identity that the group takes on. As referred to earlier, 'Instrumentality', 'Identity' and 'Ideology' can help bring an interdisciplinary approach to the way one makes sense of extremism.

[33] Linden and Klandermans (2007) bring together a social psychology (what they call a 'life history') approach to understand individual participation in far right to extreme groups. The authors interviewed 36 activists in two rounds, before and after a national election (in the years 1996 and 1993). 'Life history' approach sought to analyse the individual narrative about involvement in the movement. Using the understanding of 'continuity' that they define as: 'Continuity refers to life histories wherein movement membership and participation are a natural consequence of preceding political socialization' (Linden & Klandermans, 2007: p. 185). Based on their analyses, they categorise the movement participation into four types: revolutionaries, wanderers, converts, and compliants. The most committed members for the ideological involvement are the 'revolutionaries'. The 'wanderers' are looking for a political shelter for their beliefs and hence, join the movement. The case studies from the other two categories, the converts and the compliants, seemed to imply that such memberships are more personality-driven than a draw for the ideology. The point of entry for a 'convert' was their experience with the Dutch social security and finding blame with the 'bad immigrant'. The compliant found their way to the movement with a familial connection, to support the ideology of the people around them. The 'convert' often quits the movement due to disillusionment, because of a gap between their ideal and reality, the authors note. A crucial factor is that they do retain their beliefs from their brief participation in the movement as well. A trope that was found similar in my fieldwork as well was the employment of Islamophobic imagery to further propaganda and rumour. Linden and Klandermans (2007: p. 195) note:

> According to him, the mosque in his neighbourhood was used for storage of drugs and weapons and all refugees were economic refugees, profiteers who take advantage. These beliefs fuelled his activities in the extreme right, as did his impression that "a growing number of people stand behind these ideas. Look, that gives a bit of satisfaction, yeah, that increasingly people agree with you.

My discomfort with relying too heavily on a social psychological approach arises from two factors: first, the fact that it cannot be used to explain the divergences or exceptions (which I suspect would be many) in the sample. Second, it assumes 'individual agency' to a large extent and does not take into account (and this is the view I come in from, which too has its lapses) the institutional and systemic forces that seek to create disharmony or sow hate or use these movements to further their own ends. While a sociological approach might rely on understanding macro patterns, we do acknowledge that we cannot explain how in the exact same home, why some turn to sectarian violence and some do not. This is perhaps where a social psychology approach might help.

[34] Not to make a simplistic hypothesis, but even if the reason for joining does not seem to be 'ideological' (in terms of the organisations' ideology), we should still take the membership patterns and involvement in the organisation seriously. I have found that those who joined, in the Klandermans and Linden (2007) schema, the 'compliants' too produce tangible work in furthering the cause (this is different from the definition of 'compliance'

They insist that we need to go beyond the understanding that economic destabilisation is the foremost reason for extreme right involvement. They show that there are more individual and everyday alienations that are not accounted for when we study extreme right activists, a finding that is resonated in my study (see chapter 3). John Horgan (2008: p. 84) suggests that there are three factors that enable engagement in extremist affiliations:

1. Relevant socialisation,
2. 'Pull' factors of extremist organisations, and,
3. 'Sense of importance of role qualities'.

Three significant take aways from Horgan's work (2008) that confirm findings from my fieldwork are: first, that association in these groups leads to rewards (status or material) (chapters 4 and 5); secondly, kinship ties of those already involved deeply impact the possibility of joining organisations. I would show in the thesis that the association through kinship also impacts the nature of involvement and success within the organisation (chapter 3 and the concept of *judaav* or affective connections).[35] Lastly, 'sense of importance' and rewards to loyalists is a strategy (I saw this most prominently at work in JNU-ABVP units and is elaborated in chapter 3 and 5).

An important factor that has emerged in the ethnographies is the role of events in consolidating a membership. Virchow (2007) and Mabel Berezin's (2007) ethnographies are an illustration of a 'festival', typical of organisations that bring together members from various parts and

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discussed in Wedeen, 2015). In my field experience, I found that they work to further the agenda on social media and make their physical presence felt in rallies/protests etc. Many interlocutors from my field fit the category of 'compliants' turned ideological warriors. The authors tend to downplay the involvement and impact of the participation of such members and focus on the ones that are more 'ideologically' drawn.

[35] Chip Berlet (2000) finds two reasons for the right-wing populist alignment: disillusionment with political choices and weakness of the left alternatives (Berlet, 2000: p. 346). In their work on the Christian right wing in America, Berlet and Lyons (2000) find two groups that have been attracted to such populist movements. First, the middle-level groups (middle- and working-class whites), where people have stake in the traditional social privilege. Second, an assumption of the 'outsider factions' of the elite who use distorted forms of anti-elitism as a part of their own bid for greater power (Berlet & Lyons, 2000: p. 2). They refer to the Christian right-wing groups as propagating 'regressive' populism, 'a populist movement that combines anti-elite scapegoating with efforts to maintain or intensify systems of social privilege and power' (ibid: p. 5). This kind of populism has four features, a fact common to many extremist groups across Europe and Asia. These are:

1. Producerism: pitting 'producers' against 'unproductive' elites,
2. Demonisation or Scapegoating,
3. Conspiracism, and,
4. Apocalyptic narratives (ibid: p. 9).

interests.[36] In my study, I found that protests and those events that invoked violence were particularly successful in creating solidarities within the movement, setting inter-group cliques and rivalries aside for the purpose of upholding the ideology (chapter 5). Virchow's focus, however, seems to be on the spectacular whereas my project aims to show the routine, even mundane everyday processes that serve to produce certain dispositions, right from growing up in a particular milieu to campus life.[37] [38] [39]

In my field site I found that the longer one stayed in the organisation, the members noted that their friends, confidants and even, acquaintances came exclusively from the organisation, and many noted that they did not have friends outside the organisation. There are two findings from Virchow that become important for my understanding: first, people who join with certain

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[36] Both ethnographies describe an 'event' that evokes specific emotional responses to being part of the various shades of nationalist organisations (Front National (FN), France and National Demokratik Partie (NDP), Germany). The 'festival' incorporated many aspects of the 'far-right' culture – music, food, ideological discussions, and food. He describes the attendees in great detail ('men in suits', families, skinheads, people wearing the Nazi insignia), and finds that they are restricted to a certain age group or class (similar findings emerge in Berezin, 2007).

[37] Marches are especially important to gain visibility and attract newer participants. As detailed in an earlier footnote, my field experience showed that marches became a show of strength (through number of participants, use of slogans and symbols). The event could also be recalled at a later time to produce a connection among participants. Virchow notes that marches directly indicate the increasing assertion of right-wing groups. Virchow notes a particular march in Munich in 1997 where nine thousand people were in attendance. This membership increased almost thrice by 2004. A German far-right leader in a local newspaper in 1998 emphatically declared, 'These first small successes show us that we have to carry on going out into the public as often and as strongly as possible' (Virchow, 2007: p. 152). Such 'demos' are successful in creating a 'temporary emotional culture'. With marches, invocation of Nazi history through slogans, remembrance, and symbols, rallies produce 'emotional responses' which lead to the formation of bonds (Virchow refers to the nature of these bonds as 'affective'). These marches are a specific 'habitus' to create a 'political solider' and 'soldier masculinity'. He writes about the importance of repetition of such events: 'If taking part in a demonstration is not a one-time event, the repetition of this act can become an important ingredient of a political socialization process by which young persons become integrated into the movement's milieu' (Virchow, 2007: p. 154).

[38] Thank you to Ashwin Subramanian for pointing to this aspect.

[39] Virchow finds that the slim police presence in such a gathering indicates to him that the police are aware of the pre-existing right-wing presence in the town. This is a finding I also concur with, and I will show later in the thesis how the presence of the state (police) was a sign of comfort to my respondents (chapter 5). The complex relationship that student activists and local police have is a site to uncover the strategic ways in which student politics takes place on campuses–especially for the student group and affiliate in power.

attitudes find their beliefs locate a firmer ground within the movement.[40] Secondly, the more time members spend in the organisation, contact to 'outside world' decreases in equal proportion, a key finding to support my argument (chapter 3).[41]

Another aspect that finds resonance in my work is the relationship between geographical habitus and membership. In my study, particular neighbourhoods, caste villages and approximation to campus determined one's socialisation in the organisation (chapter 3 and 4). Virchow (2007), Nitzan Shoshan (2016) and Cammelli (2017) describe the involvement in groups as a 'community' experience (Cammelli, 2017: p. 91). Cammelli finds that 'events' become a centre point through which 'popular sovereignty' is manufactured: repeated rituals that bring members together to give a sense of community.[42] The 'habitus' of fascism includes tattoos on bodies, music (a very significant draw across studies on far-right and extremist groups), and the desire to frequent places that are known hubs of the groups. This leads to

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[40] 'Wippermann and colleagues (2002) observed that those entering the movement already have nationalist or racist attitudes, but these are deepened and transformed in the direction of a systematic worldview', Virchow notes (Virchow, 2007: p. 159).

[41] Virchow borrows from Tore Bjørgo (2002):

> 'Research on those who enter and leave far-right groups in Scandinavia also has shown "two parallel developments strengthening each other: the admission to and socialization into a new separated and stigmatized community, and the breaking of every connection towards the 'normal' society out of it.' (ibid: pp. 10–11 in Virchow, 2007: p. 159).

This finding was echoed in Linden & Klanderman (2007), Shoshan (2016), and Kimmel (2007).

[42] Cammelli (2017) studies a relatively new group (founded in 2003) called *Casa Pound* (House of Pound, hereon, CP) that came out of a very particularistic setting of Rome but deeply rooted in the fascist history of Italy. CP is a building in a multi-ethnic locality of Rome and this is where the name of the group comes from. The spatiality of the building is integral to the group because the milieu of the building is an influential part of how the members become socialised into the 'fascist lifestyle'. The milieu includes a pub, a bookstore, and a restaurant that are frequented by CP members and sympathisers. These visits further lead to opening of professional networks and political connects outside the CP. In the recent years, CP has grown and even fought elections independently. She describes the ideology of the group as 'neofascism' and defines it thus: '... political and ideological groups and parties that have been active in Europe after 1945, inspired by history of Italy and Germany between the world wars'. The history of fascism and the heroes are hailed and celebrated. But she makes a note that the definition of fascism has changed over the years and refers to the group that she is studying as 'third millennium fascists'. The group believes in traditional roles for women as primary caregivers in the home, nationalisation of financial institutions and aversion to international collaborative institutions (eg: EU, NATO etc). According to Cammelli (2017: p. 94), a CP member's self-definition was,

> ...One doesn't become a fascist for having read a program, one becomes a fascist first because he is attracted by a set of symbols … it's something more subtle than simple political stuff, you know, that's why I use the expression "feeling of the word," 'cause it's an expression that I think explains the idea well … Because it is something pre-rational that is rationalized afterward.

creating a 'political style' that acts as the initial anchor to the movements. Similarly, Meera Sehgal's ethnography (2007) of a Hindu nationalist camp shows that these sites are designed for an unrestricted and unfiltered transmission of the ideology. The physical space and the way it is utilised in terms of activities, body distribution, and timetable, surveillance and transmission methodology allow for an uninterrupted (both in terms of time and critique) flow of one-sided information. Sehgal argues that such camps are specifically designed to evoke emotional responses to the ideology and these emotions primarily are fear, anger, and hate.[43] Kalyani Devaki Menon notes in her ethnography, 'By shaping the minds and bodies of new recruits and orienting them toward the cultural politics of the movement, *shivirs* (camps) become central sites for the exercise of the Hindu nationalist governmentality' (Menon, 2012: p. 131).[44] As I will describe later in the thesis, student activists and their friends frequented select locations on campus, attended regular workshops, conferences and meetings at different levels of the organisation. The familiarity with the milieu added to their confidence and made ways for them to stake claim to those spaces. Being invited to such community spaces was significant to the feeling of belonging. Such a community space is essential for mobilisation and reaffirming of ideological politics, left or right or anywhere on the spectrum. Such spaces become sites that remind members of values they hold dear and act as affective mobilisers for action.

To study the right wing, the far right, or nationalist groups is to understand how under a homogenised agenda (in the case at hand, the ideology of Hindutva), groups are able to maintain diverse views and the different natures of memberships–a crucial factor of its success (Pates & Leser, 2021). Referring to these diverse actions that are employed at the same time,

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[43] Based on this, she coins the phrase 'feminized siege mentality' to explain the specific gendered goal of organising of such camps: to socialise into the habitus 'that blames Muslim men for violence against Hindu women'. The findings of the camp also correlate with my experience at Samiti camps in 2017. As a part of the recruitment strategies, the space of the *shivir* or camp provides various opportunities to propagate unquestioningly, the ideology of the Samiti.

[44] The younger girls focused on the physical training conducted for almost five-six hours a day and found little interest in the lectures of indoctrination. They were also keen to take up the Samiti authorities on their goal to encourage 'public speaking' and incorporate a more confident body language, all in the effort to protect their Hindu womanhood. The participation patterns of older women are not mentioned in detail. In her analysis of the 'embodied' practices taught at the camp, she finds that the physical training was not aimed to be pragmatically useful. Instead, she observes that the defence was taught like dance moves and aimed to be 'feminine' when being performed. She concludes that the physical training left the girls worse off because the moves were not thoroughly taught and were not useful in everyday life.

Blee notes, 'Many extremist groups… try to balance the extremist agendas necessary to retain their hard-core supporters and project an image of power with more temperate tactics that can appeal to a wider base of recruits and voters' (2007: p. 124). [45] This is an observation that we are finding resonating in the way the Indian Hindu nationalists (and especially BJP as a political party) have been able to mobilise extremely diverse groups and be able to cater to their interests and importantly, speak their language (from employing tropes of religiosity to loyalty). [46]

For my argument, it is the everyday and the identification with the habitus that draws individuals to movements. Kimmel's (2007) work on the study of ex-Nazi members of 'EXIT', a flagship organisation that was started by an ex-Nazi in Sweden and has now branched to other European countries (Shoshan (2016) too makes a mention of the organisation's social workers

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[45] Researchers studying the right have described such a formation of parties (especially focusing on their decentralised nature) as resembling a rhizome, "they were decentralized, segmented, policephalous (multiple leaders with few followers attached to each of them), and reticular (linked autonomous cells) (Della Porta & Diani, 1999: p. 140)" in Virchow, 2007. Also mentioned in Cammelli, 2007). In federal states like Baden-Württemberg, city council of Berlin, Schleswig-Holstein, Saxony-Anhalt, Bremen and Brandenburg, parties like the Republikaner, Deutsche Volksunion and the NPD were beginning to gain ground and accrue more electoral shares. While the DVU invited more elderly votes, the NPD had a more diverse and radical group affirming to its politics. This is because the NPD was formed after a reorganisation ('groupuscules' to form '*kamradschaf*t') of various banned parties and organisations that ranged from far-right extremists to Neo-Nazis and skinheads. These were decentralised, with multiple-leaders and were able to attract diverse members among the German far right and extremists.

[46] Virchow shows that the presence of the right-wing in Germany's parliament began to be visible in the 1980s. Berezin writes, 'My central claim is that extremism does not win elections. When parties that had been at the fringes of their national political landscape start becoming viable in elections, they are capturing the thin, rather than thick, commitment of new constituents' (Berezin, 2007: pp. 131–132). Virchow further finds that '... disenchantment with politics allowed these parties to win over protest voters, as did their focus on problems like unemployment and reductions in social security along with their *critical stand toward globalization*[46] and strong negative attitude toward immigration' (Virchow, 2007: p. 149).[46] NPD used this base to transform itself into a political party. It began its own newspaper, came out with a populist political agenda, and began to recruit 'well-known and respected' people in its events, festivals, and rallies. [46] Virchow (2007: p. 149) notes:

> ...creation of "emotional collectives" and "collective emotions" is, at least partly, an objective of these events. Leaders of far-right organizations carefully plan these emotions to integrate sympathizers, encourage followers to get involved in day-to-day political activities, and overcome the soci(et)al exclusions faced by members of the far right. Equally important is their role in political socialization, as those who have just entered or are about to enter the far-right movement adopt a certain habitus and internalize far-right ideology in a profound way.

Berezin echoes this finding and additionally notes that such events become sites of co-mingling, which allow for an 'opportunity for local party leaders to fraternize with national party elites... sites of sociability where food and drink merge with party propaganda and public discussion' (Berezin, 2007: p. 132).

in Germany as his interlocutors). EXIT helps in counselling, securing new vocational training and even providing safe houses for ex-Nazis. This organisation was chosen by Kimmel to understand the life trajectories of those who have joined and left the movement.[47] By bringing together common threads of his interlocutors, Kimmel draws our attention to their life worlds that seem to be the context for them joining the movement.[48] He sees the participation in a framework of being displaced from traditional masculine roles: common are the feelings of 'emasculation', insecurity in their 'role as a man'. He argues that it was the 'masculinizing' cultural practices that drew the people into the movement. These cultural practices (also noted by Shoshan, 2016 and Blee, 2007) included 'White Power' music, soccer, drinking alcohol, and watching violent videos. These practices are what an interlocutor of his describes as 'life

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[47] Kimmel's argument is fairly straightforward but needs a line on context. Majority of the people who join the movement join 'early' (in their early teens) and are already burned out by the time they reach their late-teenage years or early twenties. The prominent people in-charge of the EXIT branch he had been studying were 28 and in their 30s, and had both been out of the movement for more than a decade. To make his case, he has looked at archives and 'online materials' to understand neo-Nazi groups in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. The themes that emerge in his study are that people join for the appeal of the group dynamics and 'masculinity'. He suggests that the youth join the movement because culturally it is a demand of 'adolescent masculinity'. He writes, 'Participation is more a first step toward adult manhood than the first step toward to a full-fledged life as a Nazi zealot. To its participants, racism is a rite of passage' (Kimmel, 2007: p. 203).

[48] Kimmel notes that they mainly are between 16-20 years (can be younger), from lower middle-class families where their fathers are painters, bricklayers, road-maintenance workers, small traders or have small businesses. He notes that such jobs face the brunt of globalisation more acutely. Most interlocutors noted divorce in the family and there was no defining trend in the role of the mother. Kimmel sees the connection between youth as being downwardly mobile and their attack on asylum seekers or immigrants (or as Kimmel describes them 'ethnic youngsters'). Lastly, Kimmel notes that most of his interlocutors faced bullying in their school and alienation from 'not fitting in'.

of a Nazi was too much fun', providing an atmosphere of intimate homo-social group.[49] [50]
Right-wing cultural practices have not been under the purview of social scientists as reasoning
for loyalty to the movement. As these ethnographies have shown, music, forms of art, sites of
familiarity and assurance go a long way in socialising members and retaining them. Mathur
(2008) studied the RSS, and her argument was insistent on treating RSS as a cultural
organisation since that is where its power lies. RSS is able to create spaces and experiences for
its members that enable familiarity and induce confidence, in efforts to create Hinduism as a
civil religion (Waghmore, 2022). I have found newer ways in which young Hindu nationalists
create their own subculture – online, through clothing, in spaces of 'hanging out'. The space
of the *shakha* and the camp has been studied, and its importance in the success of the *Sangh
Parivar* (especially the RSS (Vachani, 1993, 2002 & 2022), Samiti, and the VHP) has been
elaborated. Higher educational institutions are essential spaces of socialisation and
mobilisation. This is a crucial gap in the literature, and I will add to this by elaborating on the
experiences of ABVP members and their cultural practices in the space of the university.

   c) Contemporary Scholarship on Hindu Nationalism

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[49] Kimmel sees the lack of 'ideological' influence in personal life histories as evidence of how these young men
wanted to join for a sense of group and mentorship, and not really an ideologically-motivated racist reasoning.
His insistence is that these young men come from broken homes, have little or no future to look forward to, being
bullied, and facing humiliation from 'ethnic youngsters', is what drives them to join neo-Nazi and extreme right
groups. He notes that members are in fact 'disappointed' when after joining, they find that the movement is not
disciplined. He also notes that the lifestyle is also what drives members to leave because of the constant drinking
and fighting bring about a 'burn out'.

But by saying that Nazism is a rite of passage, Kimmel's findings are not new. Kimmel's analysis does not explain
to us why then some persons of the peer group become members, and some do not. By homogenising experiences
of being part of the movement, Kimmel shows that an involvement in extreme right and neo-Nazi organisations
is inevitable and in the larger schema, nonchalant but harmless. In fact, by simplifying the reasons for exiting the
movement and not mentioning that there are those who stay back (because he interviewed those who left), he
seems to suggest that this participation is a naïve rite of passage. It does not account pre-existing social conditions
that already encourage such participation.

[50] Blee (2007) and Virchow (2007) find this a significant factor in attracting and retaining members as well. Blee
notes (2007: p. 124):

> Music, clothing, style, bodily disciplines, ritual, identity, and performance are critical for recruiting new
> members and solidifying the commitment of participants in far-right groups. Cultural features may be
> important to all social movements, but they take on a particular salience in racist and far-right
> movements.

Literature on the RSS and the *Sangh Parivar* has helped to provide reasons for why people join ideological organisations and how they are socialised into the ideology. This is especially true for various mobilisations during the 1990s, what Hansen and Roy (2022) refer to as 'culturalist and identarian stakes' (Hansen & Roy, 2022: p. 2). Scholarship from 1990s onwards has helped determine the everyday lives of Hindu nationalists in various affiliates. *Sangh Parivar* is evolving, and recent scholarship has testified to the fact (Bhattacharjee, 2019; Chatterji, Hansen & Jaffrelot, 2019; Sud, 2020; Teltumbde, 2020; Longkumer, 2021; Narayan, 2021; Basu & Sarkar, 2022; Hansen & Roy, 2022; Sarkar, 2022). There has been an emergence of new and different approaches to studying *Hindutva*, especially after BJP's rise to electoral power in 2014.[51]

Researchers have closely followed different aspects of the new coming of age for the *Sangh Parivar*. One of the ways that Anderson and Damle (2018) see the change is in the form of expansion of the RSS and *Parivar*. The proliferation of affiliates in all walks of life, especially the ones gaining state support, has been the biggest draw of membership to the organisation. This expansion has brought in groups with conflicted interests also under the same umbrella (the most widely known being Swadeshi Jagran Manch (the economic arm of the Sangh) and BJP on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)) (also, Kanungo, 2019: p. 146). India's former Prime Minister and a life-long RSS man, Atal Behari Vajpayee (1924-2018) once said, 'Once a *prachark*, always a *pracharak*'. Anderson & Damle (2018) see that the reason RSS is able to

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[51] Scholars' studying the way Hindutva has made in-roads in the everyday politics of India assert that India is on the verge of being a 'majoritarian state' (Chatterji, Hansen & Jaffrelot, 2019; Hansen and Roy, 2022). This present power of Hindutva is different from its past victories. Locating BJP's electoral victory (2014 and 2019) with absolute majority, researchers of the Hindu nationalist movement are documenting the present moment as it transforms India. Further, they also note the overpowering influence of India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi ('a majoritarian national-populist' in ibid: p. 4). They too place the rise of Modi in a global context (populism) but they see that in India it also combines rising caste assertion. They also note the intense interaction of government with corporations, upholding corporations against public enterprises (an example being Jio and BSNL). Corporate intervention in state power to this extent has been unprecedented in India and this is the new kind of Hindutva statecraft that is currently in the process of being crystallised (Roy, 2022). We see new as well as old Hindutva agendas coming to the fore: from Kashmir through the abrogation of Article 370, to the transformation of how Sangh itself deals with corporations (and the convenient silencing of those in the Sangh opposing it). This scholarship shows how Hindutva engages with democracy: how democracy is observed in some aspects, and some ways it is transformed and utilised to attain emerging Hindutva agendas. In my fieldwork experience, I found many differences to the pre-2014 (BJP coming to power) members of the Sangh and the post-2014 members. One of the key differences was that members had a lot more faith and hope in the state machinery to serve the cause of the movement. Many members articulated this period as being a 'course correction', to the ills of those who they think have led India astray (chapter 3). I will add to these new ways in which state was accepted, understood and used by the members of the ABVP, through their association with the BJP and the corridors of power (chapter 4).

'manage' such different units under the same umbrella is because of their '*pracharak* system'. The *Pracharaks* are at the top of the group, holding the most prestigious posts (even though they deny hierarchy within their organisations). The change is that the RSS continues its 'character building' role among its *Pracharaks*, and is also increasing its role as a mediator (Kanungo, 2019: p. 136). The affiliates become important then to implement government schemes on ground. This study adds to the literature on the affiliates of the *Sangh Parivar*. This thesis will shed light on everyday lives of members and how affiliates are operating under this new form of Hindutva statecraft. As mentioned, scholarship has focused on the role of RSS members in keeping a cohesive membership. My thesis digresses from this focus on male RSS members and shows that it is in fact the everyday connections, networks and most importantly, care work (especially by the young women of the movement) that goes into sustaining resilient memberships (chapter 3).

RSS' mobilisation through social work is an important way that scholars have attempted to understand RSS' resilience in public life. Whether it be in the cultural exercises undertaken in the tribal belt of central or north-east India, or during disaster relief, scholars have shown how these '*seva*' (social service) networks are mobilised and activated during elections and were especially useful during the past two elections. An aspect that these authors point to is that electoral wins aside, these organisations are successful in creating an atmosphere where Hindutva ideals are normalised, this being their biggest contribution (Thachil, 2014; Bhattacharjee, 2016; Longkumer, 2021). One of the reasons for the draw in the organisation was upholding this very aspect: many students became activists after engaging with '*aayam*' (initiatives) of the ABVP. This helps address one of my key research questions: what are the draws of the organisation and how do interested students become activists for the organisation? As I will show in a later chapter (chapter 3), even those students who were beginning to get disillusioned with the organisation continued to stay or uphold that aspect of the organisation. *Seva* is a crucial mobiliser for the Sangh, and I show how it is deployed to articulate different motivations of ABVP students and their aspirations.

The relationship between Sangh and caste has been always tenuous. Recent scholarship examining this relationship has shed light on the trends on the connections between non-Brahmin mobilisation and communal praxis (important contributions in this regard have been from Narayan, 2009; Thorat, 2019; Meghwanshi, 2020; Teltumbde, 2020; Waghmore &

Gorringe, 2021; Natarajan, 2022; and, Waghmore, 2022).[52] To study the relationship between caste and Hindutva is to be caught in the noise of competing narratives: of appropriation (Narayan, 2009), of discourse (Thorat, 2019) and then, reality on the ground (Meghwanshi, 2020; Teltumbde, 2020).[53] What I find particularly pertinent to my research is an assertion by Bhanwar Meghwanshi (2020): that to be a Dalit in the RSS, is to be there for the implementation of Sangh ideas, not as a decision maker. The *Hindu Rashtra* (Hindu nation) that the Sangh imagines, he notes, is the *Brahmin Rashtra* (nation dominated by Brahmins) (Meghwanshi, 2020: p. 44). My thesis shows competing claims of mobility within the Sangh. For example, the OBC students competing with Brahmin students coming from a Sangh habitus for a place within the vertical hierarchy. The hegemony of the RSS (and its male and Brahmin character) remains resilient even today. While I did not encounter Dalit members in the ABVP, I show that other castes (especially non-Brahmins, see chapter 4) are neatly incorporated in its vertical hierarchical system through providing other models of aspiration (like fighting elections for castes with capital) and providing spaces in other affiliates.

During my fieldwork, many older student activists of the ABVP spoke of how 'they' (Hindu nationalists) had 'lost time' because their movement was not as documented as other ideologies (especially referring to the left-aligned student groups, chapter 5). There has been a significant rise among new ideologues of the Hindu nationalist movement and my interlocutors have noted

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[52] Bhanwar Meghwanshi is a former RSS member and *karsevak* from Rajasthan who made half a journey to Ayodhya during the Ram temple movement in the early 1990s. In his memoir, he writes about his initial attraction to the Sangh. As a Dalit Bahujan, he says that being addressed respectfully (with suffix '*ji*') was a particular draw. The caste system is dehumanising, and such an act humanises those who have been subjected to its excesses. In my field experience, I found deep resonances of this aspect of inter-organisational relations–the fact that surnames are not outwardly asked or mentioned and the using of respectful suffixes, is indeed a factor that members list as a positive quality of being in the Sangh. As he reflects on his association with the RSS, Meghwanshi finds that most people who went to do *karseva* were Dalits, Tribals, backward classes, and Hindu saints. He also importantly tells us that most people who were mobilised were in an economic relationship (worked for them, owed money etc.) with the Sangh members. Meghwanshi was denied the path to become a *pracharak*. Further, after coming back from *karseva*, upper-caste RSS members refused to eat at his home.

[53] Official narratives of the Sangh and outward policies claim equality. For example, Sukhdeo Thorat notes the centrality given to the upliftment of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in BJP's election manifesto in 2014 (Thorat, 2019: p. 217). Similarly, Meghwanshi notes that contacts within the Sangh help in social mobility and is an attractive aspect for upwardly mobile Dalits. And this aspect of his finding helps me a step further in understanding how Sangh is able to invite and retain members, especially keeping in mind the question of caste, from different backgrounds, and socialise them into the ideology.

this as a welcome addition.[54] This is because of two reasons: first, these texts add to the diversity of how the ideology is understood, interpreted and written about. Secondly, students were able to pass on media artefacts to understand the ideology easily. Thirdly, a manuscript or a well-designed video was a source of legitimacy for the sympathisers. In my thesis I focus on the writings by the RSS and ABVP to narrate their stories. Subsequently, my thesis demonstrates that there is a focus among the ABVP university students to create their vision of a Hindutva-inspired academic milieu. I find these texts important for the question on how ideology is engaged with and interpreted by members in the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement.[55] Through texts like biographies of Savarkar (Sampath, 2019), we are witnessing a

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[54] Take for instance, Swapan Dasgupta's (2019) compilation of writings from historical figures that stand tall in the everyday discourse of the Sangh (Vivekanand, Sister Nivedita, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Aurobindo etc), but also figures from modern Indian history and have increasingly been invoked by the 'Indian right' (as Dasgupta refers to them): RC Majumdar, MG Ranade, Vallabhbhai Patel. The language is not very different from what one might hear in the *shakhas*–that the Hindus are victimised, suffered greatly at the hands of the 'invaders', Hindu nationalism at ideological odds with the 'left-liberal consensus'. Significant is Dasgupta's contribution to the idea of 'Indian right' and Hindu nationalism with RSS as being a part of the movement (I see Hindu nationalism as significantly led by the *Sangh Parivar*). He writes (2019: p. xv):

> The inspiration for the right in India has come from multiple and often contradictory sources. The proprietorship of Hindutva, for instance, does not belong to Veer Savarkar, although his contribution is seminal. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) too deserves serious attention, not merely for the influence it exercises on the BJP leadership, but also for its approach to the larger question of national regeneration. Equally important is the influence of individuals such as Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, not the mention the Arya Samaj movement.

Hindu nationalism and the *Sangh Parivar* are seen to be synonymous, and RSS dominates the conversation on Hindu nationalist movement in India. In works like Dasgupta's, it is evident that he does not give the Sangh full credit–he sees them as just another part (perhaps even appropriating these symbols) of the larger Hindu nationalist movement. This has seen a significant change in the past years–the rise of individuals associating their Hindu and Hindu nationalist selves, without ever subscribing to the *Sangh Parivar*. This is an important point, the "Hindutva individualism". We see this in the rise of YouTube channels, podcasts, websites dedicated to the 'greatness' of the Hindu nation, without ever praising or condemning the current bastion of the Hindu nationalism. Although he does not limit himself to the RSS and even claiming that electoral victories need to be set aside when studying the movement, he is repeatedly insistent on the 2014 election victory of the BJP as a win for the 'political Hindu'. His appreciation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as setting the political context of the Hindu right in India is significant, perhaps even more than Vajpayee and Advani (Dasgupta, 2019: pp. 21-35). Note for instance as section on the 'motherland, religion, and community' (ibid: pp. 35-36):

> (Modi during election rallies) leads the crowds into lusty and full-throated chants of *Vande Mataram*, the chant that has defined Indian nationalism since the beginning of the twentieth century. When the crowds are sufficiently large and worked up, Modi does a variation: he says '*Vande*' and the audience replies '*Mataram*'. The effects are electrifying.

[55] We find in such texts a representation of a new kind of Hindu nationalist–the kind who sees the ideology bigger than the organisation (a finding I can also attest to, as will be demonstrated in chapters 3 and 5). Earlier, the allegiance and loyalty to the Sangh was considered paramount. We see that mirage breaking–the reins of power seem to be decentralising and one can be a Hindu nationalist without ever being a part of the *Sangh Parivar*, something I found recurring during my fieldwork experience. Of course, the degrees of success within the

conceptualisation of what mainstream conservative academia would look like in India (also, see chapters 3 and 5).[56]

Another area of focus for my work will be on the connections between gender and the Hindu nationalist movement. There are multiple ways members are organised to contribute to the movement and I add to the diversity of portraits of Hindutva activists that are already available (Bachhetta, 1993; Butalia & Sarkar, 1995; Katju, 2003; Sen, 2007; Mathur, 2008; Manjrekar, 2011; Menon, 2012; Bedi, 2016; Basu & Sarkar, 2022; and Saluja, 2022). The ABVP is an interesting site to study the difference in gendered expectations within the same organisation for men and women. Since members of the ABVP have not been central subjects of study on the Hindu nationalist movement, this engagement would be a useful addition to the current body of literature. The figure of the urban, educated university student who is female and violent is a crucial part of the Hindutva landscape of today, as my thesis will show. Before the Ram temple movement, 'actors' of Hindutva were men. After the rise of Sadhvi Nisha Rithambara (year of birth unavailable), Uma Bharati (born 1959), even Sushma Swaraj (1952-2019), different shades of Hindu nationalist women emerged (Sarkar, 1991; Bachhetta, 1993; Dhawan 2017). No longer were the RSS women seen as submissive appendages to the men of the Hindu right. Feminist scholars have long argued that we hold right-wing women accountable for their everyday exclusionary politics (Butalia & Sarkar, 1995; Jeffrey & Basu, 1999) and the new literature points to that, while showing how these women transform and interact with the patriarchies they confront.[57] Sen (2007) and Bedi (2016) have shown that Shiv Sena women make use of the religious nationalist politics for electoral gains and the ideas espoused by Hindutva are peripheral to the main goal in electoral politics. The focus has mainly been on women who have already been connected to the Hindu nationalist movement. In my thesis, I bring examples of non-Sangh women who are mobilising capital and making space for

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organisation are still determined by the proximity to the Sangh and it does not look like it would change anytime soon.

[56] Thank you to Dr Sarbani Sarma for pointing to this aspect.

[57] An interesting way that Paola Bachhetta (1993) has described Hindu nationalist women's groups as politics of the 'anti-Other'. Here, the 'other' is a shifting signifier and can acquire different identities upon the need of the context.

themselves within the movement.[58] One of the ways of studying right-wing women that has come to the fore is their involvement in violence (Sen, 2007; Bedi, 2016; Mehta, 2015) and this thesis will focus on the ABVP women redefining what an urban Hindu nationalist looks like (chapter 5).

Argument of the Thesis

The fieldwork from this study has pointed to the deeply ingrained nature of hierarchy that permeates aspiration–that aspiration is not without understanding one's place in the vertical structures of power. How these hierarchies are understood, coded, implicitly (and explicitly enforced) and reproduced to enable upward mobility and vocalise aspirations, is the thesis of this study. For example, members in the organisation (especially women) would actively like to join politics and are certain of wanting to remain within the larger *Sangh Parivar.* Due to the expanse of the *Sangh Parivar*, members can articulate aspiration within the fold. In fact, there is a preferred trajectory that is deemed as the one with the maximum guarantee of success in electoral politics: join ABVP (as a worker), graduate to a youth branch of the BJP, acquire visibility, and then an official route to BJP. Members with existing Sangh and BJP habitus and networks have more possibilities to make a direct entry into the BJP in higher positions.

Through this study, I argue that to be a Hindu nationalist is to be keenly aware of hierarchies within the organisation, subscribing to them and enabling them to make them visible. The tasks then that are allotted to different members are understood based on this. Students are keenly aware of hierarchies present in the organisation. Part of the socialisation into the organisation is dependent on how members engage with hierarchies and find ways to utilise them. In my findings, there is negligible attempt to alter the hegemonic power structure of Sangh Combine or prevalent caste and class structures. In my thesis, I show that Sangh habitus provides the

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[58] Often, the studies on Hindutva movement and women have focused exclusively on one organisation to illustrate how women participate. I expand my field of study to focus on members of the ABVP. Work on ideological fountainheads RSS and Samiti has shown how Hindutva is imagined and verbalised through gendered understanding of Hindutva. I am more interested in understanding how it is understood and translated by a demographic that is not served directly by the ideological fountainheads (Samiti and RSS): young, urban, and university-educated persons. Most of my interlocutors are not married. In fact, romantic partnerships are sought through and negotiated through their time in the ABVP. More about romantic partnerships will be discussed in chapter 3.

most flexibility to aspire and mobility for symbolic and material gains. Before I define 'aspiration for hierarchy', I will first discuss present literature on the concepts.

Hierarchy is important to my understanding of the Hindu nationalist movement and the students. In my fieldwork experience I found that students were keenly aware of micro-relations of comparative power between themselves. They worked strategically to associate with those higher in the hierarchy. This had a direct impact on how they were socialised and remained within the organisation. Louis Dumont (1970) has written on hierarchy as a phenomenon that is generally taken for granted. He points out that once hierarchy and its rules are understood and followed, the social system under which it operates becomes legible. I will use this explanation of hierarchy to understand how social structures are organised and understood by the ABVP members. Naomi Haynes and Jason Hickel (2016) argue that hierarchy as a social arrangement has either been seen negatively or ignored by anthropologists. The authors argue that anthropologists should look at hierarchy as an important concept of study, simply because societies we study are organised in hierarchical ways. From them, I borrow the idea that hierarchy is a 'social form' (Haynes & Hickel, 2016: p. 5): a way to understand one's milieu.[59] [60] The authors contend that their interlocutors see in hierarchy a valuable way to make sense of their society (reiterating Dumont's idea of making sense of the social system). They show that hierarchy enables their interlocutors to see how values itself are weighed against each other (ibid: p. 2).[61]

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[59] Haynes & Hickel (2016: p. 1) argue that hierarchy is not seen in a positive light because we tend to contrast it with Western 'liberal sensitivities'. The authors show that hierarchy's association with power tends to have a 'reductive overemphasis' on the analysis–we tend to either generalise the cultures that organise around this concept or not take them seriously. They contrast the implicit understanding of hierarchy in opposition to western ideas of 'justice and good' that anthropologists use in their study. Their interlocutors see 'individualism and egalitarianism' as problematic and look at the hierarchical ways in which their society is organised as useful and valuable.

[60] During my fieldwork, I found resonances with the Haynes & Hickes' findings. My interlocutors did see 'higher' titles and upward mobility in the organisation as a mark of one's devotion to the movement, their integrity for their work, and an overall positive value. This is where I diverge from the authors: although the larger structures remain insulated from radical changes, hierarchical titles were not merely accepted–there were discussions that took place about whether the person deserved the values that were attached to the position and constantly compared with those who thought deserved the higher place more.

[61] In anthropological literature, patronage has gone through various interpretations. In the period from 1960s-1970s, 'patronage' was associated with unequal power; reciprocal in nature; intimate interactions and articulated in kinship modes; always exploitative by those with privilege. Piliavsky (2014) conceptualises hierarchy in the form of 'patronage' where there are those that provide patronage and those who receive it. Like Haynes & Hickel, she defends the concept from the anthropologists who previously ignored or misunderstood it. Patronage in a

Hierarchy is largely coercive in the sense that the organisational structure (and its implicitly coded power) is rigid. There is a guarantee of power that one feels once they achieve a certain position. This is perhaps what makes members adhere to the structure and not radically challenge it.[62] On the other hand, I also find that there are places of strategic claims and navigations (Appadurai, 2004) on the part of the interlocutors. The power implicitly coded in the hierarchal position would determine your social status, your clout, your ability to use the resources of the organisation and your 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai, 2004). Students who wanted to remain in the organisation or succeed in it did not actively oppose the existing structure. They worked hard to find their position within the hierarchy. In this thesis I will show the ways in which students negotiate and learnt strategies to climb higher in the vertical structures of power (chapters 3, 4 and 5).

Aspiration is seen in the light of positive human development (Appadurai, 2004; Hart, 2016). In anthropological scholarship, aspiration has been studied in the context of education and career related achievements and is articulated in material terms. Leya Mathew and Ritty Lukose (2020) note anthropological literature lacking in 'experiences and meaning' of aspiration

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democracy, she argues, brings to light what we expect politics should be but is not: 'equal, disinterested, impersonal'. Piliavsky sees in the concept of 'Clientelism' in political science literature performing the same function as political favour in exchange for goods and services. She notes the transaction as such: 'Politicians use goods and favours to buy their positions, and their electors employ such means as they have at their disposal to wrest back resources from politicians and the state' (ibid: p. 7). She makes two suggestions regarding this nature of clientelism: that it is a function of a poor democracy, and the transactions are based on 'needs' by the marginalised. This definition of clientelism does not address my concerns in the following ways. First, clientelism is not just a poor country phenomenon. Secondly, there is an assumption here that people lobby for resources with 'needs' and not 'wants'. I see the kind of 'clientelism' (for the lack of a better word) in ABVP as people who are not at the margins of the society—they are with privilege and they want to increase their social capital and importantly, material capital through the association.

[62] Kanchan Chandra (2004) sees political choice as a calculation or strategy. She offers that ideally, in a patronage democracy, people should choose who will give them best returns, rather than align with 'own ethnic category'. But she finds that Indian voters invest in identity because it offers 'desired benefits'. She writes, 'instrumental actors who invest in identity because it offers them the best available means by which to obtain desired benefits, and not because such identification is valuable in itself' (Chandra 2004: p. 11). This is echoed in my findings as well, that when it came to electoral choices, even among student politics, identity was a more readily available choice, even when returns were not directly visible yet (chapter 4 shows how identity is used to organise a panel to mobilise maximum votes). This strategy, called *samikaran* (addition), is used across student parties and beyond the scope of the university campus.

among young people (Mathew & Lukose, 2020: p. 692).[63] Critiquing the previous strand of scholarship, Caroline Sarojini Hart (2016) notes, '... narrow economic instrumental positioning of aspirations can be viewed as corrosive as it erodes the possibility and value of wider aspirations' (Hart, 2016: p. 325).[64] Hart (2016) draws in her larger work on aspirations from Amartya Sen's (1985) 'capability approach' and Arjun Appadurai's suggestion that aspirations are born in a social context (Appadurai, 2004). He writes, 'Aspirations are never simply individual (as the language wants and choices inclines us to think). They are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life' (Appadurai, 2004: p. 67).[65] [66] In her work among British teens, she finds that 'aspiration feasibility' is a combination of aspiration formation and aspiration realisation. Hart notes that aspirations that are articulated are themselves subject to contextual censoring (ibid: p. 327).[67]

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[63] The authors note that in the neo-liberal educational context, the *self* is also seen as a commodity in the marketplace.

[64] A useful definition of aspiration comes from Elaine Unterhalter, James G. Ladwig and Craig Jeffrey (2014) who see in the articulation of aspiration '...a rhetoric... serves as a diversion from the reality of increasing social exclusion and inequality' (Unterhalter, Ladwig & Jeffrey, 2014: p. 40). We see a similar kind of articulation among young people from historically-oppressed communities (Mathew & Lukose, 2020).

[65] While Arjun Appadurai's work has informed my understanding of aspiration, I feel it is important to mention here that I am aware of his name being mentioned in cases of abuse of power and harassment. See: Chakravartty, P. (2021) 'Of Academic Hierarchies and Harassment', *Medium.com*, https://medium.com/@pauchakravartty/academic-hierarchies-and-harassment-f39c66b72b08 [accessed on 4 June 2022].

[66] She argues for a multi-dimensional view of aspirations and an understanding of a combination of influences that change aspirations (ibid: p. 325). Hart (2016) enlists six characteristics of aspirations:

1. Aspirations are future-oriented

2. They are driven by conscious or unconscious motivations

3. They are indicative of the group's or individual's commitment to a goal or trajectory

4. They are relational

5. They are subject to dynamic changes, but they pertain to a present state of being (Hart 2016: p. 326).

[67] Leya Mathew (2018) defines aspirations as '... a practice of ethics that made the deprivations of the past and the precarity of the present profoundly meaningful' (Mathew, 2018: p.86). In her study among historically marginalised communities accessing English education in Kerala has coined the term 'aspiration shaming'. She conceptualizes it as an external negative reaction ('discredit') from a relative powerful position against aspirational articulation by the less powerful. I find this term extremely helpful in describing the external censuring of aspiration articulation that was done among my interlocutors (chapter 5).

My findings resonate in Hart's outlines of four types of aspirations, in the decreasing order of individual agency (individual, shared, guided and conflicting aspirations) (ibid: p. 326). Further, I find that aspiration is articulated in the context of the movement and one's knowledge of their position in the hierarchy is a key indicator of socialisation into the movement. Aspiration, as derived from fieldwork among Hindu nationalist university students has the following patterns. First, it is future oriented. Secondly, it requires work in the present. An aspect of aspiration is that it is articulated in the form of time (past, present and future). Thirdly, it is imagined in terms of material and status gain. The last pattern of aspiration confirms Appadurai's (2004) articulation of aspiration as rooted in the context. Thus, there are two things worth noting. First, aspirations are indicators of cultural ideas that are held in high regard. Through the ABVP, the interlocutors enter new cultural worlds and find a new language of aspiration. This can give an indication towards the cultural worlds of Hindu nationalists and what is an indication of success within the movement. He points out that the capacity to aspire is dependent upon the material conditions of the group. He notes (ibid: p. 68):

> It (the capacity to aspire) is not evenly distributed in any society. It is a sort of metacapacity, and the relatively rich and powerful invariably have a more fully developed capacity to aspire... It means that the better off you are (in terms of power, dignity and material resources), the more likely you are to be conscious of the links between the more and less immediate objects or aspiration.

Habitus and access to capital determines the 'capacity to aspire'. My thesis will engage with the real-time changes in aspiration (that would be more indicative of their individual social contexts) and how they change as time is spent in the organisation. I will show the strategies my interlocutors deploy once they have been socialised and navigate their position within the set hierarchy. I call this an 'aspiration for hierarchy'.

How do I define the 'aspiration for hierarchy'? I will divide the concept in two simultaneously understood sociological processes—first is making sense of the hierarchies in their particular socio-political context. Second and what follows is an understanding of aspiration that derives from relative hierarchical position and available capital. I understand hierarchical leverage as accumulated capital that is used to leverage power or influence to extract material and symbolic benefits through it. Hierarchy or hierarchical leverage is evoked only when at least one of the two persons involved is versed in the language of the context. From this argument, I see a link

between the articulations of aspiration among my respondents and the socialisation within the organisation. Capacity to aspire is a 'navigational capacity' (Appadurai, 2004: p. 69). The ability to navigate your access to resources. This capacity is linked to socialisation. To illustrate, the less time a member has spent in the organisation, the more diverse their articulations are. As time and involvement in the organisation grows, the internal hierarchy is revealed to them. Thus, aspirational articulations become limited to growth and success in organisational terms (also Hart, 2016: p. 327). This is how I see the aspiration for hierarchy.[68]

'Renaissance self-fashioning' was a term coined by literary theorist Stephan Greenblatt in his work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980). This term helped explain how individuals in the Renaissance era were fashioning their own personas according to what was valuable in their context to attain material and symbolic benefits. As will be demonstrated in the thesis, I found the term 'self-fashioning' very apt for the way my interlocutors were pragmatically engaging with the Hindu nationalist ideology. It is through socialisation into the hierarchy that ABVP members make decisions to increase their capacity for aspiration. This learning of desired social practices and deploying them for gains is what I call 'Hindutva self-fashioning'. For example, among members who aspire for politics, one of the ways they exhibit their own sphere of influence is through images with leaders who embody influence and power (what Mathew and Lukose have identified as 'forms of self-fashioning manifest in forms of aesthetic and affective labour' (Mathew & Lukose, 2020: p. 692)). ABVP students are no exception. They too upload pictures flanked alongside powerful leaders of the *Sangh Parivar*, fashioning themselves as future politicians. In the past years, these photos have become symbolic for closeness to the BJP leaders and to indicate a smoother transition from ABVP to BJYM and then, the BJP. Thus, uploading pictures with BJP members is a symbol of supposed closeness that gives leverage against those in the organisation that do not have access to such images. How these images are made is itself an exercise in learning the language of hierarchy and symbolic power—that is where knowledge of the ABVP and the powerful players inside it comes in handy.

The second key and related finding of the thesis is that relationships and connections have built the movement and the organisations from the ground up. It is these affective relationships that

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[68] I see this in the limited capacity an indication towards why organisations such as the *Sangh Parivar* will not provide any radical transformations or interventions to the present social order.

sustain and nurture the movement. This arterial network is crucial to not just the ABVP, but the Sangh network. Behind the movement lie key connections that take the form of familial ties, friendships, partnerships, and deeper connections—the care work that goes into sustaining memberships by older members in the organisation. For this, they are rewarded with reverence by younger members who, in order to assimilate within the organisation, need to understand the hierarchical structure and embed themselves within it. This marks a process of socialisation within the organisation. Those who seek to bypass the hierarchical structure present face repercussions that might impact their presence in the organisation. The aim of the members then becomes to negotiate the structure through their own connections and leverage them for success.

Field Site

I conducted my fieldwork in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and Delhi University (DU) in Delhi, India. My field site was chosen due to my previous knowledge of the milieu and the language. Both the universities are prominent historical centres of education in Delhi. Both are 'public' universities—these universities offer subsidised education through funding from the central government. Their 'public' nature adds to their reputation as prestigious centres of learning. Delhi University is spread across the city and its neighbouring areas (called the National Capital Region; NCR). JNU is a closed campus in south Delhi. In DU, I conducted fieldwork mostly in 'north campus', a site where Delhi University administration has its main office, along with prominent Delhi University colleges and faculties. During protests, I followed my interlocutors to different parts of the city.

Higher education in its present form (under the British educational structure) in Delhi has been reported from 1880s. Many historical Delhi University colleges in the north campus began under various trusts in later 1880s (Sharma, 2011: pp. 18–19). DU was formally established in 1922. It was the first university in India to start a three-year degree course in 1942 (ibid: p. 20). It has had a history of vibrant student elections (Oomen, 1974) and has been the starting point of many past and present student leaders who went on to work for their parties at the national level (see chapter 2 and appendix).

In the case of JNU, the 'JNU Bill' was introduced in the Rajya Sabha (Upper-House of the Indian Parliament) in 1964. The university was sought to be unique, a home to research and bustling student life. Jawaharlal Nehru University was also founded as antithetical to the present Delhi University's undergraduate and demographics presence, as is detailed in the early discussions on the visions of the university (Batabyal, 2020: p. 86).[69] JNU is known for its academic standards and inter-disciplinary approach to education ('... from Arabic to Russian, foreign policy to nano sciences...' (Martelli & Parkar, 2018). The three principles that JNU was set up on became the foundation stone for its academic success and a space for the growth of radical and diverse student politics (Martelli & Parkar, 2018).[70] [71]

These two universities were chosen to illustrate the different forms of ideological practices that the student organisation takes depending upon the issues at hand, and the spaces where the two campuses come together and where they diverge. There are also historical reasons why ABVP and other student parties find DU and JNU such fertile sites of political mobilisations. A way to promote student activism on campus has been found in the way universities are structured and their curricula. Studies can be a fool proof way to regulate how students spend their time with authorities looking to make students less invested in political mobilisation through timetables, constant assessments and penalties. Altbach (1991) has noted that the European system of university, where the pace of the study is more determined by students, is more conducive to producing student activists than the Anglo-American system (Luescher-Mamashela, 2015: p. 40). This goes back to the earlier mentioned conundrums of student movements that due to the length of studies, there is lesser opportunity to see long-term change and that can have in impact in the way students commit to the movement. Institutions structured

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[69] Economist VKRV Rao (8 July 1908 – 25 July 1991) joined the committee that formulated the future university. Batabyal (2020: p. 86) tells us that Rao sought the university to have two features:

> First, it should be different from all other universities in this country… Second, as a university bearing Jawaharlal Nehru's name, it should embody three basic principles: national integration, establishment of a decent society, and a universalistic philosophy….

[70] It was this campus that was under severe scrutiny by the central government in India in 2016. The incident, henceforth known as '9 Feb incident' (discussed extensively in chapter 5) polarised the student community in JNU and a significantly larger population outside the campus into two camps: nationalists and 'anti-nationals'. The incident also gave birth to new labels that were invoked consistently by the Hindu nationalists and sympathisers as antithetical to their own vision of the nation.

[71] Although the data here has been through interlocutors who are students of JNU, students of ABVP-DU feel equally passionately about the incident.

in the way that do not completely regulate the time of the students can foster activism and political mobilisation (as has been shown by Craig Jeffrey (2010) in his work on Jat youth in Meerut). Therefore, in the context of India, institutionally JNU and DU can foster student activism because of the way they are structured. On the other hand, in firmly regulated institutions for 'professional' courses like Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) or Indian Institute of Management (IIM) students might find it more difficult to congregate and mobilise (chapter 4). There have been several attempts by governments in India in the past decade to regulate and change the more 'laissez-faire' European system to the regulated American system and these have been met with stiff opposition. Sometimes, when forcefully implemented, courses have had to be rolled back due to mobilisation by student activists.[72] Relatedly, student activism is found to be more active in certain disciplines than others. This could be due to the nature of the discipline and the arrangement of the curricula. For example, scholars have noted that student activists primarily belong to social sciences and humanities. On the other hand, 'professional' institutions and students in 'professional' courses (engineering, management etc) are not very inclined towards activism.[73] Altbach (1991) attributes this to the following factors: first, students with an inclination for activism tend to 'self-select' into social sciences to understand the problems of the society; secondly, the nature of the 'subject matter' encourages direct engagement with contemporary societal problems and produce 'radical views'; and lastly, the 'professional' courses tend to be stricter in terms of structure and deliverables (Altbach, 1991: p. 253). Thus, this relates to the earlier point about relationship between structured time and student activism.[74]

Another way that student activism thrives or fails is based on the 'value' of the institution.[75] In India, student protests have had to acquire an air of legitimacy by association with the university they come from. Perhaps this is the reason JNU's quality as an institution was

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[72] Apurva, Vatsa A., Sharma, S. (2014) FYUP rollback: Why Delhi University Rolled Back its Most Ambitious Reform So Far, *The Indian Express*, https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/du-fyup-rollback/ [accessed 26 July 2020].

[73] There have been instances of student groups in the 'professional' colleges organising, especially in the recent years. For example, the anti-caste students' groups in IIT-Madras.

[74] Discussion about the disciplinary affiliation of my interlocutors is detailed in chapter 4 and the appendix.

[75] Relatedly, the 'value' of private and public educational institutions varies according to contexts.

attacked to render their issues illegitimate by Hindu nationalist supporters in 2016. This is a finding that has echoes among scholars who assert that elite universities attract both privileged (social capital) teachers and students. These universities are then able to mobilise that capital to produce changes. The location of the university is also key—the closer the university is to the power centre of the country, the more it is able to mobilise and invite change (Altbach, 1991: p. 257). Thierry M. Luescher-Mamashela (2015) notes that being close to the power centres of the country allows for 'easier access to information and decision makers and demonstrations are more likely to receive national media coverage (which is very important in terms of getting a response)' (Luescher-Mamashela, 2015: p. 41). Due to the above reasons, JNU and DU were chosen as sites of fieldwork.

Research Methods and Data Collection

This thesis looks at patterns of socialisation, mobilisation and gendered nature of student politics among the Hindu nationalist students of the ABVP in two universities of Delhi. My research on the topic began with an interest in the everyday lives of young women in a hierarchical and ideological organisation. In this thesis, I have accessed the political and social lives of ABVP *karyakartas* in DU and JNU. I conducted fieldwork before and during the pandemic (2019 and 2021-2022), and in between conducted digital ethnography of their activities within the organisation through personal interviews and social media. This ethnography is a qualitative study relying on the tools of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, structured interviews, reviewing and translating archival documents, and social media analysis. Apart from ethnographic methods, I also collected archival and digital data. Sources of information are the printed materials accessed from the archives of the ABVP in Mumbai and the Sangh bookshop at the RSS Delhi headquarters. Social media (Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, Twitter) in the form of posts, images, statuses and official channels of the organisation were also analysed. After data collection, I used thematic coding to structure the data.

In this ethnography, I relied on previous research contacts from another Hindu nationalist affiliate (the Rashtra Sevika Samiti (National Women Volunteers, the oldest RSS affiliate established in 1936)) and social media to establish a connection with ABVP student activists or *karyakartas* (activist workers). Out of 30 main interlocutors, 18 self-identified as female and 12 as male. There were 20 Brahmin students, seven Other Backward Castes (Jats, Yadavs, and

Gujjars), and three Rajputs.[76] Among the 30 students, 15 came from Hindu nationalist habitus and were introduced to the ideology before joining the students' group. Educational level of the group was as follows: 10 doctoral students, 12 masters' students, and eight bachelors' students. Barring two who were studying natural sciences, the students were studying Humanities and Social Sciences (tabulated information about some of the interlocutors is attached in the appendix).

I first conducted participant observation in public meetings, protests, demonstrations, in the common hang-out spots of Hindu nationalist students. After four-five meetings, I conducted continuous series of in-depth interviews and got access to more intimate spaces and internal groups within the organisation. The contacts were made through snowball sampling. My interlocutors were overwhelmingly women of the organisation since I am interested in the gendered aspect of membership. Ex-members were interviewed separately and during events relating to Sangh initiatives in the university. Members were evenly distributed in the organisational hierarchy and were attached to different initiatives of the organisation. Over time, it became evident to spend time separately among the different cliques that existed within the organisation. The sites of the interviews were places within the university, homes of interlocutors and public places outside the university. For those who were comfortable being visible while being interviewed, the interviews were conducted in places frequented by the *karyakartas*. The language of the interviews was primarily Hindi and sometimes, English. Others who did not want to be explicitly seen took me to places that saw less footfall. Participation observation was conducted at events of the ABVP and with the *karyakartas* when they were just 'hanging out' during non-ABVP work.

Regarding my own identity, I introduced myself to my interlocutors as a north Indian woman who came from a middle-class urban family. I share caste, language, regional and gender markers with many of my interlocutors. My interlocutors seemed to be aware of how to place me in the caste hierarchy as my surname indicated a dominant caste status. I presented my institutional credentials as an international student in Germany. Many a times students approached me about further studies in Europe. I identify as a cis female. My identity,

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[76] In my study, I did not encounter any Dalit students. While I will not claim that there are not any Dalit students in the ABVP, but predominantly, the organisation's caste profile in Delhi is dominated by upper-caste and OBC, middle-class students.

especially my caste position, allowed me access to spaces that would not be possible had it not been for my caste name's association with the movement. Further, my female identity allowed me into spaces and conversations with female students and many a times, solo conversations with male members about aspirations, masculinity and pressures they feel.

Like all ethnographers, my interlocutor's safety is of utmost importance to me. Names and any descriptions that could point to the identity (geographical approximations, unspecific disciplinary affiliation or position within the organisation) of the interlocutors have been changed or modified (that do not impact the quality of the data analysis) to avoid recognition.

Thesis Outline

In the following chapter (chapter 2), I show the historical trajectory of the ABVP. Keeping Hindu nationalist university students at the heart of this narrative, their contribution to the movement is highlighted. In this chapter, I use publication materials, archival sources, photographs and interviews to show how the RSS grew into the *Sangh Parivar*. Focusing on university students' contribution to the movement and Hindu nationalist articulations on issues of national importance, what emerges from analysis are the strategies deployed by the RSS across the decades to consolidate and strengthen its influence. Hierarchy is the key organising principle of the movement and this is reflected in the micro and macro structures of the *Sangh Parivar*. A strategy of disavowal is a key mechanism that has allowed Sangh to evade legality, co-opt organisations and issues, and appeal to larger demographics. Lastly, I describe how creation of affective networks has been another factor in the Sangh's success. Creating an infrastructure of affect for its key emotive issues has allowed the Sangh to mobilise beyond its membership and gain new members.

In chapter 3, I introduce the reader to the Hindutva habitus and its use for a Hindutva self-fashioning. Here, I have relied on Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation of habitus and capital. Bourdieu in his work defines habitus as '…structures constitutive of a particular type of environment…principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated'…' (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 72). He notes, 'The habitus is necessarily internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions' (Bourdieu, 2010: p. 166). A self-regulating mechanism,

habitus allows for access and mobilising of different forms of capital. Further, having capital allows for a conversion of capital from one form to another. Here, I show how the capital accrued from one's association with the Sangh habitus can be used to aspire for a higher position in the hierarchy, pre-knowledge of existing paths and mobilising existing resources for success. Following from the idea of affect, networks and nature of memberships, I focus on how members are introduced to the organisation: through kinship relations and friendships. ABVP's unique aspect is its presence in the university campuses. Thus, unlike other Sangh affiliates that grow through kinship and neighbourhood bonds, ABVP networks are extended through friendships and romantic relationships. I particularly focus on the role of older members addressed through kinship terms (*Bhaiyas* and *Didis*; older brothers and sisters) in introducing, socialising and retaining members in the massive movement. In this chapter, I develop the idea of the habitus in the context of Hindutva by showing the importance of emotional practices and 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979). What emerges is the idea of *judaav* (affective connection) to the networks and ideas of the movement that plays a key role in making members articulate a reasoning of being part of the group beyond ideology. Borrowing from the sources of relationality mentioned before, *judaav* is cultivated and is a measure of socialisation in the movement. It emerges that it is in fact these networks, connections and *judaav* that become the primary reasons why people stay in the organisation. These connections have more impact in the resilience of memberships than the ideological values of the movement. The focus on habitus will also show the limits and flexibility of mobility and aspiration within the *Sangh Parivar*.

ABVP is a unique organisation in the Hindu nationalist movement that gives space for young Hindu nationalists to aspire for politics in the movement. In chapter 4, I will detail the way ABVP *karyakartas* fight student elections in Delhi University (DU) and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) to attain control of the student unions and articulate their self-fashioning through electoral politics. I will begin by describing the paradigm shift that occurred in university campuses across India through the 'Lyngdoh commission' (2006) and illustrate how contemporary student politics has found a way to adapt to a Supreme Court directive on how elections should be conducted. Then, I will describe the individual process of elections in DU and JNU, respectively. Through this, I will describe the socio-political ecosystem in which individuals take the decision to become 'candidates' (people aspiring to fight elections) and what compels them to invest tremendous amounts of resources to be a part of election process.

In this chapter, what emerges prominently is the way young people understand and negotiate Sangh hierarchy to make a plan and strategize for a more stable position for themselves in the future. I will argue how the electoral system in DUSU is representative of how electoral politics is conducted in India: a system of aspirational mobility among castes that can mobilise resources. Lastly, I will discuss the ways in which informalisation, hierarchy and strategies of disavowal are operationalised through elections.

In chapter 5, I will engage with ABVP's approach to protest and violence. I detail different types of protests and their goals for the ABVP. Using different events as narratives, I highlight different strategies that are deployed according to the goal of the protests. Finally, I show how violence is used in the service of the ideology, to make a larger claim on the university campus and for the symbolic and material gains of the members. Through this chapter, I argue that protests and violence become sites through which ABVP straddles and balances its position as a Hindu nationalist and student organisation. I show how ABVP *karyakartas* use violence and protests to articulate their own form of self-fashioning as Hindu nationalists. Further, protests and clashes become crucial sites at which the organisation is consolidated for ideological goals – where internal hierarchies and cliques are suspended for a moment. Such events become important to retain the coherence of the different strands of the ABVP. The ethnography also shows the increasing prominence of women in the movement and their role in articulating a new, urban, educated Hindu nationalist femininity.

The conclusion brings together final reflections and a discussion of the prominent themes from the thesis. In it, I also suggest ways that these arguments can be engaged with, tested, and extended.

Chapter 2:

Students for Hindutva, Students by Hindutva:
A History of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)

Introduction

In this chapter I present a linear historical trajectory of the ABVP, from factors leading up to its founding in 1949, to the present (2022). The relationship of the RSS and its affiliates is an important aspect that is considered in this chapter.[77] I show how throughout its history, the ABVP has participated in leading Hindu nationalist goals, while also establishing itself as a students' organisation in the university. By borrowing the strategy of disavowal from its parent body, I show how ABVP has straddled its role as a student and a Hindu nationalist organisation. This strategy, which has allowed for multiple positions on an issue, evades direct engagement with legal repercussions, and retains a diversity in the movement.

In the following sections, I will elaborate on ABVP's history using archival material and writings of ABVP and Sangh ideologues. There are some key moments in the seven decades of its existence. I will use these events as interventions by Hindu nationalist students to demarcate its history. These interventions are used as indicators of how ABVP has straddled and balanced its position as a student organisation and as a Hindutva organisation at different points of time. These time-periods are:

 i. **1925-1948:** Formation of the RSS and the role of the students- the story from 1925-1948

 ii. **1949-1973:** The initial years of the founding of the ABVP and its growth

 iii. **1970s-1980s:** The years that ABVP came of age

 iv. **1977-1990:** *Chhatra Shakti* (Students' Power) for the movement

 v. **1990-2000:** The Ram Temple movement and entry into liberalisation

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[77] Anderson and Damle (2018) and Kanungo (2019) note that RSS deals with the larger public through its affiliates. This is significant for my study because it shows that the RSS relies on the affiliates to bring different groups into the Sangh family. Simultaneously, the affiliates can use this power (of being in the *Sangh Parivar*, a highly networked and resourceful organisational structure), as they did in history, to orient policy and ideological changes their way (Anderson & Damle, 2018: p. 21). Thus, all affiliates come together and seamlessly work for the movement.

vi.   **2000-2014:** ABVP in the interim years of power and laying the stage for a spectacular transformation of Hindu nationalism

vii.   **2014-present:** The years of power

Formation of the RSS and the Role of the Students: The Story from 1925-1948 [78]

"The first members of the RSS were students, and the young organisation effectively used them to recruit other adherents. The new student recruits were soon to be the agents of its early expansion"
-Anderson & Damle (1987: p. 118)

The RSS was established in 1925 by a group of Brahmin men led by Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, with Dr. Balakrishna Shivram Moonje (1872-1948), Dr. Laxman Vasudev Paranjpe (1877-1958), Dr. BB Tholkar (dates unavailable) and Ganesh Damodar Savarkar (1879-1945) in Nagpur. Their goal was to establish an organisation that worked for Hindus through 'character building', physical and ideological training.[79] The initial push to gain more members outside the core-founding circle was performed by young men who pursued the ideal vision of the older members.[80] The younger men were both receptive to the ideology and were prepared to make sacrifices for it (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 117). Hedgewar himself was particularly keen on college students.

Political activity among students in the pre-independence period was limited to left and centrist parties.[81] Hedgewar did not object to RSS members being active in other organisations. Hence

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[78] For a linear understanding of this period, I have relied on Anderson and Damle's works (1987, 2018) extensively, especially the period after the ban and the internal reorganisation.

[79] GD Savarkar founded the Abhinav Bharat Society in 1904, along with his brothers. He was the oldest brother of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966). VD Savarkar was the author of 'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?' (1923) and one of the most influential leaders of Hindu Mahasabha.

[80] Before the Hindu Mahasabha and Arya Samaj-led Hyderabad agitation against the Nizam in 1938, Godse in a letter to VD Savarkar claimed that Savarkar must use the power of RSS: in their able leadership and its popularity among young men (Jha, 2020). This indicates that RSS was able to secure influence among young men in the first decade of its existence.

[81] Here, I am assuming that the student body was mobilised as a larger mass of anti-colonial protests and with the presence of universities. 'Student' politics as a special form of political organising specific to campus issues

RSS members found themselves in diverse political organisations (while remaining within the ideologically centre-right fold): in the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha (All India Hindu Coalition, ABHM; hereon, HM) (Ganneri, 2022), the Congress-faction inspired by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and of course, in the student groups. Many *swayamsevaks* were part of the All-India Students' Federation (AISF).[82] [83] [84] [85] In 1940, the AISF split between the left faction and the faction that devoted itself to the Congress: the AISF (communist) and the All-India Students' Congress (AISC). The *swayamsevaks* (members of the RSS) reportedly joined AISC (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 118). A relatively localised body of more 'aggressive' members of Hindu Mahasabha and RSS were involved in an organisation called 'Hindu Rashtra Dal' (Hindu Nation Party). Nothing much came of this organisation in the long run which affiliated itself more to VD Savarkar-led HM but was regularly addressed by older RSS members (Jha, 2020). Gandhi's strategies in the independence-struggle also disillusioned some AISC members after the Quit India Movement in 1942.[86] [87] The RSS modified its approach of

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emerged prominently in India after independence. A historical overview of student politics has been elaborated in the previous chapter and the aspect of university politics will be given in the chapter 4.

[82] Formerly, Hindu Mahasabha. ABHM was founded in 1915, a Hindu nationalist political party that gained prominence under the tutelage of VD Savarkar.

[83] AISF began in Lucknow, India in 1936 and was instrumental in working in university campuses to gain support against the colonial regime.

[84] 1936 was also the year that RSS' first and oldest affiliate, the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, was established by Lakshmibai Kelkar in Wardha.

[85] Namrata Ganneri's (2022) work is seminal because sheds light on women's involvement in the Hindu Mahasabha during this time. Using archival material and interviews, she looks at the journey of women ('Hindu nationalist foremothers') in two organisations: the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha (All India Hindu Coalition; ABHM) and the Samiti.

[86] The Quit India Movement was launched on 8 August 1942 by the All-India Congress Committee under the mentorship of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The movement was to demand British withdrawal from India. Violence followed and the British responded with jailing most of the Congress leadership for the remainder of the second world war (until 1945) (Chakrabarty, 1992: pp. 791-792).

[87] Within the RSS, there was a struggle to ascertain the best way to proceed as an organisation in the aftermath of the subcontinent's partition and independence in 1947. There yet did not exist a way for RSS members to retain the core of Hindu nationalist ideological values and be actively involved in socio-political movements. Anderson and Damle (2018) note the division becoming starker after the partition and the ban on the RSS, but there were indications of different factions that had already begun emerging since 1942. While the 'activists' were already yearning to participate beyond the measures of Gandhi's Quit India movement (1942), the 'traditionalists'

'character building' to accommodate the energies of the students and these members found in RSS an opportunity to be more aggressive.[88] This enlargement to accommodate diverse motives was a crucial intervention to the RSS ideology through the involvement of students.

a) <u>Post-Partition Strategies of the RSS: How Young People Brought the Ideology Closer Home and Took the Ideology Beyond 'Character Building'</u>

After the Partition, RSS workers organised to help refugees (in the regions of Delhi, Punjab (referring to the partitioned parts as 'East Punjab' and 'West Punjab'), Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, Bengal and Sindh) (Vajpayee & Paradkar, 2002), setting the template for how it would serve the community through *seva* (service).[89] In 1948 a ban was imposed on the RSS after Nathuram Vinayak Godse shot Mahatma Gandhi. Godse was a member of the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS. The RSS was either quick to deny any links with him or stressed on him being a 'former member'.[90] Thus, after the ban, there was an effort to keep the RSS name

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(Anderson & Damle, 2018) wanted to remain within the established *Shakha* structure of participation and not expand RSS' core scope of activities.

[88] Anderson & Damle (1987, 2018) do not specify exactly what caused the disillusionment. The authors point to (and my conversations with RSS members speculate) that the methods of resistance were not seen as 'enough' by the members. 'Aggressive' here refers to the direct-action approach desired by these members to produce a more visible reaction or change. This is further illustrated through the divisional factions between 'activists' and 'traditionalists' (Anderson & Damle, 2018) in later paragraphs. I thank Ashwin Subramanian for pointing this out.

[89] Just before the partition, young activists mobilised to establish RSS mouthpieces that would reflect the organisations' view on matters of importance. In that vein, 'The Organiser', a magazine in English was established a month before the Independence and simultaneous partition. The Hindi weekly 'Panchjanya' followed in the months after it, in January 1948.

[90] Godse was a radicalised Hindu nationalist, exposed to different shades of Hindu nationalism through his membership in the RSS and under the mentorship of VD Savarkar. Through Savarkar, he was involved in the Hindu Mahasabha more prominently from the 1930s onwards. Jha's profile of Godse sheds light on his relationship with the RSS, an aspect that was once vehemently denied and has now found resurgence due to some members of the Sangh Parivar claiming him as a national hero. The connections between RSS and Hindu Mahasabha have been analysed in extremes (Anderson & Damle, 1987; Kanungo, 2003; Kothari, 2006; Jaffrelot, 2007; Ganneri, 2015; Jha, 2020): as either close associations and members affiliating to both organisations or, as cold dissociation with differences between Savarkar's HM and a sceptical RSS with Hedgewar or Golwalkar. I align with the former: there are plenty of prominent, common members between the two. After the ban, RSS activists approached Syama Prasad Mukherjee (of the Hindu Mahasabha), a former cabinet minister of Nehru, to get involved in politics. It is reminiscent of the present times and the different Hindu groups existing today and their fluid relationship to the Sangh Parivar (Jha, 2020).

To my analysis, this categorisation of Godse as a 'former member' and in the recent years, an upholding of Godse as a revolutionary for the *Akhand Bharat* cause is one of the ways in the strategy of disavowal works–in this way,

separate, and continue mobilising for work among different demographics: labour, farmers, students, members interested in electoral politics etc. This resulted in an RSS cadre existing after the ban was lifted in July 1949 (the same time that ABVP was registered as an organisation) and attracting members to the *Parivar* before initial reluctance to associate with the RSS. This is the seed of what I see as one of the ways in which the strategy of disavowal would serve the organisation in the decades to come.

During the ban, the top leadership of the RSS was jailed. This left many young, middle-level *Pracharaks* to strategize more independently (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 110). Among these were Eknath Ranade, Vasantrao Oke, Deendayal Upadhayay, and Bhai Mahavir who '... demonstrated managerial skills during the ban' (ibid).[91] Many student groups with similar ideological orientations sprouted across India. A notable name instrumental in organising students in Punjab was Balraj Madhok (1920-2016). Madhok was an RSS *Pracharak* who worked among refugee students (those impacted by the subcontinent's partition) (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 119). Later in the year, some student organisers met in Delhi to confer and draw a constitution to 'link up scattered student bodies' (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 119). Its first convention was held in Ambala, Punjab in 1948.

1949-1973: The Initial Years of the Founding of the ABVP and its Growth

From 1949 onwards, the RSS tried to shift its portrayal from a 'paramilitary organisation' to that of one providing *seva*.[92] After the ban, Golwalkar, the RSS Sanghsanchalak, was released

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both views of thought can be accommodated within the larger Sangh structure. This aspect will be further discussed later in the chapter.

[91] Golwalkar is said to have remarked about Oke that he had 'developed a liking for political work to a degree uncommon and undesirable for a Swayam*Seva*k' (sic) (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 125). As mentioned in an earlier footnote, this is an important view that continues to today among the Sangh Parivar: a suspicion among RSS purists for those with political ambition. This is also found replicated among ABVP members who differentiate themselves and their integrity for the ideology from those who wish to stand for elections and eventually join BJP–an aspect illustrated in chapter 4.

[92] *Seva* is an extremely important way in which the Sangh Parivar recruits, socialises and retains membership. *Seva* is also one of the ways in which women have participated in movements across the ideological spectrum, including the Rashtra Sevika Samiti (Ciotti, 2006; Menon, 2012). Scholarship on different affiliates and RSS' own approaches to service has been analysed to demonstrate this (Thachil, 2014; Bhattacharjee, 2019; Narayan,

from prison in 1949. He came out to find an organisation that was being pulled in many directions, as per the interests of the powerful *Pracharaks*. While loyalty did not seem to be an issue for the RSS leaders, the 'activist' *Pracharaks* now had more influence due to the underground and relief work conducted by them during the ban. They were actively involved in the rehabilitation of refugees from East and West Pakistan and in relief work in the aftermath of the Assam earthquake of 1950.[93] [94] [95] Deendayal Upadhayay was 'one of his (Golwalkar) most capable *Pracharaks*' of the RSS, initially assigned (along with Vasantrao Oke) to help Syama Prasad Mukherjee with his electoral initiative of Bharatiya Jana Sangh (Indian People's Corp; BJS).[96] Due to these networks, now the 'activist' *Pracharaks* could get involved in politics. By allowing RSS workers to get involved with the newly formed Jana Sangh in 1951, Golwalkar was ensuring the reliance of the party on the RSS (Jaffrelot, 2007: p. 140). Those who wanted to get involved in mobilising students and workers were given an opportunity to apprentice in non-RSS organisations. This was the start of influential *Pracharaks* Datta

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2021). I demonstrate the aspect of *seva* as an aspect of affective socialisation in the chapter on connections (chapter 3). *Seva* as a strategy of disavowal is discussed later in the chapter.

[93] Anderson and Damle (1987) note:

> 'Between lifting of the ban in 1949 and 1953, Golwalkar was confronted by an organisation beset by internal divisions... This divergence of views (between 'activists' and 'traditionalists') exacerbated tensions within the ranks of the RSS. To restore discipline and a unified sense of purpose, the central leadership made personnel changes designed to place *reliable Pracharaks* in key state positions' (Anderson & Damle, 1987: pp. 110-111). See also, Kanungo (2003: p. 3298).

[94] Emphasis mine. Among many personnel changes, Prabhakar Balwant Dani, who was the General Secretary between 1946-1956 was replaced by Eknath Ranade. In the same vein, a *Pracharak* from Punjab, Madhavrao Mule, replaced Vasantrao Krishna Oke, in Delhi.

[95] During the initial years of the ABVP and the years following the lifting of the ban in 1949, the RSS was going through its own struggles. Post the ban lifting, there were fewer members and financial troubles were plaguing the organisation (Ankit, 2012). Golwalkar and the RSS decided to consolidate the organisation in 1956. Eknath Ranade, the General Secretary, decided that the RSS needed its *Pracharaks* and could not afford to loan its members to affiliates. This process took approximately six years and finally in 1962 (going back to the idea of 'reliable *Pracharaks*' earlier), the RSS and its affiliates found a more stable working structure. Prabhakar Dani replaced Ranade, and again brought with him the 'activist' push. Balasaheb Deoras replaced Dani in 1964. Deoras is regarded as the most active Sangh head that pushed for diversification within the Sangh. 'While he was the General Secretary, the affiliates began to take on a more populist approach and this was demonstrated by the increasing resort to agitation' (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 114). Agitational approach, that had hitherto not been resorted to after the ban, was invoked more often and the push was to work with the affiliates and make active interventions in all areas of public life.

[96] Deendayal Upadhyay later became the party's chief ideologue (Jaffrelot, 2007: pp. 139-140; Anderson & Damle, 2018: p. 27) and helped establish it as an RSS affiliate.

Devidas Didolkar (who involved himself in mobilising students) and Dattopant Bapurao Thengadi (who later formed the labour union affiliate, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh), both of whom played key roles in establishing the ABVP (Upadhyay, 2022: p. 95).[97] On 9 July 1949 ABVP was formally declared as a student organisation (a day celebrated each year as 'Students Day' by the ABVP). The initial goals of the organisation were to create a student group inspired by the vision of the RSS and relatedly, 'counter communist forces on campuses' (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 135). During the ban, the ABVP was promoted as a student organisation with a distinctive view of the nation.

The first national president of the organisation was Om Prakash Bahal and the general secretary was Keshav Deo Verma.[98] [99] The members of the ABVP came from homes where there was already a familiarity with Hindu symbols. A factor that was influential for initial membership is '...an organisation like the Vidyarthi Parishad which relies heavily on the symbols of Hinduism and which offers a surrogate family environment' (Anderson & Damle, 1987: pp. 119-120).[100] Unlike most student organisations, teachers were welcomed to be part of the ABVP from its inception. In fact, the top positions are given to teachers and *Pracharaks*. In 1945, a young *Pracharak*, Yeshwantrao Kelkar, began his work in Nasik. At 27 years old, Kelkar had served as an RSS *Pracharak* for seven years. In 1952, he was deputed to the BJS, serving in its *karyalaya* (headquarters) in Bombay. Soon after, he returned to the RSS and was

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[97] Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways in the ruling BJP government (Lok Sabha) and veteran BJP member, Nitin Gadkari was a member of the ABVP groomed under Datta Devidas Didolkar. (Times News Network. (2018) Compassion, Humanity Vital for Becoming Great Leader', *The Times of India*, 18 July 2018, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/compassion-humanity-vital-for-becoming-great-leader/articleshow/64909591.cms [accessed on December 6 2020]).

[98] The percentage of *swayamsevaks* in the ABVP has gone down significantly over the decades. The affiliates do not have the dramatic and cohesive structure of the core RSS. The members meet when there is a meeting and although there are local headquarters and spaces, unlike the punctual *shakha*, the ABVP does not have such a spatial-temporal entity that attracts members. There are other elements of grouping that bring people together (examples: camps, *Adhiveshan* (conference), events, protests etc) and these will be discussed in later chapters.

[99] At the time of its inception, half of the ABVP members were from the RSS. Anderson & Damle note, 'The Vidyarthi Parishad provides the RSS an opportunity to mobilise support among students who might not be attracted to the strict discipline of the *Shakha*' (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 119).

[100] The connections between religiosity emerging from the habitus and Sangh membership not only allow for an easier entry into the organisation and movement, but also guarantee a longer association, as is evident in the membership patterns among Sangh women (Sarkar, 1991; Tyagi, 2020). Interestingly, a connection through the father is more enduring than the connection through the mother.

given the *dayitv* (responsibility) of the *Mahanagar Baudhik Pramukh* (educational head). Since he was already a college professor at the time, in 1959, he was deputed to the ABVP and became its most influential ideologue. Between 1959 and 1962, he began the effort to expand the ABVP (N.A., 2016: p. 5).[101] [102] In 1967, Kelkar was made the ABVP President in the Nagpur *Adhiveshan* (conference), a position he undertook during ABVP's most thrilling years. It was during this time that ABVP began its first initiative (*aayam*), SEIL.

a) Beginning of its most enduring *aayam*: SEIL[103]

The Sangh in the 1960s was deeply apprehensive due to the different civil unrests in India. One of them was the region of northeast India, site of several parallel insurgency movements (Nagaland, parts of North East Frontier Agency (NEFA)) against the newly independent-Indian state (Srikanth & Thomas, 2005: p. 62; Vadlamannati, 2011: p. 606). There was a need to come up with solutions and various outfits of the Sangh, including the ABVP, decided to visit parts of northeast India in search for solutions to understand civil unrest (and to keep in line with the ideological goals of territorial integrity of India). One of the first *aayam* that was started by ABVP was 'SEIL' or State Experience in Interstate Living. The initiative was conceptualised to counter 'secessionist' forces and termed as 'real national integration' (Desai, 1991). It should be noted here that the focus of the *aayam* was the student from the northeast–someone who is reportedly in danger of being attracted to secessionist forces. The key was to expose them at an 'impressionable age' (ibid: p .4). The idea was to make people stay together and expose them to different ways of living and different cultures. But the idea of culture here needs more substantiation. ABVP activists who conceptualised SEIL noted that when the culture was the same, there was nothing to exchange. Thus, this exchange but *not exchange* (emphasis mine) concept keeps the idea of an *Akhand Bharat* paramount: an idea encapsulating territorial integrity with a common, hegemonic culture.

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[101] During the 1960s, Sucheta Mazumdar (2003) notes ABVP's presence in mobilizing actively in lower middle-class areas in cases of Hindu-Muslim rioting.

[102] Kelkar's journey across the Sangh Parivar demonstrates the mobility of the RSS *Pracharaks* across the Combine.

[103] This intervention among tribal populations and the Sangh was not just limited to the ABVP. The Sangh began to actively work among tribal populations in the 1970s (Narayan, 2021: p. 78).

SEIL began with a pilot tour in 1963 and was instituted in 1965/1966 with 80 students travelling across India and living with Parishad members in their homes. Two RSS *Pracharaks*, Padmanabh Acharya and Dilip Paranjpe visited a fellow RSS *Pracharak* in Guwahati (Yugandhar, 1970: p. 33). They then obtained the Inner Line Permit (ILP) that allowed them to visit the North-east Frontier Agency (NEFA, present day regions in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam), Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. The *karyakartas* came back with an impression that these areas were 'isolated' from the rest of the country and needed an active intervention. After their return to Bombay, following many deliberations (with the echelons of ABVP and under guidance from the RSS), SEIL was registered as a trust under the stewardship of ABVP Bombay. In the months that followed, visits from students of both sides (to and from 'north-east') followed.[104] The ABVP group came back to Bombay with 80 students from the region.[105] There was first an orientation camp held in Bombay, after which students were allotted to host families. During this time, they visited Goa and Pune as well. In November 1966, 25 students from Bombay left for a reciprocal trip. In the following years, the visits extended to other parts of Gujarat, Goa, and Maharashtra.[106] [107] The initiative was also supported by networks of the Indian government and the Ramakrishna Mission (Desai, 1991: p. 7).[108]

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[104] The first group of students were four ABVP members and Padmanabh Acharya from Bombay (Desai, 1991: p. 7).

[105] The 80 students were reportedly welcomed by the then-Mayor of Bombay (ibid).

[106] During the following year, 'My Home is India' (MHI) was launched. ABVP *karyakartas* noted the lack of educational facilities in some parts of the northeast. Their solution was this initiative. In this initiative, students from the northeast were 'adopted' till they completed their education (Desai, 1991: p. 11; Yuganthar, 1970: p. 35). Families were chosen in different cities (Bombay, Nagpur, Lucknow, Kanpur, Agra, Ahmedabad). 39 students were chosen for this scheme. The families chosen had to have material resources to take care of the child- '… a middle-class family that will treat the NE student as their own son...' (Desai, 1991: p. 12). MHI's placement in families though lost its vigour in the following years, the reasons interestingly noted due to women seeking employment outside the home and breaking up of the joint-family system. NE students were also seen as being 'weak to cope' in academics and unable to adjust with their host families (ibid). And thus, MHI moved from a family-based initiative to the one of 'fellowship centers' (hostels). Around 20 students left, and 20 students stayed to complete the programme. The scheme was gradually discontinued.

[107] A detailed progression of SEIL's milestones is reproduced in the table in the appendix.

[108] They had support of the Governor of Assam and Nagaland, Vishnu Sahay. Government accommodations, local Congress bhavans, Rotary, and Lions clubs facilitated the visit (Desai, 1991: p. 8).

SEIL is an important case study for three reasons: first, in the context of studying the relationship between RSS and the ABVP and ABVP's functioning, SEIL's vision and initial pilot work was done by the RSS and its implementation was led by the ABVP. This points to the way work is carried out in the *Sangh Parivar* and sheds light on the nature of the relationship between RSS and its affiliates. Sangh's initiatives in the following decades could not have happened had SEIL not seen the success it did. Secondly, as its first *aayam*, SEIL provided the model for ABVP to include students who had specific interests but were not invested in electoral politics, a crucial way for larger groups of students to become involved, those who did not want to engage directly with the ideological aspects of the organisation (an aspect discussed later in the chapter). Thirdly, SEIL as an initiative manages to combine an idea of *seva* through its vision of *Akhand Bharat*–through SEIL, the efforts being made to promote a cohesive culture is a service to the people of the targeted region and to the patriotic feelings of the nation.

In this section, I illustrated the important role played by university students and the ABVP in the establishment and success of the Hindu nationalist movement. Through the events discussed above, I demonstrated the conditions that led to the birth of the ABVP. In the two decades of its establishment, ABVP worked closely with the RSS and began to find a foothold in various universities. Further, *aayams* like SEIL provided a blueprint on how to combine the idea of *seva* with the Hindu nationalist vision of the nation. Importantly, SEIL provided a framework in which students who were not interested in the ideological activities of the Sangh could still be associated with the organisation. In the next section, I will illustrate the crucial years of the ABVP and how it straddled its position as a Hindu nationalist organisation along with its engagements with the larger public debates of the country.

1970s-1980s: The Years that ABVP Came of Age

The 1970s saw a rise in the presence of lower-middle class students in the university and a parallel rise of agitation politics of the ABVP (Anderson & Damle, 1987; Shah, 2004).[109] While initially ABVP was not interested in contesting student elections, the need to intervene more actively in student politics increased in the late 1960s and early 1970s due to the general

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[109] Ghansham Shah also notes that by the late 1960s, the number of students in universities in India had increased 'fifteen-fold' from two-four lakh in 1947 (Shah, 2004) (one lakh= one hundred thousand).

involvement of young people and students in matters of political interest (Shah, 2004). In the national conference in 1971, ABVP decided that the students are to be active citizens (*chhatra kal ka nahi, aaj ka nagrik hai* (students are not the citizens of tomorrow, they are citizens today)) (Ambekar, 2019). Until 1973, although it was not taking part in university elections, the ABVP was already active in many campuses. During this period, there were three important events that took place where ABVP is noted to have played a role: the *Navnirman* (Reconstruction) movement in Gujarat (1973), the *Sampoorna Kranti* movement (Total Revolution) (1974-1975), and finally, the Emergency (1975-1977).[110] In the following section, ABVP's involvement in these key student movements will be illustrated. This is to show ABVP's engagement with agitational politics, its interventions in the larger political discussions of the country, and the change in membership and aspirations of its members after these engagements. This period will also illustrate how ABVP balanced non-Hindutva activities and established itself as a student organisation. This period brought a paradigm shift in how ABVP was perceived – not just in the Sangh but outside as well. Many of today's leadership from the BJP emerged from this period, their influence continuing in India's policies and the Hindu nationalist movement today, making this period crucial.

a) The *Navnirman* Movement (Gujarat, 1973)[111]

Chimanbhai Patel was the chief minister of Gujarat in 1973. There was widespread corruption in his government. Inflation in the prices of food and basic necessities was at an all-time high. There were political rivalries among Congress factions in Gujarat. [112] There was manipulation of finances and resources, leading to inflation. [113] The *Navnirman Andolan* (reconstruction

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[110] Its initiative SEIL was put to a halt during these years. It began again after a conference in Guwahati in 1977.

[111] Journalist Rajendra Sheth, an advisor to the Navnirman Yuvak Samiti coined the name (Misra & Kateshia, 2020).

[112] Gujarat Congress in 1970s was divided into factions. There was Congress (O) led by Morarji Desai and incumbent Chief Minister Hitendra Desai. On the other side was Chimanbhai Patel, a teacher of economics and aspiring CM. Ghanshyam Oza, favourable with Indira Gandhi, became the chief minister of Gujarat in 1971. Members of his cabinet and the Gujarat Congress chief were at loggerheads which finally resulted in the coup of Oza government in 1973 (Frankel, 1978: pp. 524–27). With the support of affluent rural farmers, Patel became the CM. The descriptions of the factional coup within the Congress exactly resemble the horse-trading scandal and the MLA theatre that took place under Amit Shah and the BJP in Karnataka in 2019.

[113] Here, Dawn E. Jones and Rodney W. Jones (1976) note,

movement) began with a 'mess' bill (mess is an entity that organises food for residential students). University students in the state began to protest the ruling state government against rising food prices and corruption.[114] They were also fighting with the authorities on matters of curriculum, fee, and university living expenses. [115] With the support of various teachers' associations, a decentralised student-led group Navnirman Yuvak Samiti (NYS, Reconstruction by Committee of Youth) was formed. Manish Jani was the president of the NYS and represented student interests to the government. Students led protests in various parts of Gujarat. Reminiscent of the present, police entered campuses, attacked students and indiscriminately arrested them. Nonetheless, in a matter of weeks, student protests were able to destabilise the government and a new call for elections was made.

ABVP does not figure very prominently in the naming of leaders of the movement. Manish Jani recalled names of some ABVP members who were involved: Arun Oza, Chandrakant Pandit and 'some others'.[116] ABVP publication materials, however, claim a massive contribution to the Navnirman movement.[117] After the success of the Navnirman movement,

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'Collusion between politicians and businessmen in fixing prices by controlling market supply for mutual profit, and the open use of large sums of money in politics to win elections and to break or make cabinet ministries, were perceived as the underlying causes of economic distress as well as the erosion of middle-class influence in government affairs' (Jones & Jones, 1976: p. 1014).

[114] While the RSS did not pass any resolutions on the Gujarat protests, it made a note of the droughts in various parts of the country, especially Bihar and UP (RSS, 2007). The connection to drought in UP and Gujarat protests is elaborated below.

[115] This is where the some of the financial irregularities that later led to the inflation become slightly clearer. As reported in newspaper articles and scholarship, the prices of groundnut oil suddenly rose months after the CM took seat. Jones & Jones (1976) report that to win favour of the national Congress leadership, the Gujarat CM offered to contribute to the UP elections in 1974. For this, he borrowed money from the groundnut oil industry. In exchange was almost no regulation of the prices. The industry raised its prices, despite a good harvest that year, and since it is the primary oil of use in middle class homes, it evoked a massive reaction (Jones & Jones 1976: 1017). Further, to win UP elections, Congress allegedly diverted grains from other states and while keeping prices low in UP, the prices elsewhere shot up. Gujarat reportedly had 66% less grain than previous year with a 100% rise in prices.

[116] Khanna, R. (2019) From the 1973 Gujarat Students' Movement to the Ongoing Agitation - Where Will It Lead?, *The Citizen*, 20 December 2019, https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/4/18045/From-the-1973-Gujarat-Students-Movement-to-the-Ongoing-Agitation---Where-Will-It-Lead [accessed on 19 November 2020].

[117] Raghu Karnad (2019) in his piece on the government's crackdown on university protests notes that historically, Modi's claim of ascendency in the Sangh ranks was due to his contribution to ironically, student protests in the

ABVP in 1974 showed record growth: there were 70 units across the country, with 125 thousand students (Yugandhar, 1970: p. ii). Although ABVP's role might not be as stark in this movement, the reason why the Navnirman movement became important was twofold: first, the dramatic increase in membership after involvement in issues of student and national interests. Secondly, there emerged a pattern of student revolt leading to a drastic transformation, in this case, dissolution of state assembly. This inspired the movement in Bihar, popularly called the JP movement (named after the freedom fighter, Jayprakash Narayan, who was leading the movement) or *Sampoorna Kranti* (Total revolution) where ABVP made a clearer contribution to the Hindu nationalist and student movement.[118]

b) JP movement and *Sampoorna Kranti* (Total Revolution)

In 1974 the ABVP celebrated its silver jubilee in Bombay. Riding high on the success of the Navnirman movement, the students responded to the call by Jayprakash Narayan in Bihar against corruption in governance (Chatterji, 1984). 'In the early 1970s, India's campuses were political crucibles for Jayprakash Narayan's growing movement against Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's increasingly iron-fisted policies' (Donthi, 2015). Jayprakash Narayan (1902-1979) had been a respected freedom fighter. Already in his seventies when the Navnirman movement began, 'JP', as he was popularly known, responded in Bihar with a call for *Sampoorna Kranti* (Chandra, 2017). He asked students to leave their books and campuses and lead the movement. Various student and political parties backed his call, mainly in the north and western parts of India (Shah, 1979; Shah, 2016: p. 21).

There was a formation of Chhatra Sangharsh Samitis (Students' Struggle Committees, CSS) across universities that coordinated with the larger movement. For the ABVP and its

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Navnirman movement. While Modi's website does claim this, it has been refuted by those students who were members of the Nav Nirman Yuvak Samiti. See: Admin. (2012) Navnirman Movement (1974): When student power rattled the unhealthy status quo!, *narendramodi.in*, 15 June 2012, https://www.narendramodi.in/navnirman-movement-1974-when-student-power-rattled-the-unhealthy-status-quo-3125 [accessed on 25 January 2023]; Mehta, H. (2004) 'Modi caught in a Web lie', *The Times of India*, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/Modi-caught-in-Web-lie/articleshow/746795.cms [accessed 1 December 2020].

[118] In the 64th ABVP National Conference, ABVP National Organising Secretary laid complete claim to the movement and the following events as well (Ambekar, 2019: p. 4).

supporters, these plans were reportedly formulated during the ABVP conference in Dhanbad in 1974 (Shah, 1977: p. 611). On 18 March 1974, students surrounded the Bihar assembly. On 21 March, ABVP requested JP to lead the students' movement.[119] RSS' Nanaji Deshmukh (1916-2010) was made the Secretary of the Lok Sangharsh Samiti, who mediated the conversations between the Socialists and the *Sangh Parivar* (Banerjee, 2016: p. 27). It began with JP and students of Patna University (the student union was dominated by ABVP in that year (Shah, 1977)) in 1974 marching to the Vidhan Sabha (State Legislature) and demanding the resignation of the governor. Students led protests in different forms–against university and state administrations–during this movement. They responded enthusiastically to his call for *jail bharo* (fill up the jails) as a strategy to cause disruption (Sheth, 2017: p. 8).

This is where the ABVP's contribution emerges prominently.[120] In the CSS, almost one-third of the membership came from the ABVP (Jaffrelot, 2015). This was also significant for the larger *Sangh Parivar* as these were the first steps towards Jana Sangh and the RSS *Parivar* becoming 'mainstream' (Jaffrelot, 2015; Sheth, 2017: p. 8). Arun Jaitley, a young ABVP leader from Delhi, was the national convener of the CSS by the end of 1974 (Karnad, 2018).[121] [122]

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[119] Ghansham Shah in his study of the initial months of the movement notes that during this time, there were clashes between the students from the CPI and the ABVP. He also notes JP Narayan allegedly stating that leftist ideology was not 'suitable' for India (Shah, 1977). He suggests that this was also the reason why the ABVP was particularly enthused about JP leading the movement.

[120] Derived from RSS' writings on the movement during this time, the aspect of disavowal among ideological organisations will be discussed later in the chapter.

[121] Jaitley convened the Committee for Youth and Students Organisations, organised conventions and conferences in support of the movement (Donthi, 2015).

[122] Jaitley was born in Delhi to parents who came over to India during the Partition. His father was a successful lawyer. In his university days, it was his debating skills that got him attention from both NSUI and the ABVP. During his years at the University of Delhi, in the year 1971, he met an ABVP member, Sri Ram Khanna. In 1972, Khanna roped him in his circle by becoming a DUSU president and marking him as a successor in Shri Ram College's student union. The following year, he was touted to succeed Khanna in DUSU but the post was given to a man closer to RSS. Praveeen Donthi (2015) writes, 'It wouldn't be the last time Jaitley, with his friends across party lines and a reputation for fitting in anywhere, was passed over for a candidate seemingly more committed to the ideology of the RSS and its affiliates'.[122] But as Donthi notes, Jaitley's ability to speak English was what made him stand out among many ABVP hopefuls and the ABVP leadership gave him a chance to contest the Vice-President's ticket for DUSU. His leadership during the JP movement soon made him popular to his own party as well as the opposition. In conversations among politically inclined ABVP members in Delhi University today, Jaitley is hailed as the example of what a membership in the ABVP can achieve. I find it interesting that these cross-party connections and language abilities are still what current members can deploy for symbolic and material gains.

The ABVP wanted to mobilise more members for itself and also counter the influence of left groups that were attracting young students to parallel radical movements like Naxalbari (Roychowdhury, 2018).[123] Being part of the JP movement also gave them the legitimacy to bargain for their own demands (bargaining for better educational facilities, demand for employment) by the state government (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 121).[124] The most significant leaders of the ABVP, who later went on to gain national political recognition, were those who made a mark during the JP movement as part of the CSS and subsequently, the Emergency years. Among them were Ravi Shankar Prasad and Sushil Modi from Bihar and future Finance Minister and ABVP's most famous alumnus, Arun Jaitley.[125] [126] [127]

c) The Emergency Years (1975-1977):

The ABVP leadership was planning to extend the model of protests from Gujarat and Bihar to other areas of India and even met to discuss possibilities for protests in other states in Nagpur in 1975. Ram Bahadur Rai (present head of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi) is named as one of the first ABVP leaders to float the idea of a student protest (Sahasrabuddhe & Vajpayee, 1991: p. 67). But the declaration of the Emergency foiled these plans. The President of India declared 'Emergency' on 26 June 1975.[128] The move was

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[123] Naxalbari peasant uprising began in the late 1960s as guerrilla movement against exploitation by landowners and money lenders in Naxalbari, West Bengal. Based on communist ideas of class struggle, the uprisings laid the foundation of the Naxalite movement in India.

[124] An interesting aspect of the ABVP that is different from other student groups is the place that teachers hold in the organisation. Teachers, especially at the university level, are welcomed into the organisation as post holders (this is also in consonance with the value that Sangh members place on age and experience, which helps establish hierarchy). Anderson & Damle (1987) mention that the ABVP is against 'student trade unionism' (121) and aspires to be the bridge between all stakeholders in the university.

[125] From 1975-1977, Narendra Modi was in an advisory position from the RSS to the ABVP in Ahmedabad (he was not a member of the ABVP) at the time and was involved in this way of association.

[126] Other leaders who played an important role in the JP movement were Lalu Prasad Yadav, Ram Vilas Paswan (Socialists) in Bihar; Sitaram Yechury and Prakash Karat (Left-Communist movement) in Delhi.

[127] Bipin Chandra (2017) has demonstrated the links between the JP movement and the emergency years. One of his concerns was to see the links between the RSS and the JP movement and compare it to other liberal movements before the advent of authoritarianism in Italy or Germany in the 1920s.

[128] Proclamation 18 or 'Emergency Provisions' is a constitutional remedy executed by the orders of the President of India. It is invoked 'if the President is satisfied that a grave emergency exists whereby the security of India or

taken at the behest of the ruling government led by India's former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (1966-1977 and 1980-1984).

The ruling regime (Indira Gandhi and her faction of the Indian National Congress) oppressed political rivals during the Emergency (Brass, 1994: p. 59). Student leaders and politics on campus were tremendously disturbed during the years. Student leaders were tortured, held unlawfully in state custody (under an act called MISA, similar to UAPA being used on students today), and even killed. Many students also operated underground. N. Jayaram (1979) notes the ABVP's presence in Delhi University, and Students Federation of India (SFI, student wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)) in JNU in leading the Emergency resistance in their respective campuses.

RSS calls the declaration of Emergency and the resistance against it the 'second freedom struggle' (Sahasrabuddhe & Vajpayee, 1991: p. i). Initially, the ABVP adopted a 'wait and watch' attitude (Donthi, 2015). Arrests began simultaneously. 'The Delhi University campus became a police camp, with more policemen than students. On June 25 and 26, as many as 186 student leaders and college teachers were arrested … Of them, 120 were teachers' (Sahasrabuddhe & Vajpayee, 1991: p. 83).[129] Such exercises were repeated in universities across the country. On 4 July 1975, the ban on the RSS was imposed and its affiliate activities like Shishu Mandirs, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, and VHP were taken over (ibid: p. 87). Arun Jaitley, in a series of posts remembering the Emergency, notes his experience of arrests and imprisonment. He writes that on the day Emergency was declared, the police sought his arrest.[130] The next day, Jaitley claimed to have organised 'the only protest' against the

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of any part of the territory thereof is threatened, whether by war or external aggression...' (https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf1/Part18.pdf).

[129] In 2018, Dalit and Hindutva groups clashed at the site of reverence of Mahar soldiers. The clashes resulted in wide-spread intimidation of Dalit activists from the region and from June 2018 onwards, arrests of prominent civil society activists and scholars began. Reminiscent of the Emergency history, among the people arrested by the current BJP government are teachers. The teachers arrested in the Bhima Koregaon case are Dr Hany Babu (University of Delhi), Vernon Gonsalves (University of Mumbai), Dr. Shoma Sen (Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University), and Dr Anand Teltumbde (Goa Institute of Management). Dr G.N. Saibaba (University of Delhi) also currently serves life imprisonment on charges of alleged links with Maoist organisations. Ramesh Gaichor, Sagar Gorkhe, and Jyoti Jagtap are all undergraduate students from Maharashtra arrested in the case.

[130] Arun Jaitley writes,

'On the evening of 25th June, 1975, a massive rally was organized at Ramlila Maidan which was addressed by JP and several other leaders. After attending the rally, I came back home late in the

emergency (Donthi, 2015). He was arrested a day later and spent 19 months in Tihar Jail, Delhi. Many ABVP members and its President, Kelkar were imprisoned. Dattopant Thengadi, the founder of the Sangh's labour union, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) notes the collaboration between labour unions across left and right.[131] Among ABVP students, he takes the names of '... Ram Bahadur Rai and Govindacharya in bringing Jai Prakash Narayan into active politics' (Sahasrabuddhe & Vajpayee, 1991: p. 14).[132] There were protests in many parts of the country. A Sangh publication notes the protest form of *satyagrah* (nonviolent struggle for truth). Among them, Vijay Goyal, an ABVP-member and DUSU President at the time, led the students in *satyagraha* at Delhi University on 21 November 1975 (ibid: p. 129).[133] The ABVP is named in instances of protests in BHU, Bihar, and courting arrests (ibid: p. 111). While the ABVP was not officially banned during the Emergency, during the first two months itself, approximately four thousand ABVP *karyakartas* were arrested. During the two years, almost 11000 members of the ABVP had been in police custody (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 122).

In this section, ABVP's engagement with the larger public and politics was elaborated. It was during the 1970s that ABVP's most illustrious alumni took leadership roles and laid the

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evening … At about 2 AM past midnight, I received a midnight knock at my residence. The police had come to arrest me. My father, a lawyer by profession got into an argument outside the gate of my house … I escaped from the backdoor…' (Jaitley, A. (2018) The Emergency Revisited – Part – I (3-Part Series): The Circumstances Leading to the Imposition of Emergency, *arunjaitley.com*, https://www.arunjaitley.com/the-emergency-revisited-part-i-3-part-series-the-circumstances-leading-to-the-imposition-of-emergency/ [accessed 17 November 2020]).

[131] Thengadi's memories are recorded as a preface to a large volume on the documentation of the Emergency by Sangh's publication unit, Suruchi Prakashan. The book is titled *People versus the Emergency: A Saga of Struggle* (1991). What I found fascinating in his writing, done in 1991, is to meticulously take names of all the organisations that were under attack from the government. These are the same organisations that are ironically under attack from the present government and social media trolls. For example, Thengadi makes a special mention of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) and how it was the source for accurate information during the Emergency. He names the International Labour Organisation, the Socialist International, Amnesty International, and the Council of World Churches in enabling of carrying important documents and information across and outside India (Sahasrabuddhe & Vajpayee, 1991: pp. 19-20). He notes the names of DS Desai and Narendra Modi in collating information after the Emergency to document its history, among many others.

[132] G. N. Govindacharya is an RSS *Pracharak* who has served both the ABVP and BJP. He worked under Balasaheb Deoras during the JP movement. He formally joined the ABVP for 10 years and was the zonal secretary of Central and later South zone. He was assigned to the BJP in 1988.

[133] Vijay Goel is a prominent member of the BJP. He was a former DUSU President (ABVP), former BJP-President, ex-Union Minister in both the NDA and Modi government. He is currently a member of the Rajya Sabha (lower house of the Indian Parliament).

foundation of the path that ABVP *karyakartas* after them could aspire for. I also demonstrated how the ABVP began emerging as a separate organisation in itself. To my analyses, this is one of the most crucial times for the organisation, as it established its identity as a student's organisation. It was in these years that it saw its highest jump in memberships and its most successful leaders starting to enter the limelight. We saw how ABVP began to shape itself as an organisation with its own initiative, publication units, leadership and influence. Before and after this time, we see an increasing influence of the Sangh and the Hindu nationalist ideology. In the time that followed, as discussed in the next section, the impact of these engagements and its relationship within the *Sangh Parivar* was re-evaluated, setting the seeds for the ABVP's eclipsed position as a foot soldier in the hierarchy of the movement.

1977-1990: *Chhatra Shakti* (Students' Power) for the Movement

In this section, I illustrate the activities of the ABVP in the decade following the lifting of the Emergency. Here, the ABVP was deeply involved with the concerns of the Hindu nationalist movement. What emerges from the analyses is the nature of hierarchical relationship between the RSS and ABVP, how the ABVP brought Hindu nationalism to the campus, and took forth the initiatives into the larger public.

The Lok Sabha elections of 1977 brought the victory of the Janata Party alliance (with Morarji Desai, a Janata Party member as the first non-Congress Prime Minister of independent India).[134] As has been an established pattern, a parent or affiliate body in the central government raises possibilities for membership growth in the student affiliates (for example, a BJP government at the Centre raises possibilities for the membership growth of Sangh affiliates

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[134] The alliance consisted of the rebel Congress faction (Congress for Democracy), Jan Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal (which itself was a coalition of different ideological groups that came together against Indira Gandhi and INC), strong regional parties such as AIDMK (Tamil Nadu), Akali Dal (Punjab and the Socialist Party (Livemint. (2014) 1977 Lok Sabha Elections: After the Nightmare of Emergency, Democracy Finds its Voice Again, *Mint.com*, 8 April 2014, https://www.livemint.com/Multimedia/BjWSnj7SKyeN4FLts0krZO/1977-Lok-Sabha-elections-After-the-nightmare-of-Emergency.html [accessed on 31 March 2022]; Editorial. (2017) June 16/17, 1977, Forty Years Ago: Janata CMs, *The Indian Express*, 17 June 2017, https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/june-16-17-1977-forty-years-ago-janata-party-cms-north-india-4707772/ [accessed on 31 March 2022]).

(Jha, 1998; Marvel, 2016)).[135] In 1977, the ABVP was the largest pro-Janata party youth group in India. In the same year, its magazine *Chhatra Shakti* (Students' Power) began. Riding high on the success, it even won university elections in several universities in 1977. The ABVP and the RSS saw a surge in their membership. Between 1977 and 1982, members rose from 170,000 to 250,000 and a rise in units from 950 to 1,110 (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 122).

While there were more chances for politicisation seeing the success of the Janata party, by 1978, the ABVP leadership (led by the RSS) had already decided that the students had been 'overly politicised' (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 126). ABVP's president was deputed to the Janata Party during the elections in 1977, but care was taken to keep the ABVP away from the party and its politics. Arun Jaitley for example, was asked to become a part of the national executive of the Janata Party. He declined and became the all-India secretary of the ABVP in 1977 (Donthi, 2015). Like the RSS had done before in the early 1950s, the ABVP established hierarchy over its affiliates in the language of *seva*– 'constructive work' and 'nation building'. While it is unclear why there was a need for the RSS and its affiliate ABVP to keep a distance from the Janata Party, it is possible that it was in part to control the ABVP. Thus, such limits to involvement in electoral politics were put. This is similar to RSS' response to ABVP's activities during the Navnirman movement in Gujarat four years earlier: to not stake claim directly to the affiliate and claim those parts of the movement that were successful. This is part of a pattern (an instance of attempts at disavowal) and continues till today.

a) ABVP Initiatives During These Years

After a tumultuous couple of years during the Emergency, following from the *seva* model, the ABVP began to focus on its 'character building' activities again. SEIL restarted its activities in 1977 with a national conference in Guwahati. 300 students reportedly took part in the three-day conference (Desai, 1991). V. Satish (current BJP national joint-secretary) was a full-time RSS worker at the time. He was designated as the SEIL regional organising secretary. The exchanges grew: both in number of students included and the places visited over the years. These visits were also networking events. For example, in all the visits, connections were made with other Sangh affiliates working in the area like the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (Tribal Welfare

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[135] This example is also raised for the relationship between NSUI and the Indian National Congress, especially under Indira Gandhi's son Sanjay Gandhi.

Community, VKA), Vivekananda Kendra (Vivekananda Centre), and Vidya Bharati (educational wing of the RSS). They received support from local government institutions and the Ramakrishna mission.[136] ABVP members met All Assam Students Union (AASU) activists during their SEIL tour of the northeast in 1982 (Desai, 1991: pp. 17-18).[137] It was during this time that present BJP members, Sushil Modi (Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha and the former deputy Chief Minister of Bihar and a member of the RSS) and Madan Das, took active part in SEIL organisation.

The ABVP also began an *aayam* WOSY or World Organisation of Students and Youth in Delhi. This organisation works on campuses and especially caters to international students who come to study in India. It builds on the larger *Sangh Parivar* idea of *Vasudeva Kutumb* (the world is a family). WOSY was supposed to fill the gap of an 'international forum of students and youths, that will stay above the interests of power block and will think in terms of the welfare of the whole humanity' (Desai, 1991: p. 3). Through WOSY, the organisation members sought to educate the international students on India, its values and history. They celebrated (and continue to celebrate) festivals with them, hold cultural evenings and mixers.[138] WOSY was, and continues to be one of the ways in which ABVP claims to conduct 'non-ideological' activities for the students (this aspect is dealt in detail in later sections).[139] [140]

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[136] A Hindu faith-based movement that began in Bengal in late 19th century.

[137] AASU or the All-Assam Students Union (formerly, All Assam Students Association) was a university group that was active in bringing the Assam Accord in 1985, a memorandum of settlement (MoS) between the Indian government and those agitating for the Assam movement. AASU as a group believed in a particular vision of Assam that consists of indigenous people (irrespective of religion or caste) and vehemently against 'infiltrators' who they believed were altering the 'indigenous' culture and language of Assam. See also: Baruah, S. (1986) Immigration, Ethnic Conflict, and Political Turmoil--Assam, 1979-1985, *Asian Survey*, pp. 1184-1206.

[138] 'Students from various countries studying in India participate in Deepawali, Holi, or Navroz and other cultural and sporting events', notes an ABVP booklet (2019). Christmas and Eid are missing from the list.

[139] In 1985, Kelkar retired from his position as the ABVP national president and returned to the RSS as a Maharashtra State *Baudhik Pramukh (Intellectual Head*; someone who sets the curriculum for the ideological discussions*)*. He was replaced by Bal Apte, who later went on to become a Member in the Rajya Sabha from the BJP. These examples also indicate the fluidity of mobility within the Sangh. Both men could aspire for higher positions in the BJP due to their initial affiliation to the RSS. As mentioned earlier, this mobility is not available to all the members of the ABVP.

[140] In 1985 (the UN International Year of Youth), the ABVP undertook its first visit to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to expand its networks. In December 1991, the ABVP celebrated 25 years of its initiative of SEIL. In some

In 1982, ABVP began to contest university elections again. It was during this time that ABVP, along with other Sangh brethren also began mobilising for Kashmir. The Janata Party became Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980, after a separation from Jan Sangh. After BJP's loss in 1985, ABVP members were especially sought after to project the image of young, active politicians. Donthi (2015) notes, '.... (Atal Behari) Vajpayee told *India Today*, "The election result gives us time for rethinking. There is need to project new faces. We have young talent in people like Pramod Mahajan of Bombay and Arun Jaitley of Delhi'. Thus, it fell upon the 'young talent', that had been asked to actively 'depoliticise' earlier, to take the newly imagined electoral wing of the Sangh towards a transformation. In the next section, we see the increasing influence of the Sangh and even, BJP, in the agendas and activities of the ABVP.

1990-2000: Ram Temple Movement and Entry into Liberalisation

In this section, I will discuss ABVP's participation in issues of Hindu nationalist importance that had a national impact: the Ram temple mobilisation and the subsequent demolition of the Babri mosque, and the anti-Mandal agitations. These events are significant for the larger history of the Indian nation and the ABVP played a crucial role as a Hindu nationalist organisation affiliated to the Sangh to assert it ideologically.

a) <u>Ram Janmabhoomi Mobilisation (Ram Temple movement) and Babri Masjid: Religious Nationalist Mobilisation</u>

> *'The demolition which took place on 6th December, was in the nature of a tectonic shift. The enraged Hindu youth on that day demolished not only the Babri structure but also the Nehruvian model which had usurped the political space of this country for nearly half a century'*
> --ABVP (1994: pp. 2-3).

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parts of the country, they had running book banks (under the name 'Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya Book Bank'), felicitation functions of position holders in universities (which continues today), sports, and arts meets etc.

If there were a decade that marked an overwhelming influence of Hindu nationalist forces in India, it would be the 1990s and the mobilisation for the Ram temple movement.[141] The entire *Sangh Parivar* mobilised in different ways that led to the final destruction of the Babri mosque on the morning of 6 December 1992 (Patwardhan, 1992; Vachani, 1993, 2002, 2018). This set a domino effect that led to the laying of the foundation stone of the Ram temple 28 years later and a continued success for the BJP. In the Ram Temple movement, the *Sangh Parivar* projected its *raison d'être*: making of political Hindus. The organisation was deeply interested in the idea of 'Hindu identity' still, but this was now seen from the point of view of debates on liberalisation of the economy, free markets, and territorial markers (with the unrest in many parts of the country becoming prominent). This decade saw an intimate functioning of all Sangh affiliates and the ABVP taking a lead role in emphasising these initiatives on university campuses and outside.

The ABVP was deeply involved at all the stages of the movement. First, it published easily accessible materials on the importance of 'Ram Mandir' and the significance of it being built on the spot of the Babri Masjid. Dr. Chaman Lal Gupt, who was the head of the ABVP in Himachal Pradesh, published one such booklet. In a series of 32 questions, the author answers all questions explaining the movement, from why there is a need to demolish the mosque, the question of 'minority vote', and its relevance to electoral politics, to the legality of the case. The booklet is undated (I suspect it was published before the demolition).

Secondly, the ABVP mobilised support in universities and university dormitories, and provided *kar sevaks* at the site of the mosque.[142] An ABVP member, Samriddhi (female, Brahmin, 22-years old), feels very strongly about the Ram Janmabhoomi issue. Through her, I met her father who was involved in the Ram temple movement. Her father, an RSS and ABVP man himself, was a student in a city in Uttar Pradesh in the late 1980s. In the city, there is a tradition of 'community hostels': dormitories built by caste communities for their students studying in the

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[141] The 1989 general elections were a precursor to the coming time as Congress lost the elections to the National Front. The National Front comprised of Janata Dal (led by an ex-Congressman VP Singh) and it got majority support from the BJP. The BJP withdrew support from VP Singh's government in 1990 because Singh had instructed the arrest of BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani. LK Advani was spearheading the Ram Janmabhoomi (Ram temple) movement and was travelling across the country in a 'Rath Yatra' (a motorised caravan journey) to mobilise support for the movement.

[142] For RSS youth mobilisation, see: Vachani (2002, 2018).

university in the city. When I met him, he recounted how some of his seniors organised a hearing of Sadhvi Rithambara's cassettes some months before the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. He was 17 at the time, and very influenced by the large ABVP presence in his hostel. Although there were many who were not officially a part of the organisation, they were sympathetic to the cause. His seniors felt anger towards members of the Muslim community at large (the city in UP he comes from has a history of communal violence and had already been in the process of residential polarisation). Every evening, as Lal Krishna Advani's *Rath Yatra* progressed through the country, the seniors organised for members of the dormitory to come together and discuss the problems of 'Hindu oppression'. When asked if there were students who ever voiced a contrarian view, he could not recall any interventions. During Diwali holidays that year, he went to visit his kin in a village nearby. In the village, there was talk of two young men who had decided to go to Ayodhya and build the Ram temple. One of those young men died in the violence and he is still remembered in the village 'reverently for his contribution to the movement'.[143] The ABVP lay claim to the *karseva* in Ayodhya, between the months of October and December 1990. In a confrontation with the state police, sixteen *karsevaks* were killed.[144] The ABVP remembered the event thus:

> 'We still remember the historic *Karseva* at Ayodhya... when unarmed Kara sevaks (sic) were attacked by the police killing many at the point-blank range, making a mockery of civilisation, democracy and human rights. The events demonstrated a national awakening that was a challenge to the pseudo-secularists. ABVP was a part of this movement' (ABVP, 1994: p. 2).

According to the ABVP, the events of 6 December 1992 'changed the course of history'. 'A decisive ideological battle has begun', the organisation noted, setting the course for its activities

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[143] Another ex-ABVP member is Samriddhi's neighbour. He was a young man studying in a city in UP at the time. He remembers being stirred by the 'wave of Ram devotion that swept the country'. He and his friends decided to heed the call to go to Ayodhya to do *karseva*. He did to not inform his family since it could be dangerous. Instead, he and his friends boarded a train and set off for Faizabad (the nearest railway station to Ayodhya), only to be stopped by the police in Kanpur. There he encountered 'almost hundreds of other *karsevaks*', all determined to reclaim the land for their god but were being stopped from reaching there. But the 'stay in Kanpur' was a comfortable one, he recalled. He said that they were fed and taken care of 'by people of Kanpur who deeply sympathised with the cause'. Although he did not make it to Ayodhya, they felt their attempt was not in vain. The news of the demolition of the mosque reached them while they waited in Kanpur.

[144] Vachani, L. (2018) The Babri Masjid Demolition Was Impossible Without RSS Foot-Soldiers Like These, *The Wire*, https://thewire.in/communalism/rss-sangh-parivar-babri-masjid [accessed on 15 December 2020].

in the decades that followed. Interestingly, they saw the assertion of these organisations in connection with the fall of Soviet regime in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Already conflating 'secularism, socialism and democracy' against communism, the discourse of the organisation portrayed these events as echoing the cultural nationalism 'wave' (deeply reminiscent of the present moment we are in) that was sweeping internationally as well (ABVP, 1994: pp. 4-5). Alongside hailing the assertion of Hindus was the continuous invocation of Islamic terrorism by the ABVP. ABVP used the communal violence that followed the Babri Mosque demolition in 1993 as impetus to speak of India as under attack from Islamic terrorism. By connecting Islamic terrorism to intelligence agencies in Pakistan, the discourse posited India as being in a precarious position from its neighbours (ABVP, 1994: p. 7), and thus, attributing Hindu assertion as a geo-political strategy of security. ABVP's '*Vaicharik baithak*' (discussion meeting) report from 1994 notes the various incidents that make Islamic terrorism a big case for the ABVP. They connected the secessionist movements in Punjab, Kashmir, and the parts of the 'Northeast' of India to Pakistan and Bangladesh. Interestingly, they note:

> 'However, there are Muslim youths and intellectuals who recognised their ancestry and national identity for what is. Welcoming this, a programme of educating the Muslim youths in the norms of nationhood and the social dialogue with them on the basis of education, equality and freedom will have to be consciously undertaken' (ABVP, 1994: p. 7).

This vein of language: of separating the 'good' Muslim from the 'bad' Muslim is a practice that has prevailed–right from RSS to the present and is the belief behind the formation of the Muslim Rashtriya Manch. [145]

b) Deliberations on Education, Caste and Involvement in the Anti-Mandal Agitation

The lack of educational reforms and its direct relevance to the lives of the students was seen as anti-national by the ABVP. Between 1992-1994, ABVP began the campaign of 'save campus'. The initiative did not have one particular aim: it was rather to address and bring to light the larger ideological issues that the ABVP found important (*Swadeshi*, invoking nationalism and

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[145] See also: Vachani's work among the members of Muslim Rashtriya Manch in Delhi (2022).

speak of territorial security and against international agencies, social inequality etc.) and also fight the day-to-day struggles of students on campus: exams, hostels, curriculum etc.[146]

One of those campus interventions were the anti-Mandal (anti-reservation) agitations (mainly in the north India).[147] [148] Recognising the central position of young people, the booklet notes, 'Caste wars are fought by youths and students. If students realise the intrinsic oneness of the society, and organise themselves to fight social injustices, caste wars will come to end' (ABVP, 1994: p. 9). The discourse on caste in this decade (and in some narratives in the present as well)

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[146] Here '*swadeshi*' in the Hindu nationalist schema means promoting and supporting 'Indian' products and their vision of 'Indian culture'. Key geo-political changes in the 1980s-1990s (especially relating to the fall of the USSR) and anti-colonial movements reaffirmed the ABVP's (and the larger *Sangh Parivar*'s) goal of assertion of national identity. Questions of 'cultural invasion' of the US through the introduction of satellite televisions were seen as an attack on the 'values, norms, and standards of social behaviour' (ABVP, 1994: p. 8). Unlike the RSS, the ABVP suggested that 'boycotts' were not enough of a strategy–it suggested a counter-assertion of 'our way of life, our norms, and our values' to counter the 'invasion'. 'The vulgar display of ostentatious living in the advertisements generates desires which will never be fulfilled' (ibid: p. 8). The critique of the way of life promoted by the satellite broadcasts was also a critique of the capitalist lifestyle sold by them, echoing then the calls for *swadeshi*. The resistance to the 'western' way of living, whether cultural or economic, is noted to be coming from '... Islam, the Chinese tradition, the Japanese identity and the Hindu civilisation' (ABVP, 1994: p. 11). Echoing the numerous resolutions of the RSS on the debate on liberalisation and their scepticism of opening of the economy, the ABVP also voiced its suspicion of the US and international agencies working as its 'handmaidens' and the free market impact on cultural values. Echoing RSS, it also propagated the idea of *swadeshi*: '... *Swadeshi* is not a slogan, is not merely a statement of economic policy, but is a watchword of a way of life' (ABVP, 1994: p. 6). By already voicing its suspicions of the US and international agencies, it also engaged in debates on the role of farmers, workers and students.
The suspicion against international agencies is not new and was enthusiastically pursued by the BJP-led central government after coming to power in 2014. International non-governmental organisations and civil society groups under the government scanner were Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Missionaries of Charity, and even, *Karwan-e-Mohabbat* and Fridays for Future, among many others. See also: Safi, M. (2018) Greenpeace and Amnesty Accuse Indian Government of 'Smear Campaign', *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/-dec/25/greenpeace-and-amnesty-accuse-indian-government-of-smear-campaign?CMP=share_btn_link [accessed on 1 April 2022].

[147] In 1979, Bindeshwari Prasad Mandal (ex-Member of Parliament) was asked by then-PM Morarji Desai to head the Second Backward Class Commission. This commission was to first, identify categories of socially and educationally backward classes and then, suggest measures for the improvement of the defined classes. The commission recommended 27% reservation of Other Backward Castes in government institutions. The commissions were to be implemented 10 years after its submission, in 1990. Its implementation was protested mainly in north India by dominant caste youth. See: http://www.ncbc.nic.in/Writereaddata/Mandal%20Commission%20Report%20of%20the%201st%20Part%20English635228715105764974.pdf.

[148] Express News Service. (2015) Sunday Story: Mandal Commission Report, 25 Years Later, *The Indian Express*, 1 September 2015, https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/sunday-story-mandal-commission-report-25-years-later/ [accessed on 14 December 2022].

is seen by the ABVP from two lenses: as a divider of the Hindu nation and as a site for predatory 'vote bank politics', a view that continues to be held even today. The ABVP narrative acknowledged the inhumanity and persistence of caste as a specific feature of Hindu society: not only in terms of economic, but social and cultural inequality. The suggestion to counter the impact of caste, however, lay in VD Savarkar's words: everyone born in the territories of Bharat is a 'son of the motherland whatever be the caste of his birth' (ABVP, 1994: p. 8). Here it echoes its younger *Sangh Parivar* kin, 'Sewa Bharati' (founded in 1989) and the larger Sangh approach to caste: paternalistic programmes of 'social upliftment and economic help'.[149]

In the period discussed in this section, ABVP members participated alongside their Sangh brethren in larger national events (Ram Temple movement, conversations on liberalisation and, the anti-Mandal agitation). In all these events, the mobilisation was nation-wide. What we see are ABVP members as active foot soldiers of the Hindu nationalist movement. Further, the ideological assertions echoed the RSS stand on the above issues. What was different from the previous decades was that ABVP was now engaging in public issues of the Hindu nationalist movement, unlike positing its demands in the language of student issues—an indication of ABVP's priorities as an organisation. There was also a specific caste character of the ABVP that came to be highlighted in these events, especially the anti-Mandal agitations. In the next section, I show ABVP straddling two forms of public assertions: one of taking an active voice in issues of national importance and the other of being a Hindu nationalist organisation.

2000-2014: ABVP in the Interim Years of Power and Laying the Stage for a Spectacular Transformation of Hindu Nationalism

These years lay the foundation to the Sangh's eventual coming of power, electorally and otherwise. Issues raised here were used as planks to situate itself ideologically – corruption as an anti-Indian value, a vision of governance, the issues it raised in education and the pattern of violence that followed. The ABVP had a specific ideology, and it was doing all in its power to promote it.

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[149] Although this is the view held and publicly articulated today, ABVP members, especially in Delhi University are well-versed with the role of caste in university elections. Caste plays a crucial role in how people situate themselves in ABVP units and their electoral future. This aspect is elaborated in the chapter on Elections.

After the 2008 recession crisis, three major scams came into public conversation simultaneously: the Satyam accounting fraud in 2009, the 2G-spectrum allocation scam in 2007, and the Commonwealth Games.[150] While these cases were being probed by the national investigation agencies, India witnessed a strong anti-corruption movement. This movement was called 'India Against Corruption' and it began in 2010 – basing itself on the morality of austerity and against the greed indicated in the scams. Corruption in India was not a new issue (harking back to the corruption issues raised during the Navnirman and JP movement in the early 1970s); it acquired a major force under the movement, projecting a motley-crew of social activists, lawyers, and civil servants, and even poets and academics as the ideal types. The ABVP, following the RSS line, had been organising consistent seminars, protests, and conferences against corruption–projecting the ruling United Progressive Alliance-government as representative of everything that was corrupt and wrong with India. In 2009, on completing 60 years, the ABVP observed the year as *ABVP 60 varsh – Ek andolan desh ke liye* (ABVP 60 years – a movement for the nation). In 2010 incidentally, ABVP's *Adhiveshan* (national conference) was on the theme *bhrashtachaar ke viruddh maun taudo, halla bolo* (against corruption raise your voice and attack). There was talk of greed contrasted with the austerity of the RSS, austerity as an inherently 'Indian value'. There were constant references to piles of money in foreign banking institutions, procured in an illegal and immoral way, 'black money'. According to the ABVP, black money was involved in illegality and immorality. This money was reportedly operated by people who were cunning and unlike naïve Indians, were another class and put their interests above all else. Ideas of austerity, 'good governance' and transparency were highlighted. Among them was also the call to 'bring black money back'–all pushed hard by the ABVP.[151] Alongside this movement, there was another incident that disgraced the ruling government. December 2012 brought the news of a gruesome sexual assault and murder of a student in New Delhi. The ABVP was among the many organisations

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[150] The Satyam scam was a corporate fraud where accounts were forged, ranging over one billion. The 2G-spectrum scam was a telecom bandwidth allocation scam between corporations and politicians. There were multiple corruption scandals in the Commonwealth Games held in Delhi in 2010. In all these cases, politicians and wealthy corporations were involved.

[151] These ideas fed into projecting Narendra Modi as the next Prime Minister. RSS and its affiliates were deeply involved in the India Against Corruption project, and the end of which led to the formation of BJP's nemesis in Delhi, the Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man's Party).

across India that was shocked by the brutal rape and murder.[152] The stand of the ABVP members was the harshest form of punishment for the accused.[153] There are two interventions (Juvenile Justice Bill and the call for capital punishment) that present ABVP members consistently speak of in this regard and newer members are immediately informed of these contributions of the ABVP.[154]

The anti-corruption and anti-rape protests (2012) were articulated in the language of patriotism and safety. Alongside, the ABVP was trying to straddle its position as a student organisation through campaigns in the universities on student elections, and impact of market forces on education and subsequent changes suggested to university structure. The ABVP members believed that a key intervention in education should be teaching students about the glorious history of the nation (a significant aspect of the New Education Policy 2020). In 2007, for example, the ABVP was cogitating on the following issues:

1. Deliberations on the Lyngdoh committee rules[155],
2. Rise in private universities and their certifications, and,
3. Ragging (harassment of students by their peers).

Questions on privatisation of education and modelling of existing universities in the image of international ones were being discussed during this period. Delhi University had seen massive protests by students and teachers against suggestions for the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP). The ABVP, in its literature and protests from 1990s onwards, had consistently retained its stand against increased privatisation of education. In a 2010 meeting, the ABVP held a conference in Delhi to systematise how NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) would evaluate private universities and ways in which university curriculums across India could be brought to the same level. The organisers of the meeting were deeply worried about the privatisation of education. Referring to it as *vyaparikaran* (of

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[152] BBC. (2020) Nirbhaya Case: Four Indian Men Executed for 2012 Delhi Bus Rape and Murder, *BBC.com*, 20 March 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-51969961 [accessed on 14 December 2022].

[153] ABVP Central Office. (2020) Press Release: Delay in Execution of Nirbhaya's Rapists and Murderers Unfortunate: ABVP, *ABVP.org*, https://www.abvp.org/sites/abvp.org/files/Englis%20Press%20Release%20Delay%20in%20execution%20of%2 0Nirbhaya%27s%20rapists%20and%20killers%20unfortunate%20.pdf [accessed on 14 December 2022].

[154] From their association in the anti-rape movement and the Justice Verma committee, the organisation started a program called 'Mission Sahasi' in 2018.

[155] Engagement with the Lyngdoh committee recommendations will be elaborated in the chapter 4.

relating to trade or business) of education, the ABVP speakers were deeply worried about high fees, and education becoming inaccessible to a majority of the poor population. They did not believe the logic given by the government: that the market forces will regulate the fees and eventually make it accessible. This line had been retained every time there was a conversation on privatisation of education, especially at the university level, till 2014.

The strategy of straddling is highlighted in ABVP's involvement with violence in these years, especially clashes with other student groups. These violent occurrences were following the ideological line of the movement. These instances reach a fever pitch during university elections. I will highlight three instances from the time. One of the more prominent news came from Osmania University in Hyderabad, where violence occurred during the Beef eating festival organised by the university's students in 2012.[156] The ABVP objected to the festival, deploying the same argument that cow vigilante groups use: the cow is India's mother, and it is sacrilege to consume the meat. Second, in 2013, ABVP *karyakartas* clashed with student activists from All India Backward Students' Forum (AIBSF) for the latter's celebration of '*Mahishasur Diwas*' (*diwas* means day) in JNU, a way to pay obeisance to Mahishasur as a revered figure among some tribal groups. According to another interpretation and one that falls in ABVP's schema, Mahishasur is seen as a villain and goddess Durga was his punisher. The ABVP was at the forefront of this event.[157] [158] Third were the protests against AK Ramanujan's essay titled '300 Ramayanas', between 2008 and 2011. The essay details multiple versions of the epic Ramayana and many of those versions punctured the homogenised vision of Hindutva that ABVP and the RSS hold dear. They began by ransacking the History department in 2008 and then carrying out protest marches again in 2011. The essay was dropped due to the pressure and the controversy it generated. [159]

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[156] BBC. (2012) Violence Breaks Out at Indian Beef-eating Festival, *The BBC*, 16 April 2012, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-17727379 [accessed on 17 November 2020].

[157] Times News Network. (2013) Mahishasur Day Observed at JNU, *The Times of India*, 17 October 2013, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/24305458.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst [accessed on 4 April 2020].

[158] In 2013, when Narendra Modi visited a college in Delhi University, ABVP activists attacked teachers and students protesting his visit.

[159] Such an act of pressuring and articulating on the curricula was repeated in ABVP protests in 2019, where simultaneous protests took place in different departments across Delhi University. The department of Sociology

There is a common link between these events and violence: it is the assertion of the ABVP's version of Hinduism as a religion that allows for certain eating practices, and upholding certain narratives of myths and stories. The diversity encapsulated in the various ways in which Hinduism is practiced and interpreted is interestingly upheld and appropriated (see: Narayan, 2009) and aggressively rejected in some places by Hindutva organisations (it is also a strategy of disavowal as I show later in the chapter). Narayan (2021) in his analyses of the BJP's and RSS' electoral strategy in India's 2014, 2019 general elections and UP elections of 2017, has shown that large parts of their success lay in reaching out to *vanchit* (marginalised) communities (how *Sangh Parivar* tends to brand tribal and Dalit communities) and providing spaces for reverence to these communities.[160] Identifying those leaders, idols, and figures that can be appropriated is a strategy that has allowed the BJP to gain significant electoral gains in the following decade. But the promotion of hegemonic eating practices remains, and this violence though has continued alongside the attempt to assert a view of Hinduism that is commonly practiced among some dominant castes in north India.[161]

This period demonstrated how ABVP managed to straddle its role as a Hindutva organisation as well as a student organisation. Its involvement in the anti-corruption movement can be contrasted with its assertions for its ideological vision of Hinduism (violence in Osmania, JNU and against '300 Ramayanas'). This period also shows us the highlights of the agendas and events that would follow BJP's electoral victory in 2014. Using the language of neutral, secular language of patriotism, participation in 'India Against Corruption' gave the Sangh family the foundation to project Narendra Modi and the BJP as antithetical to the government in power. Anti-corruption and good governance were in fact the planks on which the 2014 BJP campaign stood. Further, the interventions in education, especially focusing on the content and structure of the university, have found reflection in the formulation of the New Education Policy (NEP

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at the Delhi School of Economics faced the violent brunt of the ABVP activists who broke doors and windows of the department. Ethnographic details of the protest will be elaborated in the chapter 5.

[160] In Narayan's analysis, the aim of the RSS through this specific mobilisation is to 'create a cultural hegemony that will include the entire Hindu community and even many traditionally non-Hindu tribals and minority groups' (Narayan, 2021: p. 10). Thus, all the while attempting to assimilate these different groups, it retains its purists (ibid: 19), thereby creating an umbrella of groups that might not necessarily speak the same language but have the common Hindutva thread.

[161] See also: Anderson & Longkumer (2018).

2020) and changes in university syllabi (a protest of such a nature is described in the chapter 5). Lastly, we see that violent interventions based on ideological lines (Osmania University and beef; protests against '300 Ramayanas' and what constitutes appropriate syllabi taught in the university) have only increased in frequency and intensity after the BJP has come to power in 2014.

2014-Present: The Years of Power

a) <u>Anti-National, 'Tukde-tukde', and 'Urban Naxal': Redefining the Discourse on 'Nationalism'</u>

> *'Today the ABVP has contributed to the debate on nationalism. Some people are lying about pseudo nationalism. But Vidyarthi Parishad has decided to declare who is a nationalist and who is an anti-national... We have taken this debate successfully out of campuses also... I am proud of our activists in JNU and Hyderabad Central Universities'*
> -Ambekar (2019: p. 7).

> *'When someone tells you that you say are the 'bharat mata ki jai' or 'Vande Mataram' kind, say it with pride: yes we are those who say 'bharat mata ki jai''*
> -Ambekar (2019: p. 4).

Some descriptions of youth congress under Indira and Sanjay Gandhi match the description of how the ABVP operates in the current political climate (Shah, 1988). At this present moment, no other student political party has the kind of resources and power that the ABVP possesses. The ex-National Organising Secretary, Sunil Ambekar does not miss a beat in announcing ABVP's agenda, as can be seen from the quote above. Identifying the 'anti-nationals' from its ideas of nationalism has been a priority of ABVP members in certain campuses in the country, especially those that have historically been anti-Hindutva or where the ABVP has not seen electoral success (for example, JNU). In other cases, like the Ramjas incident, it is to consolidate its power in a campus (in this case, University of Delhi), which still has pockets of

dissidents (this argument is elaborated in chapter 5). The events that have shaken universities in India in the recent past have all involved the ABVP and subsequently, the BJP.[162] 'Wherever we are moving towards, they (communists and naxalites) are taking their steps back' (Ambekar, 2019: p. 13) is the ABVP's claim. The idea of 'urban naxals', intellectual and social activists in university campuses and cultural fields, conducting 'anti-India' activities is not new. The word 'anti-national' has been used in Sangh literature even in the 1950s. It has been used in the context of communists, students aligning with progressive movements, social activists working in areas that actively resist Hindu right-wing forces (and now, even farmers). But the currency and wide usage it gained in the past couple of years, especially aligning with the ascendency of the Modi government in the Centre, is new. The word 'Urban Naxal' is meant to signify those that work for 'communist' (Naxalism, Maoism, and ultra-left groups all come under one umbrella) but can be extended to any person who is not subscribing to the views of the Sangh. The ABVP's new aim has been to identify those 'urban naxals' and as Ambekar says, '...Vidyarthi Parishad has decided to declare who is an anti-national and who is not' (ibid; this was also the theme of elections in DU and JNU in 2016).[163] By taking inter-campus ideological rivalries outside the campus, JNU's ABVP faction opened itself to a scrutiny from within and outside and it received equal amounts of support and backlash. Now ABVP members have the support of state resources, no long-term harm has come to them.[164] [165]

b) <u>Social Media</u>

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[162] Occupy UGC protests in Delhi, 2015; HCU in-fighting and the subsequent death by suicide of Rohith Vemula in 2016; 'Feb 9 incident' at JNU, 2016; Ramjas College incident, DU, 2017; arrests of scholars and activists in 'Elgar Parishad' conspiracy; fee hike protests in JNU in 2019; attacks in the universities of Jadavpur, Jamia Milia Islamia, Aligarh Muslim university in 2019, and finally, the rampage that occurred in JNU in 2020. The events would be discussed and elaborated in chapter 5. Soon after the events, ABVP published a booklet outlining its version of the events in JNU (published in 2017). This booklet will also be analysed in the same chapter.

[163] The discourse on nationalism (national, anti-national, urban naxal etc) has been extremely relevant to this phase of the organisation and to the larger political events in the country. This phenomenon is discussed in-depth in chapter 5.

[164] For example, the case of the all the ABVP students who were involved in the night of rioting at JNU in early 2020, have neither any case registered against them nor any repercussions.

[165] After the JNU attacks in January 2020, many celebrity supporters of the Sangh infrastructure in public statements supported the 'nationalist' ABVP for fighting the 'anti-India and *vampanthi* (communist)' forces. In this narrative, the violence was ABVP's reaction to 'save' JNU from the overwhelming 'anti-India communist forces'. This aspect would be further elaborated on chapter 5.

Social media is a crucial tool, used by ABVP members for their own self-fashioning. It is used to promote their membership in the organisation. A strong social media presence is needed to fight student university elections (an aspect that will be elaborated at length in chapter 4). The Sangh apparatus speaks homogenously, across affiliates, on issues it considers important, and the members' social media interactions reflect this view. BJP's social media arm has its support in the large number of ABVP cadres present in university campuses. Interestingly, the ABVP sees its social media role as one of intervention and course correction. In this schema of the Sangh, social media is used deliberately for the movement. In a speech, Ambekar noted:

> 'ABVP has protested against those who tried to lie and use social media negatively and brought about a constructive element of engaging with social media.... Activists have tried to save social media. You are the people who tried to engage with the society and tell the truth' (Ambekar, 2019: p. 8).

ABVP members are constantly on social media, using all platforms to promote and reach out to newer members and create networks. During the months that have followed Covid restrictions and campus closures, the ABVP wasted no time in shifting its *modus operandi* online—from weekly meetings to special events and constantly engaging students in activities, especially regarding the New Education Policy.[166]

c) The Project of Historical Rewriting and Academic Scholarship

> *'...The fact of Hindu-Muslim enmity that was just fiction started materializing courtesy, the sinister efforts of the supporters of imperialist British rule and certain fundamentalist Muslim elements. This eventuated in India experiencing its division before independence'*
> --Ambekar in Abhijeet, Shashank & Ramanand (2017: p. 3).

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[166] The online social media landscape globally has shown that it is a particularly fertile ground for extreme opinions and radicalising previously 'moderate' individuals. Academic and journalistic investigations (Köhler & Ebner, 2019) reveal how 'red pilling' is a deliberate strategy among online right-wing groups to invite more memberships. The Hindu right-wing as well (of which Hindu nationalist students are also a part) has been particularly active in mobilising online. In this thesis, I focus on the social media usage of my interlocutors. I should mention that right-wing and Hindu nationalist discourses are deeply entrenched online and their networks extend beyond the Sangh. Not all the people who are recruited/addressed online become official members of the Sangh.

'In the past 700-800 years, our nation has gone through tremendous changes. Even in the past 70 years, there have been a lot of misplacements. Now is the time for change'
--Ambekar (2019: p. 14).

The debate on historical scholarship that has been opposed by the Hindu nationalist forces in India is not new. It has been a pet project of the Sangh for a very long time (Vachani, 2002). Yet, in the past couple of years, this project has found an extremely firm grounding, especially now with the support of state infrastructure. Tanika Sarkar (2019) has written extensively on how the Sangh's historical division now dictates and guides national government bodies like the Indian Council for Historical Research, Teen Murti Memorial and Library, Indian Council for Social Science Research. Alongside is the attempt to dismiss academic scholarship that does not adhere to the idea of India that the Sangh prescribes. In the case of the Sangh and its affiliates there has been an active effort to fund, support, and legitimise research done by Sangh members and sympathisers. This is done through conducting Sangh-prescribed research and in turn, the Sangh supports it through conferences, scholarships, and institutional resources, including appointments (Bidwai, 2014). Another project of the ABVP and the larger Sangh has been to document its own history and make its own historical events mainstream. This is being done through lectures, social media events, scholarships, and awards being named after important Sangh members.[167] [168]

d) *Aayam* (Initiatives of the ABVP)

Clearly, ABVP has been working for the Hindu nationalist ideology intensely since BJP has come to power. It has also attempted to expand its own networks. For students particularly interested in different science disciplines, there are specific groups: for example, agriculture (AgriVision), Pharmacy (PharmaVision), Medicine (MediVision) etc. These specific

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[167] As an example, there is a Yashwantrao Kelkar Youth Award organised under the name of ABVP's most influential ideologue, Prof Yashwantrao Kelkar. In 2019, the Yashwantrao Memorial lecture was attended by the Vice President of India, M. Venkiah Naidu and members of the ABVP. The event was held at the Bombay Stock Exchange in Mumbai. In 2021, the award was held during the ABVP national conference in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh and was attended by Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi.

[168] Table on *aayams* in the appendix refers to the various initiatives of the ABVP.

initiatives are being created to provide ABVP leadership in every field.[169] Through SEIL, they work with student groups in the 'northeast' and thus have contributed to eliminating the secessionist forces there (Ambekar, 2019: p. 7). Some ABVP members believe that in cases of harassment and violence, women should take responsibility for their safety. According to this narrative, this is the real meaning of women empowerment, as opposed to the ideas of feminism that are against the country (Ambekar, 2019: p. 8).[170] 'This country will go with the women who align with family', Ambekar asserts (ibid). In that vein, *Mission Sahasi* (Mission Bravery) programme teaches young women to defend themselves through martial arts and strategies. The training is given to use everyday items as weapons against attackers.[171] The programme began in 2018 in Mumbai as a pilot project and then was held in every *Prant* (area division). The training is given for a period ranging from a day to a week and is expected to prepare women to ward off violent attacks in the public space. The description of the training reads much like Menon's (2012) and Sehgal's (2007) descriptions of physical training given to Samiti recruits to protect themselves in the public sphere.[172] In 2020, due to COVID restrictions, *Mission Sahasi* moved online and focused on women facing cyber-attacks and cyber bullying.

These are just some examples of the various initiatives or *aayam* of the ABVP. Modelled on the same thought as the affiliates of the *Sangh Parivar*, what makes these initiatives unique is that they are presented as demographically specific, apolitical initiatives. 'For those students who don't have interest in politics but want to serve the society, we tell them to join Students

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[169] Interview with ABVP national secretary (August 2019).

[170] The ABVP will not let the 'so-called politics of feminism' go on in the country (ibid: p. 8).

[171] A man named Vikas Dubey, a YouTuber, gives the training. On his YouTube channel, he has fashioned himself a new name of 'Grandmaster Shifuji Shaurya Bhardwaj'. His claims of training Indian army commandos and being a member of the defence forces were thrashed in 2017 (by Navy and Army ex-servicemen associations). He has, apart from providing 'commando-like' training to ABVP girls, also entered Bollywood. ABVP students, when speaking of *Mission Sahasi*, speak of his Bollywood forays and his experience in 'training black cat commandos' as evidence of legitimisation. See: Rampal, N. (2018) The Chief Trainer in ABVP's Self-defence Programme for Women is a Military 'Imposter', *The Print*, https://theprint.in/india/governance/the-chief-trainer-in-abvps-self-defence-programme-for-women-is-a-military-imposter/143508/ [accessed on 18 December 2020].

[172] WOSY, the international students' affiliate of the ABVP, was in the news because of a Facebook hate speech case that was uncovered by the Wall Street Journal (Purnell & Horwitz, 2020). The WSJ report found that the chief lobbyist explicitly ignored cases of hate speech reported on the platform that dealt with Hindu right-wing organisations. Lobbyist Ankhi Das is the sister of WOSY president Rashmi Das, both ex-ABVP members from JNU.

for Seva; for those who are interested in the performing arts, we ask them to get involved in Rashtriya Kala Manch', an interlocutor who had been the President of ABVP-JNU said. And many students do join these initiatives. The ABVP cannot be a nationalist student organisation without having a firm hold over the student body. Hence, for those students who 'don't like politics', the ABVP offers them a plethora of its initiatives to become a part of. As I will demonstrate in the following section and chapters, such a presentation is crucial to expand membership base but also remain relevant to the issues of the campus.

In the previous sections, I demonstrated how ABVP managed to straddle its position as a student and Hindutva organisation. It seems from the previous sections that this straddling works almost like clockwork. ABVP thus wants be known for its involvement in issues of national importance (for example, after its involvement in JP movement, anti-rape protests in 2012), but also fight for its ideological beliefs alongside. One initiative tends to balance the other. In the next section, I will focus on one of the movements that has received relatively less attention compared to its counterpart (the Ram Janmabhoomi movement) and the reason it became so important when the BJP came to power during this time period.

Article 370, *Chalo Kashmir* (Let's Move towards Kashmir) Movement, and Its Relevance to ABVP Today

In this section, I will first describe how the movement was part of a larger history of Sangh interventions in the region and the socio-political context that gave birth to its more immediate mobilisation, and how this movement encapsulates two of Hindutva's core ideals: of territorial integrity and the Hindu identity. Second, I elaborate on the crucial role that ABVP plays in this history.

The announcement of the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution (removal of the 'special status' of the state of Jammu and Kashmir) came quite suddenly.[173] It was announced on 5 August 2019. As soon as the news broke, interlocutors from both the Samiti and the ABVP began posting a particular photo on their social media. It was a photograph of a young Narendra

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[173] The news seemed sudden for outsiders. Within the ABVP, one of my interlocutors (who comes from an elite Sangh habitus) was in Kashmir at the time. She was directed to come back to Delhi a week before the announcement was made.

Modi, half-sprawled on a makeshift platform. He is at the centre of the image, not looking directly at the lens but somewhere behind the camera person. Four men sit in upright-cross-legged position behind him. They are all wearing white *kurta-pajama* (tunic and loose trousers). A poster made of cloth hangs behind them. On the poster is a map of India (not the entire subcontinent). There is a logo in the centre of the map that states '*Chalo Kashmir*' (let's move towards Kashmir). Encircling the map are the words: *370 hatao, aatankwaad mitao, desh bachao* (remove 370, eliminate terrorism, protect the nation). Although this image is undated (I speculate it was before 1992), it was shared widely after 5 August 2019 to show how long Modi has been wanting to make this change—the abrogation of Article 370. There was another image shared alongside. On 26 January 1992 (the same year that Babri Masjid would fall), some BJP leaders reached Srinagar (the capital of Jammu and Kashmir). This was at the height of militancy and violence in Kashmir. This journey was part of BJP's initiative called '*Ekta Yatra*' (Journey for Unity). The journey began in Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu and ended in Srinagar. The goal was to unfurl the tricolour at Srinagar's central square, Lal Chowk (Red square). The image shows BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi standing with a young Narendra Modi, holding the rope to unfurl the Indian national flag. The image was captioned: 'He does what he says', implying the power of Narendra Modi's determination. Both these images highlighted the struggle faced by Modi—and by extension, the organisations he was associated with—for removing Article 370 to reassert India's claim on Kashmir.

Modi's role in the *Chalo Kashmir* movement has been highlighted but he was not the only *Sangh Parivar* member to have been active in this movement.[174] *Chalo Kashmir* was a pan-Sangh movement, and it invited membership from across the affiliates (much like the *karseva* for Ayodhya and the Babri Masjid demolition during the same time). From 1990 onwards, ABVP focused on the following:

'1. Consolidating nationalist forces

2. A movement for educational change, and,

3. Initiation of a debate on systemic changes' (ABVP, 1994: p. 1).[175]

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[174] Chrungoo, A.K. (2022) Kashmir, the Visible Welcome Change, *The Organiser*, 31 January 2022, https://organiser.org/2022/01/31/13544/bharat/kashmir-the-visible-welcome-change/ [accessed on 5 April 2022].

[175] The booklet does not provide a clarification on what exactly are the 'systemic changes' it seeks. I speculate here that these issues revolved mainly around the dramatic developments that were taking place, such as, in Jammu and Kashmir (separatist movements).

The RSS *Karyakarni Pritinidhi Sabha* (Representative body, KPS) and *Akhil Bharatiya Pritinidhi Sabha* (All India Executive Council, ABPS) passed many resolutions directing the government to act more sternly on militancy in Kashmir. For the ABVP, the march to Kashmir and unfurling the tricolour at Lal Chowk in Srinagar was an important milestone in the goal towards consolidating national integrity. They also conducted a 'Teen Bigha Satyagraha' (struggle for three *bighas* (a unit of land measurement)) in June 1992. For the Sangh and the ABVP, the *Chalo Kashmir* movement acquired significance for two reasons: first, it was to ascertain India's control and legitimise the territories of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. The Sangh and the ABVP believe in the territorial integrity of the Indian subcontinent known as *Akhand Bharat*. Hence, a secessionist movement is antithetical to their cause. Secondly, after the attacks and subsequent exodus of Kashmiri Hindus in some parts of the valley, the cause of the Kashmiri Pandits was significantly raised and protested by Sangh outfits, including the ABVP. Article 370 had been a thorn in the side of the RSS since the time of its declaration and for them, it encapsulated all the problems that were occurring in Kashmir.

a) Sangh and Kashmir[176]

RSS' opposition to Article 370 began soon after India's independence. RSS *Pracharaks* Balraj Madhok and Premnath Dogra began a campaign to scrap Article 370 in 1952 (Anand, 2020). They formed a party called Praja Parishad Party (Citizens Committee Party) that began campaigning against Article 370. Praja Parishad found full support with the Sangh and its existing affiliates. On 14 November 1952, Praja Parishad began a *satyagrah* for Kashmir's integration into the Indian territory. Anand (2020) notes that the demand of the *satyagrah* was to remove all special provisions for Jammu and Kashmir, including Article 370 and the special flag. This was to indicate that Jammu and Kashmir were an integral part of India. These provisions hinted a division of the Indian subcontinent's integrity, a fact that directly attacked the Sangh's idea of territorial integrity, as mentioned above. This is why the slogan '*Ek Desh mein do vidhan, do pradhan, do nishan-nahin chaleinge*' (In a country, there will not be two different constitutions, two different leaders, and two symbols) was extremely crucial until the abrogation. During these *satyagraha* movements, the state reacted acrimoniously against the

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[176] Syama Prasad Mukherjee, a former cabinet minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's cabinet and Hindu Mahasabha member, vehemently opposed Article 370 because he believed in the territorial integrity of India. In his last days, he travelled to Jammu & Kashmir to oppose the Article 370. He died in J&K and is recalled reverently in Sangh discourse on Kashmir and Article 370.

Praja Parishad (RSS, 2007: p. 6) and the RSS was quick to condemn the move.[177] In the same year, the RSS K.K.M. (*Karyakari Mandal*, working committee) condemned Pakistan's incursions into Kashmir, referring to it as '… an act of aggression' (ibid). Similar resolutions followed in the years to come. Many of the RSS resolutions note disappointment with the way the Central and state government handled the issue of Kashmir, often labelling the stand as 'weak' (ibid: p. 8) and wanting to 'appease' Pakistan (ibid: p. 37). The talks between India and Pakistan were welcomed but were seen with suspicion (ibid: p. 40).

From the 1980s onwards, the RSS resolutions majorly addressed violence against Hindus and attacks on temples in Kashmir. It was during this time that the RSS began speaking about the 'exodus of Kashmiri Hindus from the Kashmir valley' (ibid: p. 138) (this was also the time for the rising assertion of Hindu nationalist organisations). In fact, the RSS ABPS noted the following for the Kashmiri Hindus in the valley:

> '… [the ABPS] appeals to the Hindus in Kashmir to stand firm in their places. Which is essential not only in their own interest but also for reasons of national security and integrity and assures them, of the I (sic) support of patriotic people all over the country' (ibid: p. 139).

According to the RSS, the reason for targeting Hindus by 'anti-national' forces was an understanding that '… as long as Hindus remain there, Kashmir cannot be separated from Bharat' (ibid. p. 182). This discourse implied that Kashmir's allegiance to India was through the Hindus residing there.[178] By 1990, the conflict in Kashmir had seen unprecedented violence.

Between 1950 and 2005, RSS discussed Kashmir 48 times (on issues of militancy, borderlands, discontentment in different regions of India etc.) and passed 31 Kashmir-specific resolutions (RSS, 2007). Post 1980s saw a rise in the way Kashmir was being discussed, especially in terms of terrorism and Pakistan, separatist movements, anti-Hindu violence and territorial integrity (ibid: p. 182). During the abrogation, there were multiple strands that were being repeated by

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[177] An aspect of this is further discussed under the section 'strategy of disavowal' later in the chapter.

[178] In 1990, a resolution of the RSS noted of Kashmiri Hindu exodus as, 'By now, all patriotic people have been virtually squeezed out of the Kashmir valley' (RSS, 2007: p. 189).

the Sangh and its affiliates. First, the solution sought for Kashmir was subsumed under the larger question of territorial integrity and sovereignty–a factor that guides that narrative even today (ibid: p. 139). The second factor that was manifested in the narrative of the abrogation in 2019 was the differential powers between the state and the central governments (echoing the earlier slogan '*Ek Desh mein do vidhan, do pradhan, do nishan-nahin chaleinge*'). Several resolutions also expressed a grave discomfort with the powers that wrested with the government of Jammu and Kashmir, especially with regard to legislations (ibid: p. 107). The argument that the RSS gave in this regard was to assert that such powers should rest with the government of India, citing this dissonance as an erosion of the 'authority of the Parliament' (ibid: p. 107). Third was the discrimination meted out to displaced Hindus from the valley and the need for correcting this historical wrong (ibid: p. 139).

b) ABVP, Article 370, and Kashmir

ABVP's magazines 'Chhatrashakti' and 'Rashtriya Chhatrashakti' are important sources to locate the organisation's involvement in the movement. These magazines are the official mouthpiece of the ABVP. Usually, there is a cover story or a theme that occupies the central pages in the magazine. There are also editorials, poetry, stories and articles covering important issues for students. In the magazines, the ABVP's stand on Kashmir echoed that of the RSS: abrogation of Article 370, territorial integrity and the situation of Kashmiri Hindus. After the Kashmiri Hindu exodus (between 1989-1992), the ABVP protested outside the Prime Minister's residence. Before this, the ABVP organised national integration rallies in different universities. The ABVP participated whole-heartedly during the *Chalo Kashmir* movement (interestingly, the RSS resolutions make no direct mention of the *Chalo Kashmir* movement). The ABVP cadre members were reportedly present in large numbers during the travels from Kanyakumari to Kashmir.[179] In an article titled '*Anushasan ki Drishti se Vidyarthi parishad Adarsh hai*' ('From a disciplinary point of view, ABVP is an ideal', 1999) by a member named Rajjubhaiya, ABVP activists reportedly reached Jammu and Uddhampur in the bid to hoist the

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[179] I was unable to locate testimonies of members who participated in the movement. Younger *karyakartas* report being told of ABVP's 'significant' contribution to '*Kashmir Chalo'* movement in meetings and conferences.

Tiranga in Srinagar. They were allegedly stopped by the government from proceeding further (Rajjubhaiya, 1999).[180]

From 1990 onwards, Kashmir was always mentioned in relation to terrorism and the involvement of Pakistan in creating an internal disturbance to the integrity of India (much like the discourse of the parent body). A letter to the editor by a member of the ABVP (who was also then-Vice President of DUSU (Delhi University Students Union)) in 1991 notes that the students were reportedly dissatisfied with the actions of the government in retaining Kashmir as an integral part of India (Rashtriya Chhatrashakti, 1991).[181] In the following years, on anniversary issues and marking important dates in India's history, ABVP resolutions reflected on the respective central governments in power for not doing enough on the issue of Kashmir, to curb terrorism or acting softly with Pakistan (Kashmir as a site of 'proxy war initiated by Pakistan') (Chhatrashakti, 1999: p. 5).[182] In the narrative, the blame for the violence in Kashmir wrests between a network of terrorists (with the support of Pakistan), the weak government (except in the years when the National Democratic Alliance (NDA led by the BJP) government was in power (1999-2004)), anti-national groups (such as those who called themselves 'secular'), and groups affiliated to the left. For example, in the 42nd *Adhiveshan* (1997), the ABVP resolution raised the issue of governments' conscious negligence of the plight of Kashmiri Hindus (Chhatrashakti, 1997a: p. 15).[183] An editorial in the following issue noted, rather sarcastically, 'As usual the watchdogs of secularism kept mum… Kashmir is back to square number one. Three cheers to secularism' (NA, 1997b: p. 3).[184] The ABVP also held protests and demonstrations in universities to assert India's claim on Kashmir and highlight events they believed hurt the integrity of the country. One such event was noted to take place in JNU. The article 'JNU – the nationalist upsurge' (1996), spoke a language eerily similar to

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[180] Ma. Rajjubhaiya. (1999) Anushasan ki Drishti se Vidyarthi parishad Adarsh hai, *Chhatrashakti*, January 1999, Delhi.

[181] NA. (1991) Letters to the Editor, *Rashtriya Chhatrashakti*, September 1991, Vol. 14, Issue 6, Delhi.

[182] NA. (1999) Fifty Years of Independence- An Apt Moment for Retrospection, *Chhatrashakti*, September-October 1999, Issue 9, Delhi, pp. 5 & 11.

[183] ABVP. (1997a) *Desh ki Vartaman Stithi-* 42nd Adhiveshan Resolution in Bangalore, *Chhatrashakti*, February 1997, Issue 11, Delhi, pp. 4 & 15.

[184] NA. (1997b) Editorial, *Chhatrashakti*, April 1997, Issue 12, Delhi, p. 3.

the one used during and after 9 February 2016 (Chhatrashakti, 1996: pp. 11-15)[185] : 'With the covert support of the leftists, the university was slowly turning to be a den of anti-nationalists and secessionists. Kashmir terrorists like 'Aazm Inquilab' use to come to campus and go scott-free'. This statement was implying that with the help of students from the left, people associated with Kashmir militancy had no restrictions in the JNU campus. There was to be a seminar held to protest the army's presence in Kashmir on 6 February 1996. The ABVP protested this, reportedly under the request of the 'JNU student community' (Chhatrashakti, 1996: pp. 11-15).[186] Means of protest were a signature campaign and physical violence. The article notes, 'The days are not far away when nationalist forces will sway the campus and throw out the leftist anti-national brigade lock stock and barrel' (Chhatrashakti, 1996: p. 15).[187] In another instance, there was a mention of the gruesome murder of Graham Staines and his children by Hindu fundamentalists.[188] In it, a 1999 magazine article asked whether the Indian media valued the lives of Christians more (here, Staines and his children) to the lives of Hindus who were killed in the Kashmir valley due to a differential coverage of the suffering of people from the two communities.[189] The tone and message of the articles and speeches by the ABVP today have not changed and retain the themes mentioned above.

Article 370 was abrogated on 5 August 2019. On the date of the abrogation, ABVP JNU released a *parcha* (pamphlet) highlighting the significance of the move towards retaining the territorial integrity of India. It referred to those who protested its abrogation as 'wolves … who sucked the blood of Bharat for seven decades'. The ABVP saw the abrogation as a tribute to many people who were opposed to the idea of Article 370: the soldiers who had been stationed in the region and lost their lives, Syama Prasad Mukherjee, prominent leader of the Hindu Mahasabha and ideologue of the Jana Sangh and the BJP, Ram Manohar Lohia (1910-1967),

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[185] The event is discussed in detail in the chapter 5.

[186] The relevance of using the reasoning of 'student community' is discussed later in the chapter and under 'common' or neutral students in chapter 5.

[187] NA, JNU- the nationalist upsurge, *Chhatrashakti*, March-April 1996, Issue 6, pp. 11 & 15.

[188] Graham Staines (1941-1999) was a Christian missionary engaged in leprosy relief work in Odisha. He was burnt along with his young sons (aged 6 and 10 years) by members of the Bajrang Dal (youth wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, World Coalition of Hindus; hereon, VHP) in 1999. VHP is a member of the Sangh Family. The Supreme Court of India directed a death by hanging to the main accused in the case.

[189] NA. (1999) A Warped Indian Media, *Chhatrashakti,* January 1999, Delhi, pp. 9-10.

another statesman who raised the cause against 370 in the Indian parliament, BR Ambedkar (who reportedly did not want 370 to come into existence at all), and many more.[190] The JNU-ABVP also addressed those who did not support the abrogation directly in the following words:

> 'Today we do not want to name the Pakistan sympathisers of JNU campus. They are already identified by the absolute similarity of their reaction on the prospective abrogation of ART. 370 with that of the government of Pakistan. We just want to say to them that they are exposed and soon will be decimated by the power of democracy' (Statement issued by JNU ABVP, 6 August 2019).

This statement is interesting in many ways and highlights how the ABVP does politics on campus. First, this highlights their attitude towards Pakistan as a nation that is antagonistic to the progress and integrity of India. Secondly, those who showed dissent towards the abrogation were put in the same category as 'Sharia-seeking wolves stationed beyond the 'Radcliffe-line' and also their co-ideologists living in India'. This created a binary between those who oppose the move as 'wolves', implying a negative, and those who support the move as the ones who believe in the progress and betterment of the region, harking back to the 'anti-national' and 'nationalist' binaries that the ABVP has often tethered itself to.[191]

The details of the ABVP's history as outlined above demonstrate the progression of the Hindu nationalist movement in India. The *Chalo Kashmir* movement and Article 370's final abrogation showed how the ABVP was involved from its inception and how the idea was realised when its Sangh brethren attained state power. There are three aspects that emerge from the historical analyses: first is the relationship between the RSS and its affiliates and the use of the strategy of disavowal. Secondly, the use of *seva* is a strategy of expansion. Thirdly,

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[190] The *parcha* noted that Mukherjee was 'murdered' in 1953 due to his stance on 370 under the watchful eye of Sheikh Abdullah (the first Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir after India's independence) and then-Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

[191] Wolves as a metaphor for threat have also been used in the right-wing discourse in Germany. Rebecca Pates and Julia Leser's work (2021) shows how the Alternativ für Deutschland (Alternative for Deutschland, AfD) used the rhetoric of the wolf, both as a literal and metaphorical threat, to gain legitimacy among voters in eastern Germany. In mid-2010s, there was a growing population of wolves in parts of eastern Germany. These wolves threatened the lives and livestock of the villagers. The conversation about the growing number of wolves was caught in a crossfire between environmental conservationists, animal protection groups (among others) and those who were threatened by them. The symbol of the wolf was used by the AfD to signify the real threat. But it was also used as a symbol of immigrants and refugees who were entering Germany, especially those who were attempting to escape the war in Syria (Pates & Leser, 2021).

hierarchy is the organising principle in the Sangh family. I will discuss these three aspects below to illustrate how the Sangh and the ABVP have deployed them for the growth of the movement.

Strategies of Disavowal and its Success in Ideological Mobilisation

'We can't tell them what ABVP is, what Hindutva is, what the Sangh is. It is not their concern. An international student desires very basic things and that is the purpose we serve.'
-Pradnya, WOSY coordinator, West zone

*'I did not know that Hindus were in such grave danger before joining the ABVP. I joined because I wanted to do '*seva*'. It was after joining that I realised how big the fight is!'*
-Ashutosh, 21-year-old ABVP member, DU

'I saw a notice on the department board about a visit to the Parliament. Only once we were there that we came to know it was organised by the ABVP. The Bhaiya-didi *(older brothers and sisters) explained to us why we need to defend our country, about the blasphemy of the Parliament attacks, and thus that visit became even more holy. Since then, I have become attached to the nationalist ideology through the ABVP'*[192]
-Shyam, 23-year-old ABVP member, JNU

On 9 February 2016, an event was organised by a left-oriented student group in JNU to mark the execution of Afzal Guru and a leader of the separatist group JKLF (Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front).[193] The event was organised in solidarity with people who believe in the cause of Kashmir's self-determinism. Another group on campus vehemently opposed the organising

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[192] The words Shyam used were '*rashtriyata se judaav ho gaya*' (Hindi; attached to the nationalist ideology). These words indicate an affective attachment to the ideology, something that supersedes mere leaning towards an ideology. In the next chapter on affective connections, I show why the usage of this word is significant as it indicates a resilient socialisation into the ideology.

[193] This event is discussed extensively in chapter 5.

of this event. The latter group, the ABVP, believes in the idea of *a Akhand Bharat* (an undivided territory of India). The idea of separatist groups cuts at the heart of their ideology. '9 Feb' incident, as it is popularly known, became the spark through which a fire began between the different visions of nationalism that exist in India. The ABVP believed that the organisation of such an event threatened the sovereignty of India, attacked the sacrifice of 'our soldiers', threatened the 'freedom' of the country. Hence, since 2016, the ABVP units (both DU and JNU) organise trips to the Indian Parliament. This is to remind students of the sovereignty of the Indian nation. As displayed from the quote above, Shyam is convinced that the vision of the ABVP for the nation is a universal vision of the nation. 'There is nothing wrong with wanting a unified country to become a stronger force in the world', he asserted. He saw no distinction between the Hindutva vision of nationalism and ideas of the nation inscribed in the constitution. 'It has nothing to do with the ideology–it has to do with patriotism', he explained, almost exasperated. Similarly, '*seva*' for Ashutosh was devoid of ideology. It was a feeling of 'wanting to do good'. For him, it just happened 'by chance' that he was asked by a senior *Bhaiya* in college to come help clean up a *basti* (slum) as part of Students for Seva (SFS), an initiative of the ABVP. It was there that he saw the 'good work' that ABVP was doing and slowly, he began attending other events that *Bhaiya* and his friends organised. Now, he knows the 'truth', as he refers to it. In a similar vein, the violence in three clashes that occurred in Delhi University and JNU ((Ramjas (2017), '9 Feb' (2016), and 'JNU attacks' (2020), respectively) were reportedly done by ABVP members in the name of 'common students' – to signify that the reaction was not rooted in the ideology but called for a universalist pull.

A theme that has emerged from the historical analysis (and will be shown later through the ethnography) is the everyday ways in which the *karyakartas* articulate ways of association with the organisation that have nothing to do with the Hindu nationalist beliefs or ideology. These ways of association are articulated in a language or a structure that seeks to go beyond the language associated with the ideology (in the above cases, it would be *Akhand Bharat*, nation, Hindutva, Hindus, etc.). 'Disavowal' is defined in the Cambridge dictionary as '…the action of saying that you know nothing about something, or that you have no responsibility for or connection with something'.[194] This definition seems to explain some of the ways in which the Hindu nationalist organisations work on the ground in an effort to gain members. And the

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[194] McIntosh, C. (2013) *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary 4th Edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ABVP becomes a particularly interesting organisation situated uniquely on a university campus because the ideology, unlike its other Sangh brethren, is not upfront. This section explains how this strategy has been historically used to benefit the movement and how it is operationalised.

a) 'Disavowal' and its Use as a Strategy

This way of articulation is adapted to appeal to a larger audience—to attract those who might not necessarily be ideologically-inclined or those who might be initially averse to be associating with an ideological organisation. Further, it is also an attempt to make the ideology seem universal. Perhaps, a strategy like this can reach out to more people than it would have when the goals of a movement are upfront. By articulating ideological goals in a language of universalist terms, one can appeal to more people and give the ideology a new lease of life (as indicated from Pradnya's description of how ABVP affiliate WOSY functions among international students or how the initiatives are offered to students). Further, similar to the case of the Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man's Party, AAP), the assertion of a 'non-ideological' image seeks to convey that ideology is supposed to imply an ulterior motive, an agenda (necessarily implying something negative and self-seeking). Whereas, when an organisation posits itself as 'non-ideological', it aims to give the impression that the organisation is not seeing its own benefit, that it is the opposite of self-seeking.

Another question that arises then is whether this is pre-planned or something that happens on its own? Does the organisation own up to this? In my experience, this sometimes happens organically. But over time, based on the experience of the activists, it becomes a planned strategy, as can be seen from the quotes used and as I will demonstrate below. For example, in the case of the ABVP, some protests against the administration bear no connection to the ideology, and in some, the ideological leaning is articulated in the language of neutrality 'common student' or 'neutral student'. Choosing when to rely on ideological language and when to speak in universalist terms is a choice that is made. This could be one of the ways of seeing it as a strategy.

Disavowal is a strategy of social movements and political mobilisations – of, ideological mobilisations themselves, and this is not restricted to the Hindu nationalist movement. It is done to appeal to a larger group, to oscillate between ideological goals and universalist language, and to evade repercussions. Further, I would even suggest, it is a way to retain structural hegemony of societal institutions. By articulating the goals of a movement in universalist terms, by speaking of them through a language of 'common good', the inconsistencies, internal power hierarchies and everyday conflicts are conveniently hidden (for example, in the case of gender, Hindutva and caste, see Dhawan (2017)). In this particular instance, as I show below in the case of the Sangh, it is able to evade legal repercussions time and again due to this very strategy.

b) How is the Strategy Operationalised?

According to Badri Narayan (2021), 'The RSS as an organization is both a reality and a myth. There can be no final word on it. One of the reasons for this is that it is continuously changing and evolving. It constantly destroys and renews its image' (Narayan, 2021: p. 9). Is the RSS truly a myth? What contributes to this appearance? The range and growth of the *Sangh Parivar*, its affiliates and organisations influenced by the Hindu nationalist ideology has grown tremendously in the past decade. Narayan observes from his fieldwork that, '…unofficial and unclaimed part of the RSS left us awestruck. We realized that the RSS is like the tip of the iceberg' (Narayan, 2021: p. 7). Now, more than ever, there are small and large organisations 'creating a Hindu consciousness and spreading the message of Hindutva' (Narayan, 2021: p. 6). The RSS works as a 'coordinating organisation' for those groups that work on its 'sociocultural and political lines' (Narayan, 2021: p. 12). From the historical analysis of the movement (the strategic times at which different affiliates were born and subsumed within the *Sangh Parivar*) and the present work that there are two ways that such a disavowal of the ideology is operationalised: through active denial by the larger organisation and, formation of affiliates. In fact, the two go hand-in-hand. First an *aayam* (initiative) or the affiliate is established and then the organisation can claim or distance itself from it according to the conditions at the time. Why is there such hesitancy to claiming an action? Is 'ideology' a word to be avoided in ideological movements? As shown through the use of the strategy of disavowal, ideological movements need to appear more than their core goals—they need to

appeal to a larger group to remain relevant. Hence, they use strategies of disavowal: to implicitly assert control but also evade any negative repercussions from their chain of actions.

How does the RSS remain the ideological fountainhead of its many affiliates? Anderson & Damle (2018) suggest that the affiliates, despite their diverse interests, have managed to behave as a cohesive unit under the RSS umbrella. The RSS, they note, '... has continued to serve as their ideological mentor without involving itself directly in their decision-making process' (Anderson & Damle, 2018: p. 22). It goes on to suggest the cohesiveness is credit to the '*Sangathan Mantri*' model (Organising secretary model) where an RSS *Pracharak* 'on loan' holds the highest office of the affiliate on a long-term basis. The authors speak of 'relative autonomy' given by the 'parent organisation' (i.e., the RSS) in the running of affiliates. The authors note, 'Decision-making within the various affiliated organisations, as in the RSS-proper, proceeds only by consensus'. Historically, RSS has relied on its affiliates to continue its mission during the times it has been navigating legality and illegality (after MK Gandhi's death in 1950 and during the Emergency years). The authors assume that the 'consensus' is independent of the context it is being made in (that age, caste and gender play negligible role in decision-making of the affiliates) and that the present hierarchical structure is a perfect democracy. And thus arises the need to study the organisations anthropologically, because reality is different from the written word of the RSS constitution. Who makes it to the executive committee is directly dependent on their willingness shown to follow the RSS and Sangh line–not everyone makes it to the top and those who do have proven themselves extremely loyal to the Sangh Combine.[195]

Within the RSS, there appear to be two differential opinions coexisting over aggressive Hindu outfits (Jha, 2019). One wants to assimilate and the other wants to 'tolerate'. There are different subjectivities being generated and both work parallelly for a single goal—a political

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[195] Another claim that authors make is that not all organisations working in the Hindutva schema make it to becoming official affiliates. They give the examples of Kutumb Prabodhan and Stree Shakti (organisations working to promote strengthening family system and female empowerment) and that it took them years to become part of the Sangh Combine. The authors note that the RSS first sees if the potential affiliate can work independently. Only then does it take them under their wing. This relation not only makes it seem like an Oedipal, but also one of appropriation. Of course, there are some metaphorical children that never get full approval of the father figure, like the Muslim Rashtriya Manch and the inherent unwillingness of the RSS to fully accept those it needs to vilify (see: Vachani (2022)).

Hinduism.[196] As has been shown above, the *aayam* can be claimed or not, and thus the 'myth' (Narayan, 2021) making is a conscious effort. This form of a free-floating network of organisations in my analysis then is not so much an incomprehensible 'myth' but a strategy. According to Jha (2019), 'Fringe organisations' are a way of convenience in the movement. The strategy of disavowal allows the movement to claim and disown parts according to convenience. Further, I find that this in fact is a strategy used by the RSS to engage different socio-political contexts and its relationship to the Indian state.[197] Anderson and Damle's suggestion that the affiliates exist as independent units is the strategy of disavowal (2018: p. 22). No matter how diverse the different affiliates, the training of decision makers and highest position holders in the affiliates are RSS members (sometimes 'loaned' to the organisation). The ultimate loyalty lies to the Sangh (ibid: p. 23). This strategy of disavowal is crucial to the functioning of the RSS and integrity of the *Sangh Parivar*. The next sections will illustrate the different ways in which this strategy is operationalised.

    i.   'Common students' and Conflicts in the University

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[196] Following from an earlier footnote about Hindu right-wing cultures online, this also was re-invoked during the recent case of 'Bulli Bai app' which led to the discovery of subgroups among radicalised Hindus online. One fashioned themselves as 'Trads', those who believed in the traditional (hence the name 'trads') ideas of Hinduism and the place of Hindus. These people might not necessarily be related to the RSS but found support among the radical Sangh infrastructure online. The 'trads' made fun of 'Raitas' among their own groups, the group that was able to bend to the calls of the liberals, change their intensity of ideological propagation. Literally, diluted and flavoured yogurt, the word 'raita' is supposed to indicate weakness. While both these radicalised groups further the cause of their ideology online, supported by the Hindutva online ecosystem (including some of my interlocutors), the RSS leadership condemns and issues statements against hate speech and such harassment. See: Alisha, J, & Barton, N. (2022) Explained: 'Trads' vs 'Raitas' and the Inner Workings of India's Alt-Right, *The Wire.In*, https://thewire.in/communalism/genocide-as-pop-culture-inside-the-hindutva-world-of-trads-and-raitas [acces-sed on 13 December 2022]; Goyal, P. (2022) Bulli Bai campaign exposes the rift between Trads and Raaytas in RW ecosystem, *Newslaundry*, https://www.newslaundry.com/2022/01/06/bulli-bai-campaign-exposes-the-rift-between-trads-and-raaytas-in-rw-ecosystem [accessed on 13 December 2022].

[197] The example of statements made by BJP members Nupur Sharma (an ex-ABVP member and DUSU president) and T Raja Singh are perfect examples to illustrate this aspect. Both members made offensive remarks against a religious icon, a rhetoric often repeated in everyday Sangh discourse (I have heard it many a times during *shakhas* and in conversations). The comments received censure from the international community and the BJP was quick to label both members as 'fringe' elements. See more: Reddy, J. (2022) BJP's Quick Action on MLA Raja Singh – A Lesson Learnt from the Nupur Sharma Debacle?, *Newsminute*, 24 August 2022, https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/bjp-s-quick-action-mla-raja-singh-lesson-learnt-nupur-sharma-debacle-167149 [acces-sed on 6 September 2022]. For a similar disjuncture in RSS' view of Gandhi, see, Vachani (1993).

Instances of violence accompany ABVP members' assertions that they felt compelled to act at the behest of the 'common students' (as will be demonstrated in chapter 5, Ramjas clashes, T-tree protests, '9 Feb' incident and even the recent Ram Navami attacks in JNU (2022)).[198] During protests at the University, the demands articulated by the ABVP were spoken as rooted in the concern for the 'common student', even though many were located squarely in Hindutva concerns. Strategies of disavowal are able to help explain why when using the idea of 'common students', ABVP is able to universalise their own cause, justify their reaction and even, violence that is incurred. ABVP's proximity to different affiliates and its demographic diversity allows for a more entrenched mobility in the movement. To retain its position as a student party but also as a strong member of the *Sangh Parivar*, the ABVP needs to protest in myriad ways to assert itself on campus. It cannot merely be a campus party, because then, it would not stay relevant to its core ideology. It cannot also be completely and explicitly only ideological since it needs to speak to students' issues to remain an important stakeholder of campus politics. The language and ways of protests demonstrate the way in which it retains its important and unique position within the *Sangh Parivar*: as a successful campus-based Hindu nationalist student party. But as I have argued before, while it balances its position as a student Hindu nationalist party, due to its status as a student affiliate, it cannot aspire to set larger agendas for the Hindu nationalist movement in India and thus, remain within the set hierarchy of the *Sangh Parivar*.

ii.   Caste and the Hindu nation

Scholarship on the Hindu nationalist movement has shown that the movement derives heavily from retaining caste hegemony (Kanungo, 2007; Dhawan, 2017; Natarajan, 2022). The language of the movement is articulated in the language of a general Hindu identity. Despite dissonances in the movement, the processes, rituals, and even the everyday language of the organisation is Brahmanical and is couched as universal (Banerjee, 2005, 2012).[199] Recent mobilisations by RSS and BJP members during the UP elections were exhorting citizens to vote as 'Hindus' and not be divided by caste identities. VD Savarkar in his magnum opus

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[198] Wire Staff. (2022) Violence in JNU After ABVP Allegedly Tried to Stop Non-Veg Being Cooked on Ram Navami, *The Wire*, 11 April 2022, https://thewire.in/rights/jnu-violence-non-veg-ram-navami-abvp [accessed on 13 December 2022].

[199] Among Marxist or Communist student groups, the goals of mobilisation are mainly articulated in the language of human rights.

'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu' (1923) claims Hindu as a territorial identity. This completely washes over the oppressive and divisive caste system or those who wish to claim a non-Hindu but Indian status.[200] During fieldwork, most of my interlocutors claimed that they did not 'see' caste and that caste was not a factor in the Sangh. It is true that there are ways in which caste is not highlighted during Sangh rituals–last names are not asked, people eat together etc. But informally, most members knew of each other's caste affiliations, their closest confidants happened to be from the same caste group, and they were acutely aware of their caste identity's political currency, if they were to be involved in student politics. In such a schema, caste divisions and their sociological implications become too complex and complicated. The language of disavowal then helps retain the hegemonic caste structure but eschew it in its public rhetoric. As opposed to using the language that is explicitly caste-specific and acknowledges diversity of experiences in its rhetoric (the associated inequalities), this allows for articulating a homogenous vision of a nation.

iii.   Legality and RSS

As mentioned earlier, the strategy of disavowal has been constantly deployed by the Sangh and its affiliates to engage the Indian nation state. Strategies of disavowal are also one of the ways in which RSS and its affiliates keep themselves aloof of legal repercussions arising from involvement in the violence. For example, as has been mentioned earlier, in 1952, Balraj Madhok and the local RSS *shakha*s came together to form the Praja Parishad Party. The Party faced repercussions from the state, including police action and arrests. During its 1953 meeting, the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS, the All-India Representative Committee) of the RSS met to condemn the police actions and the reaction of the state. The RSS condemned the attacks on the Praja Parishad and its supporters by the government. Interestingly, the resolution that followed was to condemn the way RSS was being 'implicated' in the *satyagrah*. The resolution noted, 'It has been already clarified many a time that RSS has no connection of any kind whatsoever with any political party which has launched the movement' (RSS, 2007: p. 7). As has been established, the forces behind the Praja Parishad were senior RSS leaders, including Madhok who was instrumental in the formation of the ABVP and the Jan Sangh.

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[200] It is this strategy that has allowed the RSS ideologue and BJP member Ram Madhav, to claim that Hindus are the 'elder brother of Muslims, not their big brother' ('big brother' implying oppressive dominance) (Mustafa, 2021).

Thus, RSS' assertion of 'misleading' statements against it by the government do not seem to align. In a related example from the 1970s, during the ABVP's involvement in the Navnirman movement in 1970s Gujarat, the RSS in its annual meeting chastised the methods that were being deployed by students as possibly breaking the 'social fabric' of the nation. In 1974, the RSS ABPS passed a resolution condemning any association with the violence that took place in Gujarat and Bihar. An interesting part of the resolution states,

> 'The Pratinidhi Sabha (representative body) is conscious that the common people are passing through extremely hard times, and they are nearing the end of their patience. Even so, indulging in violence, arson and destruction of public property will only disrupt the entire social fabric and pave way for chaos and disorder... it is our sincere request to all sections of the society to keep aloof from all such activities and dissuade others also from indulging in the same' (RSS, 2007: p. 75).

In a similar fashion, by chastising the very methods that worked to bring change in Gujarat, the RSS washes its hands of its participation in the Navnirman movement in 1973. If the ABVP's contribution is acknowledged, it seems like the RSS strategy of claiming credit when it is convenient, is not new. But the RSS continues to commend the students who were participating whole-heartedly to rule out corruption and extends its support to the movement ('...present atmosphere of all-round corruption and selfishness can be cleansed only by the generation of such a pure stream of patriotism' (ibid)). This is the extent to which student participation is mentioned, even when its own ABVP was knee-deep in the movement. To note a present example, in the Haridwar Hate Speech case of 2021, the Rashtra Sevika Samiti members are mobilising support for the organising group on social media and *shakhas*. Alongside, Venkaiah Naidu, a seasoned BJP member and the Vice-President of India, as well as the RSS Sanghsanchalak Mohan Bhagwat chastised the meeting organisers and called it 'unconstitutional', all the while the members on-ground mobilised support for the attendees on social media.[201]

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[201] In December 2021, a group of ascetics had convened for a religious meeting (*dharma sansad*) in Haridwar, Uttarakhand. In this meeting, inflammatory speeches were made against annihilation of a particular religious community. The video evidence from this meeting was used to file a hate speech case in the Indian Penal Code and the case was heard in the Supreme Court of India. See: BBC News Service. (2021) Haridwar: Police Case After Outrage in India Over Anti-Muslim Hate Speech, *BBC.com*, 24 December 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-59778426 [accessed on 13 December 2022]; DNA Web Team. (2022) Haridwar Hate Speech Row: How the Event Unfolded, a Complete Timeline, *DNA.com*, 12 January 2022,

Rupa Viswanath (2016) shows that legal regulations over religious sentiments came into prominence in colonial India in the 19th century. The present law (295A of the Indian Penal Code, commonly called 'Hate Speech' law) came into its early form in colonial India in 1927 (curiously the same time of many religious-revivalist movements and initial years of the Hindu nationalist movement in India (Gupta, 1998)). The law was and is reportedly to provide a framework of recourse and peace when someone's sentiment is hurt. But what Viswanath shows us is that the state does not implement the legality (the law and its consequences) until there is a 'majority' community involved, along with an inherent threat of violence. Viswanath (2016: p. 357) writes,

> 'Caste Hindus began in the first decade of the twentieth century to claim Dalits, who had previously been regarded as outside the Hindu fold, as fellow Hindus when it was realised that their numbers were necessary to securing the Hindu communal claim to being the majority community'.

The idea of Hindus being a majority community gained prominence in 1920s and was in opposition to the other 'minority community' of Muslims. Following from this, a way that the Sangh structure has been able to use the strategy of disavowal is by relying on the legal discourse combined with its definition of a homogenous Hindu identity. This strategy is deployed (relying heavily on a disavowal of caste as mentioned above) against those discourses that do not align with its own ideological beliefs, the most common of which is using the language of 'hurt religious sentiments'. As mentioned earlier, the ABVP, among Sangh groups, has been active to flag and raise issues against those books, media representations, and artefacts in the public domain–the ones it considers harming or hurting religious sentiments of Hindus (for example, the violence in Osmania university or the protests against *300 Ramayanas*, among many other books). This strategy among Hindu traditionalists is not new (Gupta, 1998). As mentioned above, the Sangh and its affiliates have been able to use 'hurt sentiments' as an affective mobiliser, and silence or threaten those who speak differently: by articulating the agenda as non-ideological, by invoking a larger community than a direct reference to itself (for example, the idea of 'Hindus', the idea of 'common' or 'neutral' students), by invoking the constitution (in the language of legal discourse). The RSS and the larger Parivar thus have been

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https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-haridwar-hate-speech-row-how-event-unfolded-complete-timeline-yati-narasighanand-dharam-sansad-sc-plea-hearing-2928040 [accessed on 13 December 2022].

successful in creating an 'infrastructure of offense' (what Vishwanath refers to as 'specific economy of offense' (Viswanath, 2016: p. 357)): as an affective mobiliser and using law then as a strategy of disavowal to evade any repercussions that might arise (this aspect is discussed in the next chapter as part of 'feeling rules').[202] [203]

In this section, I illustrated how the strategy of disavowal serves the RSS and the movement. I demonstrated the different ways in which it has come to its aid and how the affiliates seem to be a by-product of it. I will conclude this section with an example: In 2022, student activists of the ABVP were protesting the suicide of a schoolgirl in Tamil Nadu. She had allegedly died by suicide due to the pressures of 'religious conversion' in her convent school. The language of the protest, the demands are articulated in the language of freedom to practice faith (Staff, 2022). On the other hand, in a neighbouring state ruled by the BJP, women who wear the Hijab were (and continue to face harassment) being banned from educational campuses (Husain, 2022). This, some members of the ABVP say, is justified because 'women need freedom' and being anti-Muslim has nothing to do with it. 'It is not about ideology, it is about freedom', I was told.

Seva: The Fruit of Plenty[204]

Service or *seva* is one of the central pillars of how movements and organised groups make in-roads into previously untapped communities. *Seva* is also a way that they appeal to a larger population, appearing more universalist. *Seva* is also viewed as a non-political act, alongside appearing selfless and attributing positive values to the person performing it. In the case of the Sangh and its family, *seva* is a crucial and an abundant signifier (the word *seva* is central to the name of the two ideological fountainheads, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Rashtra

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[202] Thank you to Dr. Rupa Viswanath for pointing this aspect out and articulating it in the terms of 'infrastructure'.

[203] A similar strategy comes to mind from another political elite organisation, the Indian National Congress. After the assassination of India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, her son had famously remarked that the anti-Sikh riots from 1984 were because of the 'anger that come upon the Indian populace', completely removing the blame from convicted Congress members who were involved in instigating and committing acts of violence. See: Rajiv Gandhi's Speech Justifying 1984 Riots, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k847hOowO70 [accessed on 9 September 2022].

[204] Thank you to Dr. Rupa Viswanath for emphasising on this aspect.

Sevika Samiti). In the idea and act of *seva*, the Sangh (like many other ideological projects) encapsulates a multitude of meanings, functions and results. As has been demonstrated above and will be elaborated in later chapters as well, *seva* provides a multitude of opportunities—it works as a strategy of disavowal; it is an affective mobiliser; it is a method of socialisation into the values of the Sangh habitus; it is a way of projecting a non-political; and it is able to encompass religiosity without being burdened by it. In this section, I will focus on *seva* as a strategy of ideological institutions and a strategy of disavowal.[205]

The RSS began with *seva* as one of its conceptual pillars: character building and serving to uplift the community. There was an inherent idea of self-erasure and selflessness. Service is at the core of many other Sangh affiliates (Thachil, 2014; Bhattacharjee, 2019). The RSS has been able to create a certain kind of service model that is able to merge its ideas of Hindu identity with the idea of service. This has been one of its most resilient pillars of success. The overarching narrative is service for those who are considered less privileged–a paternalistic, messianic approach. This approach, not exclusive to the Sangh family, effects two narratives: first, it minimises, and even disregards the structural inequalities that brought the privilege differentials in the first place. Secondly and subsequently, this approach regards the service as an apolitical act–ideologically-neutral, and universalist. Such an approach would not demand radical structural change towards equity. Importantly, it should be mentioned here that for some members, just being a part of the organisation is a form of *seva* for the nation and the organisation's vision (this will be elaborated more in the chapter on affective connections and elections) (also, Menon, 2012: p. 140).

As has been demonstrated in the chapter, the discourses of *seva* and involvement of young people has been crucial to Sangh and ABVP history. The energies of the young people were to be directed to be able to serve for the cause of betterment for others. It was due to the service during the partition of the subcontinent that the RSS found deep respect among some Punjabi Hindu immigrants, many of whom are still its most ardent supporters in Delhi. After the ban in 1949, the approach from militarising was changed to *seva*, and this approach is what sustained the organisation during its most trying years. Young people have also not only provided service this way. As has been demonstrated in earlier sections, young people from the Sangh (not just

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[205] Other aspects of *seva* (socialisation, affective mobiliser etc) as crucial to the ABVP and the Sangh project will be discussed in the later chapters.

the ABVP) were involved in issues of national importance. Further, they have been the foot soldiers of every Sangh initiative–from mobilisation in the Ram Janmabhoomi movement (*karseva*) to election campaigning for the BJP in the recent state elections, doing *seva* for the movement at every step. While the older generation of leaders has set the agendas of service, young people have been the ones implementing them.

As mentioned earlier, the ABVP cannot be a legitimate student body without working on student issues or being involved in student interests that are not overtly Hindu nationalist. Therefore, like its parent body, it has initiatives and postures that appeal to the 'apolitical' students like Students for Seva, SEIL, Rashtriya Kala Manch (National Arts Forum, RKM), etc. The ABVP too relies on the idea of service to further its connection to the people it works amongst, adapting the idea to the university space. 'Help-desks', providing counselling, being freely available to new students and protesting and raising issues for 'common students' is how the ABVP adapts the non-ideological, universalist narrative of *seva* to the universities. This is demonstrated in its popular slogan, '*Kaun lada hai? ABVP. Kaun ladega? ABVP!*' (Who has fought for you? It has been ABVP! Who will continue to fight for you? It is ABVP!). One of the oft-repeated phrases during election campaigning is the listing of how ABVP has worked 'selflessly' for students throughout the year.[206] Through a repetition of its commitment to *seva* for the larger student population, the ABVP then claims its 'rightful' struggle to power.

It is in the name of the 'neutral' or 'common' students that the ABVP is also able to raise issues that are closer to its ideological leanings. Take for example, the pro-CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act–an act that allows non-Muslims from India's neighbouring countries to expedite their citizenship process in India) rallies that were undertaken in response to the student protests against CAA (2019). The ABVP protests were all in the name of 'neutral' students who were patriotic and wanted India to have tougher anti-immigration laws. As will be shown in the chapter pertaining to protests, the '9 Feb' incident, the Ramjas clashes, and even the JNU attacks were all undertaken in the name of 'neutral' students who allegedly appealed to the ABVP because of its history of working for students. Thereby, constructing the narrative as non-ideological, *seva* as a concept also becomes a strategy of disavowal. To hark back to Ashutosh's statement for joining the ABVP in an earlier section, 'I did not know that

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[206] This aspect will be further elaborated on the chapters 4 and 5.

Hindus were in such grave danger before joining the ABVP. I joined because I wanted to do *seva*. It was after joining that I realized how big the fight is!'.

For the Love of Order: Hierarchy as an Inherent Part of the Hindu Nationalist Movement

From the linear historical delineation of the development of the ABVP through the decades, I have shown how RSS reigns supreme in the Sangh schema. As the ideological and operational fountainhead of the movement, the development and its relationship to the affiliates shows how hierarchy is operationalised in the movement. The ABVP–in its position as an affiliate–has been implementing the Sangh's causes. I will go back to Anderson and Damle's (2018) assertion that the *Sangathan mantri* model is used to provide relative autonomy to the affiliates. My view is that having loyal and seasoned RSS members at the head of each affiliate allows the hierarchy of the RSS to remain on top. RSS members still hold the highest symbolic power and as will be shown in the subsequent chapter, those members coming from the Sangh habitus are able to gain success much faster than those who are relatively new to the structure. Further, as will be shown in the thesis, socialisation of members in the organisation is indicated through the understanding of hierarchy within the organisation and the larger Sangh structure.

In the ABVP, the hierarchy of the organisation is clearly defined: right from the college-level *karyakarta* to the national president. The hierarchical flowchart (see appendix) is telling for a lot of reasons: first, until 2022, the highest position in the organisation belonged to an RSS *Pracharak*. Second, the posts of the national president, the national vice-presidents, the national organising secretary and the national joint secretaries, among the executive committee are all non-students. Many categories can be considered when one does a hierarchical calculation as an everyday *karyakarta*. One's age is definitely prized in this structure (Tyagi, 2020). The educational level, the status of the college or the degree programme also plays a role in how *karyakartas* relate to each other. Someone coming from a known Sangh habitus comes with symbolic privileges. In recent years, access to established BJP members too enables acquiring a certain leverage among different *karyakartas*. But above all, connections to the Sangh and the Sangh habitus reign supreme in this hierarchy.

Hierarchy and its everyday understandings lie at the heart of socialisation into the movement, I refer to this aspect as 'aspiration for hierarchy'. Historically, we see that the RSS has made

decisions for the movement at crucial points in ABVP's history. For example, as has been mentioned in a section above, the decision to remain away from the Jan Sangh after the lifting of the emergency was taken by the RSS in the interest of students who had reportedly been too 'politicised' (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 126). The ABVP members' trajectory within the organisation, and their articulation of mobility (this will be elaborated further in chapter 4) within the larger Sangh family, acknowledges this. As this chapter has shown, the ideological agendas are set by the RSS and their implementation (for example, the RSS *Pracharaks* conceptualising SEIL) is carried out by younger members in the affiliate organisations. It is through the hierarchical notions that are inherent to the conceptualisation of the organisation and the movement, that the RSS has been able to retain its hegemonic leadership.[207]

Conclusion

'Today in many campuses, students are well versed with the ABVP. They know that the Parishad will bring with it new initiatives, activities that are in the favour of the society, students and they want to support us wholeheartedly. There are many older teachers who have an experience that whenever the country has faced an attack or trouble, whenever there is an issue raised in the country, the ABVP will come to the campus with a solution. They (ABVP) don't bring problems, they bring solutions'
--Sunil Ambekar, National Organising Secretary at the 64th National Conference
(*Adhiveshan*), Gujarat 2018 [208]

In this chapter, I addressed two aspects of the current Hindu nationalist movement: the relationship of the RSS and its affiliates and, the contributions of the ABVP to the movement. This chapter shows that university students were crucial to laying the groundwork and the subsequent success of the Hindu nationalist movement under the RSS. As has been shown, the university students (specifically young men) involved in the RSS from its inception were instrumental in taking its objectives beyond 'character building'. University students

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[207] What does this hegemonic leadership consist of and what does it mean for the ideology? As will be shown in the later chapters, the leadership is dominated by Brahmin men, and this reflects in the leadership of the affiliates and the larger Sangh habitus that its members are embedded in.

[208] Ambekar, S. (2019) *Abhaveep: Parivartankari Yatra aur Nayi Dishayein*. Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad: Mumbai.

transformed the organisation during the ban. It was the younger *Pracharaks* that led the push towards establishing affiliates. There was a conscious shift after the RSS ban in 1948 from militarising to *seva*. Students played a major role in shifting this narrative for the movement. Through a linear historical evolution, we can see how the ABVP, one of RSS' most active and loyal foot soldier, represents the growing and dynamically changing form of Hindutva. As shown through SEIL, young people were instrumental in conducting pilot projects for establishing bigger Sangh initiatives. The Navnirman movement and JP brought the ABVP into direct activism, and the Sangh began to become mainstream (Jaffrelot, 1996, 2015). The ABVP began to be recognised as an organisation that worked for students' interests. The ABVP adapts and transforms the conversations important to the movement and make it accessible to a larger audience. I focused on the strategy of disavowal as a way that the RSS has engaged with the larger public. One of the ways the Sangh Parivar utilises the strategy was shown through an engagement with the idea of *seva*. Lastly, the relevance and importance of hierarchy to maintain order and cohesiveness with the large network of Sangh organisations was also highlighted.

The ABVP began to further Sangh activities during its years of ban, and it would not be far-fetched to suggest that the present-day RSS survives because of its affiliates. During the period between 1949-1963, the RSS cautiously approached the expansion into affiliates (Anderson & Damle, 2018: p. 21). The RSS' engagement with the Indian state shows the strategy of disavowal. Thus, the impression of the independent affiliates is necessary for it to continue its work and reach newer demographics. We can see how the ABVP has furthered RSS agendas on campus since its inception to the present, and the ABVP's contribution to the Hindu nationalist movement is no less significant. While there have been repeated speculations within media about a supposed conflict of power between the RSS and the BJP, in my field experience and the scholarship I draw from, the RSS remains at the top of the decision-making hierarchies of all Sangh affiliates. Therefore, while there is a desire for a stable position in the BJP (as will be shown in the chapter 4), there is also a desire among ABVP students for 'respect' from the RSS. Seen in the context of the Sangh hierarchy, it does not challenge or aim to radically alter the given structure. Through socialisation within the established hierarchy of the *Sangh Parivar*, the ABVP stays within the bounds. Thus, I argue that to be an ABVP member is to aspire for a place within the hierarchy.

In 2019, the ABVP has its *karyalayas* (offices) in all 28 states including union territories Jammu and Chandigarh. These are the head offices of the *prant* (region/district) in the state. In 2020, after the annual membership drive in July, the organisation boasted of three million members. Their oft-repeated motto is *rashtriya punarnirman* (national reconstruction). The song of the organisation *Parishad geet* (song of the Parishad) asserts that they will not tolerate those who insult national symbols. The song also notes that the ABVP members know the limits of freedom of speech and expression, and do not take democracy lightly. 'ABVP's biggest gain is that it has given the country such a students' organisation that has been born out of years of devotion and hard work (*Saadhna aur tap*)' (Ambekar, 2019: p. vi). The ABVP sees itself as a robust organisation; an organisation that has committed itself to years of self-discipline. The use of the word '*tap*' (a shortened form of '*tapasya*') in this regard is interesting. '*Tap*' does not find a direct translation: it is a combination of single-minded devotion and hard work, and imbibes within it the quality of meditation and an absolute mastery of the self. The words are drawn from Hindu scriptures–of dedication that would call the Gods to earth and there is an element of purity to this dedication. *Tapasya*, most often associated with fire, would purify you and thus, through this, the ABVP sees itself performing a spiritual role because it has been born of years of dedicated *tapasya*. It neatly places itself in the trope of Hindu symbolism available to many of its members.

The benefit of the ABVP in the Sangh schema is its role as a student Hindu nationalist organisation. As demonstrated and as will be elaborated on in later chapters, it can straddle both roles–as an organisation working for the ideology and as a student party interested in gaining power in the university. The RSS lays a lot of stress on young age in its socialisation model (Vachani, 1993). Younger members are prized for their energy. Young people in the Sangh have led the way for its service initiatives. While their digressions are tolerated, they are largely expected to follow the ideological line (Menon, 2012). The seeds of the ABVP were laid for specific reasons: to bring young university students into the Hindutva fold, to counter the communist influence on campus and to use the energy of young people for the movement. Therefore, the ABVP was always an extension of the Sangh Parivar on university campuses and schools. But now, the influence of the BJP and the promise of politics is what drives many new members to the organisation. There is space for both kinds of membership in the ABVP: there are those who are more driven by what ABVP stands for in the Sangh schema, politicised

Hindu nationalism on university campuses. And there are those who see themselves carving political futures through their association with the BJP.

It is not just the RSS and its affiliates relying on the ABVP. The ABVP benefits from the resources of both the BJP and the RSS. Members of the ABVP gain from association. To say that the ABVP has gained prominence in the shadow of the BJP regime in power would be an understatement. BJP's internal infrastructure has allowed for the ABVP to mirror the former's successes, especially in gaining cadres through social media. Scholars have noted that the student affiliate of a political party gains when its parent body is in power (Jha, 1998). Journalists confirm this finding in the case of the ABVP (Marvel, 2016). BJP today is full of examples of ABVP members making it big (see appendix). This could perhaps be the reason why the ABVP is so closely connected to it and is influenced by it. BJP's success allows ABVP's membership to aspire for material gains (as will be shown in chapter 4). This aspect brings newer membership with different goals from those who are driven by ideological motivations. At this political moment, the movement enjoys a diversity of membership it has never seen before. It has reserved cadres to achieve its goals from a variety of methods, and the ABVP, due to its unique position, can contribute in myriad of ways. One of the ways it contributes is through bringing in young, educated and urban students into the movement. The attraction towards its membership, what a life in the ABVP entails and what the organisation calls upon its members to do has changed; majority of the labour is performed by members of the organisation who take on mentorship roles in kinship terms of older brothers and sisters (*bhaiyas and didis*). In the following chapter, I will illustrate how affective connections between members socialise and retain memberships, and directly sustain the movement.

Chapter 3:

Bhaiyas, _Didis_, and _Karyakartas_ (Older Brothers, Older Sisters, and Activists): How Emotional Practices and _Judaav_ (Affective Connections) Shape the Hindu Nationalist Movement

Introduction

In this chapter, I am going to focus on the everyday cadre building and processes of retaining memberships in the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement -- the importance '… of those who carry out party's everyday work' (Bedi, 2016: p. xviii). This chapter is about intimate connections and relationships that sustain the Hindu nationalist movement. Through my fieldwork, it emerges prominently that it is the everyday relationships and affective connections that allow for deeper socialisation and retaining of memberships in the organisation. I will show how people and connections lead members through the movement and how ideology is made intelligible through these interactions. These connections are the sites of introduction into the emotional practices and 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979) of the organisation, a key way of socialisation and remaining within the movement. There is a lot of care work and emotional labour that goes into sustaining such movements that is often ignored. This aspect, I call '_judaav_' (affection that emerges through connection), will show how emotional practices learnt through connections are the main investments that allow the Hindu nationalist movement to have the position it has today. I will focus on three types of connections in this chapter: familial, peer (friendships and romantic relationships) and finally, the role of everyday investments by _Bhaiyas_ and _Didis_ (older brothers and sisters)[209]. I will show how these connections nurture memberships and affective relationships, and their significant contribution to making the movement. Further, I will show how members use elements from the Sangh habitus for their own self-fashioning as _karyakartas_.

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[209] _Bhaiya_ or _Didi_ is a form of respectful address in the language of kinship (might not have a familial relation).

a) <u>Emotional Practices in a Sociological Context</u>

Emotions are relational and located in a social context (Mesquita, 2022). I subscribe to the theorisation that emotions are produced, in accordance with the norms and values of their particular milieus (cf. Salmela & von Scheve, 2018, 2017). To indicate the extent of socialisation into the Sangh milieu and the Hindu nationalist movement, affective investments made by the activists into the desired emotional practices become quite important. Therefore, to be an integral part of the movement is to observe, understand and embody the emotional practices of the Sangh habitus. Here I use two conceptualisations to understand these patterns: first, Pierre Bourdieu's elucidation of praxis (1977) and Monique Scheer's explanation of 'emotional practices' (Scheer, 2012).[210] Second, I use Arlie Hochschild's conceptualisation of 'feeling rules' and 'deep stories' (Hochschild 1979, 2019). Hochschild describes how emotive experiences are moulded by context. The way my interlocuters are moved by certain words and expected to behave in certain situations, points to the socialisation practices of emotions in this habitus (especially those who come from familial connections in the Sangh). These are what she refers to as 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979). Hochschild's conceptualisation of 'deep stories' is '…deep story is a narrative based on a core metaphor evoking a given range of emotions' (Hochschild, 2019: p. 11). Both these concepts help to explain the emotional repertoires of the members of the movement, and I will build on them in the chapter.

My understanding of praxis comes from Scheer's engagement with Bourdieu's theory. She writes, 'Individuals behave according to the patterns that their community (class, milieu, subculture) requires, not just in the sense of deliberately learning rules of the 'appropriate behaviour'—as formulated in etiquette manuals—and 'obeying' them' (Scheer, 2012: p. 202). Learning these behaviours indicates an engagement with the 'game'. It is a strategic exercise, based on 'the practical sense that emerges from the habitus' (ibid). I see praxis as a way and indicator of social practices into a milieu. A definition that I have relied on for my understanding are that emotional practices is:

> '1. Designed to function in a social context . . . 2. Forms of skillful engagement with the world that need not be mediated by conceptual thought; 3. Scaffolded by the environment, both synchronically, in the unfolding of a particular emotional

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[210] Thank you to Dr. Victoria Hegner for introducing me to Monique Scheer's work on emotions in anthropology.

performance, and diachronically, in the acquisition of an emotional repertoire; 4. Dynamically coupled to an environment which both influences and is influenced by the unfolding of the emotion' (Scheer 2012: p. 198).

For example, in the context of Hindu nationalism, anger at insult to symbols (discussed in the previous chapter as 'infrastructure' of emotions), compassion for the 'downtrodden', an articulation of naturalised patriotism, are all examples of various emotions as tools to engage with and understand the world. These are the 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979) that govern the Hindu nationalist movement. What indicates emotional practices from mere observation by the *karyakartas* is the embodiment of feeling, acquirement of *samajh* (an affective understanding, discussed later), and decisions that follow. Scheer (2012) astutely notes, "For the purposes of emotional practice, it is important to note that these acts are not only habituated and automatically executed movements of the body, but also encompass a learned, culturally specific, and habitual distribution of attention to "inner" processes of thought, feeling, and perception" (Scheer, 2012: p. 200). Here I understand 'affective' to be drawn from Lauren Berlant (2010) and Sara Ahmed (2004): affective as circulatory, as transcending the body, as requiring conscious labour. Emotions that create tangible boundaries and transcend the 'body' – that invite action, 'affective investments' as Ahmed (2004) refers to them.

My goal in this chapter is to show the emotional practices of the movement and how they are understood and adapted in the ABVP. I use these emic terms (*judaav*, *samajh* (understanding) etc.) as signifiers of the emotional practices and feeling rules. These indicate socialisation into the movement and understanding different forms of hierarchies. I argue that these distinct forms of connections (most often articulated in kinship terms) and subsequent desired socialisation form the crux of how the Hindu nationalist movement makes and retains lifelong members and loyalists. The everyday lives of members are nurtured and sustained through these connections. In many cases, these connections become the foci of their allegiance to the organisation and the ideology.

In this chapter, I will first show how relationships (familial ties, friendships articulated in kinship terms) sustain and mould the movement. The emic terms that emerge from this analysis will be used to describe the everyday care work and emotional investments by older *karyakartas* (in the language of '*Bhaiya*' and '*Didi*'). These older *karyakartas* are the actual drivers of retaining and strengthening memberships in the organisation. Through this chapter

and the next (on elections), I show how aspiration (for success within the organisation and embedding in the milieu) and hierarchy are linked in the Hindu nationalist movement. This knowledge, attained through socialisation within the organisation (engagement with the 'game' for 'practical sense' (Scheer, 2012: p. 202)), is crucial for the path that the individual member might take to determine their own self-fashioning and their success in the organisation.

'We Do Not See Our Relationship to This Country as One of Just Passport or Voter ID. *Humein Apne Desh Se Judaav Hai*' (We Have a Deep Connection to Our Country): Elements of *Judaav* in a Hindu Nationalist Home

In the Hindu nationalist movement, familial connections have been shown to sustain memberships, sometimes as lifelong, inter-generational affiliations (see also: Sarkar, 1991; Mathur, 2008; Vachani, 2022). In this section, I will introduce the Hindu nationalist habitus and the values that members gain from this association. These values are held dear within the families and in the movement. It is these values that inform the emotional practices of the movement and form some of the elements of *judaav* towards the ideology and the movement. Spirituality, religiosity, and faith form the bedrock of many members' connection the group. Building on faith in the land and culture, the connection to the idea of the nation is sustained through service (*seva*).

  a) Faith, Communism, and One's Own Beliefs: *Judaav* through *Aastha* (faith)

'*My spirituality believes that everyone should get proper existence in this country. And that is because of my spirituality, my belief that comes from family,* Sangathan (*organisation*).'
–Pradnya, 28-year-old Brahmin woman *karyakarta*

I first met Pradnya through Aditi (a 28-year-old Brahmin woman, ABVP-JNU member) on a humid, summer evening in JNU in 2019. Pradnya came riding behind Chaitanya (the unit head of the ABVP-JNU, a 25-year-old dominant caste, male *karyakarta*) on his motorbike to Ganga Dhaba (a popular eating joint in JNU), shouting Aditi's name from some distance away. Upon hearing her name, Aditi began laughing and said to me, 'She is crazy. And amazing. You'll see.' Pradnya arrived, almost jumping off the motorbike, and launched into complaining to Aditi about Chaitanya's alleged terrible driving skills. Aditi stopped her mid-sentence to point towards me and introduced me to her. Pradnya also introduced herself, adding, 'I hope I did

not scare you.' Aditi and Pradnya then began talking about Pradnya's meeting with someone. 'I was also stubborn. There I was looking pretty and dressed up, but if he does not take the effort to talk to me, I am also my father's daughter,' she told Aditi, implying that she will also not make the first move. Pradnya then got me up to speed on the relevance of the meeting. She had attended an ABVP affiliate meeting with a fellow *karyakarta* who she had a 'crush on' (infatuated with) and who Aditi was sure liked her as well. While on the metro (public transport) ride back together, they both refused to initiate conversation about anything else other than the organisation. 'Yes, *you* both should continue to act like children and play this game,' Aditi said sarcastically, and they both laughed. As we walked towards Ganga Dhaba, Pradnya stopped to ask Aditi how Vani was doing. Vani is the ABVP national secretary and a PhD student at JNU (27-year-old, Brahmin). Pradnya had not seen her (Vani) in a while and wanted to see her too, now that she was visiting the campus. Aditi directed us to change direction, but we were in luck–Vani was in front of us and in conversation with her partner and two ABVP members. Pradnya rushed to Vani rather dramatically and dived for her feet, exclaiming, '*Devi, tumhare darshan hue, main dhanya ho gayi!*' (Goddess, I am so blessed to have witnessed your presence!) Vani, perhaps accustomed to her theatrics, hugged her affectionately. Vani's mannerisms were completely opposite to Pradnya's. She calmly asked her to meet her later and complimented her on 'weight loss'. Aditi too added her appreciation. '*Yaar main bahot mehnat kar rahi hoon. Bahot control chahiye iss cheez ke liye,*' (Guys, I am working very hard with this. This requires a lot of control) she added, pretending to wipe fake tears from her eyes. Aditi then bade Vani goodbye, adding that they would later stop by her hostel room and then led us towards the eating joint.

Friendships between female *karyakartas*, especially older ones and in JNU, were quite common to see. The passage here demonstrates the everyday lives of young female *karyakartas* and how they are combining personal friendships, romances, fears and societal pressures along with their association with the Hindu nationalist movement. These kinds of interactions also show the diversity of interests and personalities within the movement. As we walked towards Ganga *Dhaba*, I told Pradnya about my research and interests. She listened intently and promised to help in whatever way she could. 'Sangh women are typecast, and it would be good to show a diversity, whether you agree with us or not,' she added. We found a spot to sit. I offered to get refreshments while Aditi and Pradnya made themselves comfortable. When I came back with chai, Aditi was updating Pradnya about her meeting with her supervisor. She

had a few weeks to make a submission, after which she was planning to go home to see her family. Pradnya nodded, adding that there was nothing like home food after a stressful semester. She was also visiting home, in between her field trip to Jammu and Kashmir and her university in a western Indian state.

Pradnya is a 28-year-old Brahmin woman who comes from an ABVP family. She grew up with the ABVP. She was already a rank-holding member during her school years (she credits this to her Sangh habitus). 'There were two ways ahead for me (within the Sangh hierarchy). Due to the name of my father and grandfather, I would be given a direct unit's head as a post (*ikai adhyaksh*) or a secretary. (laughs) (Looking over at Chaitanya) For that I would not have to do a PhD,' she said. Chaitanya and Aditi laughed.[211] Her paternal grandfather was a *Sangathan Mantri* (Organising Secretary) of Rampur *prant* (divisional region, name changed) in Uttar Pradesh. Her father had been a national vice-president of the organisation. Her mother had also worked for the ABVP during her college years. Her father is now a Vice-Chancellor of a university in central India and is associated with a Sangh affiliate. Pradnya herself grew up in Rampur and studied there until her master's degree. She joined the ABVP when she was in school (through the programme for high school students). Through the course of my conversations with the women I discovered the diverse Sangh habitus' that members came from. Before Pradnya, I had only known of the RSS as having the privileged position. But the increasing relevance of ABVP alumni in the movement shows how people like Pradnya and their families are playing a crucial role for the movement in the university. Further, this highlighted the diversity of women underlined by the *karyakartas* earlier themselves: as one grew into this knowledge about Sangh culture through research and travel (example, Aditi as illustrated later), and the others through familial networks (Pradnya, for example). Pradnya's journey and connections indicate her relatively privileged position into the Sangh, already having the knowledge of networks and the options available to her within the organisation (as indicated by her articulation of her future in the organisation and the friendly dig at Chaitanya). Through the association of her father, grandfather and mother, she already has diverse portraits of how people participate, having grown up in the Sangh culture and the movement. Further, she has seen Sangh in its working phase and now, when the Hindu nationalist movement is at

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[211] It was explained to me that Chaitanya had to be in JNU in some capacity and was thus enrolled in the PhD programme. This friendly dig from Pradnya indicated that Chaitanya was a successful *karyakarta* in his university before JNU and was specifically directed to come to JNU to help with the unit there.

its zenith. Her participation is based on this knowledge and calculations. It is also worthy of note that she describes her future and aspiration in the movement in the language of the Sangh hierarchy, a key indicator of socialisation and embeddedness in the Sangh habitus.

For Pradnya, her *judaav* came through her familial connections. One evening in JNU, I met Aditi and Pradnya. Pradnya was speaking about her experience with 'communists' and noting her discrepancies in the ideology and practice. Chaitanya, the JNU-ABVP unit head, joined us. 'Oh, great! Comrade bashing!' he said as he sat down. 'No, it is not that. It is just what *they* (communists) say and what *they* do doesn't match,' Aditi spoke softly while trying to not interrupt Pradnya. 'If there is such a problem, how are those communists 'communists' if they work in the private sector?' Pradnya argued. At this, Aditi laughingly said that one finds communists in malls because no one else has the money to frequent malls. Pradnya continued, 'If capitalism is such a problem, then how are *they* communists when they receive money from a private organisation? Getting salaries? Are deans somewhere? They are professors in private institutes.' At this point, Chaitanya added, 'They live in 'Fabindia'', and they all erupted in laughter (implying that the 'communists' visit the 'Fabindia' store frequently).[212] In another meeting, Pradnya mentioned that the word 'socialist' was added to India's constitution, even though the Chairman of the drafting committee, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar, reportedly opposed it. She sees this also as part of a larger propaganda produced by the Indian film industry. She quoted an example:

> 'Bollywood films in the 60s and 70s started to show Karl Marx's theories–that the industrialist, who has invested his money and is running the factory, is always a bad person, and the worker is good and pure. Do you really believe that? That being rich

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[212] 'Fabindia' is a clothes and lifestyle brand in India. The company's economic model is based on an idea of 'inclusive capitalism'. Among my interlocutors, Fabindia came to represent among many other things, something quintessentially elite and left-ideology aligned. Other associations were Khan Market (a neighbourhood in Delhi), the Indian Habitat Centre and India International Centre (convention centers in the capital) etc. 'Khan market gang' was also a phrase popularised by BJP member Narendra Modi (India's current Prime Minister), using it synonymously with 'Lutyens' (to indicate central Delhi designed by architect David Lutyens; to indicate connections with power in central Delhi, the seat of Indian government). These associations indicated privilege, and disconnect with 'ground politics', values considered in opposition to the Sangh ideology. Many of my ABVP interlocutors who came from wealthy families frequented both Khan Market and Fabindia.

makes you automatically evil and that just because you are poor, you are a good person?'[213]

This is an annoyance with Marx's theories being illustrated through mass media. The supposed relative ease with which early films displayed the rich and poor divide with an ideological component, added to the frustrations of my interlocutors. The ABVP members were frustrated because 'communist' ideology (*vaampanthi vichaardhaara*) was initially more attractive to university students. They found that they had to compete with an entire legion of support (including professors, mass media etc.) to attract students to the ABVP. Pradnya said that she was initially attracted to the 'Left' as well. Pradnya's father encouraged her to read up on all kinds of politics available: communist and the 'nationalist' ideology, and then make an informed decision about her politics. 'My father said that rather than being a weak soldier, be a strong enemy,' she recalled, declaring that he did not want her to follow in his footsteps just because of the familial connection. In a seemingly coherent narrative, she spoke about making a trip to Bastar (Chhattisgarh, India) during her school years, reading Marx and 'other communists', and dreaming of a revolution.[214] 'At some point, I also wanted to do '*lal salaam*'' (red salute, a chant of the Indian communists).

According to Pradnya, the communist ideology only hopes for 'survival, not sustainability'. In her understanding of communism, 'there is scope that you would be able to survive but not nurture. It does not exist in *their* head that someone can grow, it is not in their vocabulary…' For Pradnya and Aditi, the fight of the communists is the fight of religion versus non-religion. 'Like Islam and Christianity, you are either a communist or you're not,' they spoke in unison. In fact, both Pradnya and Aditi had special disregard for Indian communists as they saw them as 'colonised'. Aditi had done her doctoral fieldwork in a post-colonial country that has had a

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[213] I had not encountered this particular grievance against the Hindi film industry before. Usually the grievances against 'Bollywood' specifically were that it was anti-Hindu and it was immoral in many respects. Further, since 2020, critics of 'Bollywood' have found ways to connect resonances of 'nepotism' (connecting it to another electoral party, the Indian National Congress), meritocracy and immorality. In fact, during our conversations, Pradnya half-jokingly assigned me a 'homework' to find negative portrayals of Christian or Muslim religious leaders.

[214] Bastar is a region in the center-west region in India. It is part of the Chhattisgarh state and is locationally close to the states of Odisha and Telangana. A mineral-rich area, Bastar is home to a diverse tribal and Scheduled Caste population. Bastar is among the regions that has seen state forces clash with Naxalite or Maoist members. Due to its affiliation with communist activity, it acquires significance in Pradnya's story. This aspect is discussed later in the chapter.

history of conflict. This experience had exposed her to left-wing radicalism and in it she saw her fight in India.[215] 'You look at communism in… (her fieldwork region), they have invented a new thing. With them, it seems like we have a lot in common… there is a lot of similarity in our and their discourse,' she recalled.[216] This extensive engagement and analyses dismisses the view that people in ideological movements are 'brainwashed' or have no other choice but to join. This detailed analysis and comparison from both Aditi and Pradnya show that their association with the movement is an informed choice through life experiences.

i. Faith and *Judaav* (Affective Attachment)

Both Pradnya and Aditi stressed what they saw the communist ideologies lacked: faith. It was from this understanding of the 'communist' ideology that Pradnya drew a comparison from her own habitus. According to Pradnya, in Hinduism (replaceable here with nationalism, 'Indian culture' and a sense of 'native' belief system), there is diversity of beliefs. This guides her belief system or 'family orientation' towards 'nationalism' (she does not refer to Sangh here but a more supposedly innate 'feeling' of love for the 'nation'). For her, the difference in the Sangh and communist ideologies is faith. A belief in something, what she calls *aastha* (faith). She explained the basis for her connection with her family and their belief system,

> 'My family orientation is based on a lot of faith (*aastha*). *Aastha* not just in God (*Ishwar*), but in everything. For example, my mother would say, 'your leg touched *theirs* (random person)? Why did it touch? Now, touch their feet (reverently)'. Why? Because of *aastha*, respect. And it is from *aastha* that you get respect. I have derived that if you don't have faith in something, you will not respect it. Unless and until, you trust in it, you cannot respect it.'

For Pradnya, nationalism merges with religiosity and spirituality, and a desire to believe. When speaking about books that were given to her to educate herself of her family's politics, she

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[215] Aditi´s thesis topic is quite specific and elaborating more on it would potentially disclose her identity. This is the reason I cannot elaborate on her topic. The important aspect of her work is that she uses it to express different types of communist articulations.

[216] This aspect of conflating radical left-wing visions of nationalism and Hindu nationalism is something I found quite interesting in conversations with older ABVP members. The latter does not take into account the anti-colonial aspect of the former very prominently.

speaks of icons from the Hindu mythology, seamlessly switching from Krishna to geographical landmarks that connect to her beliefs:

 'When we say in India that our civilisation is millions of years old, what do we base it on? We say it from *Neelmat Puran* (a historical text dated between 6th-8th century AD). Where did it emerge? Jammu and Kashmir. We say this from *Raj Tarangini* (12th century Sanskrit text by Kalhana). Where did it emerge? Jammu and Kashmir. Till the 19th century, there has been Shaivite (*Shaiv*) culture, the worshippers of Shiv. After that, invasions began. The leftists say that Jammu and Kashmir was never yours, that *you* were not connected in the northeast. When we talk about the connection, the wife of Krishna, Rukmini comes from Arunachal...

Aditi: Even Sita (central figure from the epic Ramayana) comes from northeast. It is written. The area that we call Mithila, which has now become a tiny part of Bihar... The entire Northeast area is Mithila…(thinks) Another one of Shri Krishna's wives is from the Northeast…'.

'…Nationalism (*rashtravaad*) comes from the integrity of land and people. For us, land is not just a piece of the earth. We do not see our relationship to this country as one of just passport or voter ID. We call it our mother,' Pradnya passionately noted. This conflation, what Romila Thapar (1989) has referred to as 'Hindutva historiography', forms a major bedrock of Aditi and Pradnya's beliefs. It is this faith, these connections, that make them respect the land and have affection for the geographical entity in the form of a nation. Pradnya has been associated with an ABVP affiliate organisation that works for international students on university campuses and engages them in India's cultural activities. A chance internship with an Indian Council for Social Science Research's project led her to Jammu and Kashmir in 2015, before Article 370 was revoked.[217] She studies how traditional arts can be used to make border areas strong by increasing their economic stability. Her research has her working closely with the JKSC (Jammu Kashmir Study Circle). JKSC is a Sangh-affiliate organisation that works in

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[217] Article 370 were legal provisions that provided the region of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh restrictions from interventions by the Indian state after Indian independence in 1947. These provisions or freedoms were removed suddenly on 5th August 2019 and the Article 370 was abrogated by the Indian Parliament. Removal of Article 370 had been a dream of the Hindu nationalist movement from 1950s, especially led by Syama Prasad Mukherjee.

Jammu and Kashmir region.[218] [219] Her experiences there, mostly in Jammu, but also parts of Srinagar and Ladakh, led her to see and experience the political economy of the region. She spoke warmly of being welcomed in all the three parts of the state, seeing the beauty of the region and all the products that are made or grown there (cumin, saffron, pashmina, fruits, rice etc.). She spoke fondly about the 'common people' and has deep distrust of those 'who needed violence for their own business' (to indicate that there is material gain for some people when a region is in conflict). She felt strongly that military defence and war are not the long-term solutions to conflict, especially in border areas. The conflict, in her experience, has emerged from miscommunication or just wrong information being conveyed by those who have antagonistic feelings about 'India'. These beliefs, now taken the form of research, have emerged from her home milieu. These beliefs are not based on abstractions. She developed these beliefs from her practical experiences through her association with the Sangh.[220]

There are some aspects of relationships in the Sangh structure that become evident through Pradnya's journey in the organisation. First is the relationship with parents and their embeddedness in the Sangh structure. This process of having one's closest friends, acquaintances and associates in the Sangh starts from the older generation (and this finds resonance in other studies on right-wing mobilisations: E.g., Klandermans and Mayer, 2005; Berezin, 2007; Virchow, 2007). The more affectionately and reverentially a *karyakarta* spoke of their parents, the more embedded and active they were in the ABVP. Further, as Pradnya's journey in the organisation demonstrates, coming from a Sangh family provides privilege in mobility and navigating the Sangh's affiliates and hierarchies, and articulate one's own aspirations in these terms.

Another aspect that emerges is that most of these *karyakartas* always speak of being given options to follow another ideology and thus, their presence in the ABVP is a choice. The idea of independently coming to an ideology and making a conscious decision to be a part of the movement is common to women's narratives in right-wing and Hindu nationalist groups

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[218] JKSC was a prominent think-tank during the Indian government's abrogation of Article 370 in 2019.

[219] Through her association with WOSY in the ABVP and the JKSC in the RSS, she is able to inhabit two seemingly separate but different affiliates of the Sangh.

[220] Thank you to Prof. Srirupa Roy for highlighting this aspect.

(Bachhetta, 1993; Blee, 1991). The narrative of Pradnya's encounter with Communism in Bastar (a site well-known for State-Maoist conflict) and the emphatic way in which it was spoken signals that it is an essential aspect of her understanding of the difference between her own belief system and the one she opposes. This is similar to the way Hochschild describes the narratives of her interlocutors as 'deep stories' (1979). The language of the narrative points to the patterns of the symbols employed (for example, the relevance of choosing Bastar, the use of '*Lal Salaam*', making a journey as a rite of passage). This illuminates the ways in which activists determine their own place in the ideological movements. Jessica Taft (2017) has also referred to how activists construct their histories, seemingly homogenous, to indicate their presence in the organisation or movement as a chosen destiny.[221] It is this informed choice and having faith that determines their decision of remaining within the familial habitus. Thus, a learning from members' articulations of their 'nationalism' is the emotional connection (*judaav* through *aastha*) that they have to the nation. It is this affective *judaav* that differentiates their own ideology from the others. It seems that this desire to believe, the religious-spiritual model from home (what Pradnya refers to as 'family orientation') forms the emotional connection and is being mobilised to pull towards a deeper, more selfless connection to their vision of nationalism. What this also then does is provide an almost mythical structure to look up to, and that seems to transcend a 'rational' or utilitarian-emotional dichotomy (as indicated in Pradnya's assertion that their love represents the mother).

b) *Desh* (Nation) and Self: *Judaav* through *Seva* (Service)

'I do not remember a time that we have cooked a meal for just the four people of the house.'
–Bani, 29-year-old, ABVP member from a Sangh family

This is, no doubt, an exaggeration. But even an approximation to the fact would be that Bani's core nuclear family never ate alone. These meetings would also entail material resources being used to sustain the guests. For example, cooking meals, providing a space for them to rest, having the time to be available and talk during these meetings. This is not uncommon. Many members have spoken about the boundary of the home as almost being porous for members of the Sangh Parivar. Sangh members, known or unknown, come and go. The quote from Bani

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[221] Thank you to Prof. Srirupa Roy for highlighting the distinction.

above highlights the way in which Sangh activity is embedded in their everyday life. Bani is a 29-year-old OBC woman, from Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. She came to Delhi to prepare for the Union Public Service Commission exams (exams to be a civil servant). For this, she joined JNU as an MA student in 2013. She has been associated with the ABVP since her Bachelor's degree (in International Relations) in her hometown. Bani is very close to her family. She adores her father and looks up to his friends (all in the Sangh) as father figures. She reveres her mother, respects her intelligence and devotion to her family and the nation. Bani credits her present personality to her parents who, in turn, were socialised in the ABVP. She spoke, 'My giving nature comes from my parents because they also learnt to give from an early age. They gave their time, money, hard work, motivation/sincerity (*mann*). Material things were given without a notice. My giving and accommodating nature came because of the ABVP.' As has been shown earlier in relation to familial association, this is perhaps one of the reasons she was able to fully embed herself in the Sangh structure–her admiration of her parents extended to their associations, a common factor among active ABVP members coming from Sangh families.[222] Bani's case is representative of the Sangh habitus. What she has access to are the privileged emotional practices of the movement, something her non-Sangh peers will come to much later in their association.

When Bani was 15 years old, her father was in-charge of an ABVP *Abhyas Varg* (workshop) that was being held on the outskirts of Gorakhpur. For one of the lectures in the Varg, everyone sat under a tree. As the lecture was going on, someone playfully threw a brick at a honeybees' nest. This led to the bees charging everywhere. The attendees, mainly students, had to be rescued. Bani saw that her father was getting bitten continuously, while trying to evacuate the *karyakartas*. She recalled that she watched in horror from a distance as her father was the last one to be evacuated. Due to the stings, he was taken to a hospital and was in coma for 4 days. He was relieved from the hospital after two weeks. As we sat, she was teary eyed, expressing

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[222] For example, while describing her initial involvement in the organisation, she said:

Bani: What used to happen in our area was that girls did not have a *shakha*. No one used to hold it. I began to hold a girls' *shakha*.

Aastha: ABVP?

Bani: No, Sangh.

Aditi: (laughs) She goes here and there...

Bani: No, for me it is the same.

This seamlessness between the Sangh Parivar affiliates is quite common among such *karyakartas* who have a generational connection to the Sangh. They had to clarify it only when I asked.

that she was extremely worried that she would lose her father. When her father recovered, she angrily asked him about the consequences had he died. She recalled their conversation,

> 'I asked him, 'Will you do this next time? Will you? What if you had died, what would I have done then?' He replied, 'If this happens again, I would do the same thing'. For months we have taken out stings from his scalp and his ears. And just imagine, when I asked him, he did not hesitate to say that he would do this again. It is stories like these that made me realise, through the ABVP, that '*you*' (emphasis mine) come later. There is nothing before or bigger than the *Desh* (country).'

This is further illustrated by Bani's father's case as an instance of motivation to work for the '*desh*'. Bani's father was recently given responsibility for two 'councils' (institutions of education under the Human Resource Development (HRD) ministry). Her father is an educationist. He is closely associated with Sangh's educational initiatives.[223] He has recently not been able to see from one eye, his vision having reduced to 30%. His ailments have also been giving him discomfort. But as much as it pains his daughter, he will not yield to her pleadings to slow down. He reasons,

> 'For so many years, there have been only lies and *adambar* (chaos) spread. There are so many people who have worked for the country and died. We have nothing to show for. Education system has been ruined. How can I stop now that we have the chance to do something, to improve our education system?'[224]

What emerges here is a conflation of public duty, service (*seva*), the presence of the Sangh (in this case, the ABVP), and patriotism. This desire to work for the *Desh* manages to create a hero out of ordinary circumstances, someone who does public good. This public good (in this case, saving students) is driven by a deep sense of self sacrifice. This sense of sacrifice is in turn driven by a source of love or inspiration bigger than a mere 'you' (also emerges in the idea of *dayitv* (responsibility, described later)): in this case, it is patriotism or *Desh*. It is these affective

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[223] Despite my repeated attempts, I was unable to gain clarity on his disciplinary association or the specific 'councils' he was a part of. He was, in some capacity, associated with the ICSSR, the same organization that Pradnya got a chance to intern with on the J&K project.

[224] This outlook and statement are significant in their relation to the ideological goals of the movement, especially in context of BJP holding government power and the Sangh. The exact implementation of this outlook has been elaborated in the section 'The project of historical rewriting and academic scholarship' in chapter 2.

connections that play a major role in motivations of individual members of the organisation. A deep affection and an imagination of sacrifice of self, for *Desh and seva* are crucial pillars through which Sangh members express their connection to their idea of nationalism, and embeddedness in the movement.

i. Various Articulations of *Seva* and the Nature of Association with the *Sangathan*

'When a student takes their first step in college, ABVP takes their hand. This makes the student believe that all their problems would now be solved. This trust is ABVP.'
–Pranay, 26-year-old, Gujjar ABVP member (in a social media post, dated July 2021)

Many *karyakartas* articulated, both collectively and in individual interviews, that for them *seva* is a goal that is realised through *judaav* with the *Sangathan*. *Seva* is working for the society. The definition of what work is and what constitutes society, while articulated in different ways, mainly represents a similar thought: society is constituted by those who are 'less fortunate', 'underprivileged', '*bechare*' (poor) or in any way less privileged than the *karyakartas*. 'Work' would involve providing services to those considered 'society'.

Officially, ABVP has a dedicated affiliate called 'Students for Seva' that conducts various initiatives. During COVID-19 pandemic's second wave that traumatised large parts of India, in Delhi, between April-June 2021 ABVP began 'Mission Aarogya' (incidentally sharing the name with the COVID-19 tracking app launched by the government of India in 2020). In 'Mission Aarogya', ABVP students in Delhi provided various kinds of services to citizens. Some would wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and test slum residents in their vicinity. For this, they would test their temperature, and if the body temperature was found to be higher, they would test for oxygen levels. If the case was found to be critical, they would provide them assistance to go to the hospital or medical advice. In JNU, the local ABVP unit worked with affected families in nearby slum areas. Within JNU campus, ABVP members said that they supplied food, medicines and sometimes, even money to the residents of the campus. When schools were shut after the first lockdown in March 2020, JNU-ABVP began '*Basti ki Paathshaala*' (School in Slums) to provide free coaching so that students could keep up with their syllabi in school. Like many other civil society groups, ABVP units in different parts of the city organised to provide up-to-date information on the availability of hospital beds, oxygen cylinders, medicines, and other rations. They provided specific phone numbers of their

karyakartas in different neighbourhoods and maintained a non-stop helpline. During this time, they were also fighting with university administration to delay exams, postpone assignment submissions, provide relief to research students by requesting scholarship extensions and deadlines.[225] [226] As mentioned in the previous chapter, over the course of history, *seva* has been deployed as a strategy of disavowal by the Sangh. Here, an emotional connection alongside the initiatives described above, adds to it as a strategy of interpellating (Althusser, 1971) new members, as a way of socialisation (and as will be described in the next chapter, as a symbolic value among members). *Seva* becomes a marker of socialisation and articulation of aspiration among members, as described below.

     ii. *Seva* as Sincerity and *Dayitv* (Responsibility) from the Sangh

'I don't want to join politics, I just want to do seva. If the Sangathan *(organisation) feels that I would serve the society better as a leader, I will do it.'*
–Mandakhini, mid-20s, Brahmin ABVP *karyakarta* (JNU) and Samiti member

Mandakhini had no doubts about her 'leadership abilities' – she had effectively occupied positions of authority during the 'Damini rape case' (2012) by leading the ABVP in Guwahati to protests. She currently also had a *dayitv* (responsibility) in the Samiti as well. *Dayitv* in the *Sangh Parivar* is a way to designate an official leadership position in the hierarchy. This is to indicate the *seva* aspect of the Sangh prominently in the way the rank is thought of. *Seva* through *dayitv* for some *karyakartas* in the ABVP is about showing their integrity towards the ideology and the organisation, putting the nation before self. Many a times I asked prominent *karyakartas* if they wanted to become political leaders or join mainstream politics like the ABVP alumni they were inspired by. The response to that question was always the same: 'I want to do *seva* first.' This would be followed by a clarification that if they are asked to be 'political', it would be on a directive from the organisation. When Vani expressed sentiments similar to Mandakhini above, she mentioned, 'The *Sangathan* (the organisation, here the

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[225] ABVP's initiative 'Medivision' comprises of medical students. These students too joined forces to provide assistance during the pandemic, especially during the second wave. 'Students for Development', another affiliate, has been conducting regular fairs in various campuses to promote goods from local shopkeepers who lost businesses during the lockdowns.

[226] See the table in the appendix detailing the various *aayam* (initiatives) of the ABVP that illustrate how ABVP diversifies interests to attract students, especially those who might not have a keen interest in the ideological mobilisation.

ABVP) has the wisdom to know who can serve better in what role (*dayitv*).' Hence, if the Sangathan felt that Vani would do *seva* better through an active involvement in politics, she would simply follow the directive of the *Sangathan*.[227]

A motivation for politics from one's own self is seldom expressed by these *karyakartas*. There is a certain kind of outward dismissal by such *karyakartas* towards those with political aspirations. This dismissal of desiring power or disavowal of political aspirations is what the 'genuine' *karyakartas* use to distinguish themselves from those who join the organisation for 'selfish reasons'. Further, people with position in the Sangh and its affiliates' hierarchy also emphasised that this language is to discourage arrogance that power brings with it. Power is essentially seen as corrupting (for example, Golwalkar's alleged view of Vasantrao Oke–that Oke had political ambitions 'undesirable' for a *Swayamsevak* (Anderson & Damle, 1987: p. 125)). There is a view that differentiates between 'genuine' and 'selfish' *karyakartas*. 'Genuine' *karyakartas* are those who have an innate desire to work for the nation and keep the ideas of the *Sangathan* over their own desires. 'Selfish' *karyakartas* is used to categorise those who are 'using' the *Sangathan* for their own goals. Most often it is used to attribute a pejorative quality to those *karyakartas* who express a desire for politics. A desire for power is also an emotion that indicates that the desire to do *seva* is not sincere and a sign of immaturity, a lack of *samajh* (wisdom). The language of *dayitv* points to the supremacy of the position holders in the Sangh. *Dayitv* is always given – it is a responsibility that is received and not a self-initiative. During the ABVP conventions, the announcement of *dayitv* is a massive source of encouragement for *karyakartas* and it is seen as a validation for one's hard work or talents in the organisation by the *Sangathan*. This is what Vani was referring to when she said that the Sangh had the 'wisdom' for choosing roles. This also points to an inherent wisdom in the hierarchy. This aspect is not visible at first-- a *karyakarta* only comes into this *samajh* once they are socialised into the organisation.

c) Entering the Vocabulary and Acquiring *Samajh*: On the Path to *Judaav*

Members have mentioned that frequency of Sangh members visiting the home was at times annoying. Aditi mentions an incident when she was in 8th standard in her hometown in UP. She

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[227] Here Sangathan could mean the ABVP or the larger RSS-BJP superstructure. Depending upon the *karyakartas'* place within the organisational hierarchy, the word is used interchangeably.

was about to cook. There were ingredients to feed only one person and she decided to use it for herself. Moments before she began to cook, a *Sangathan Mantri* came to their home. As he settled, he saw that she was in the kitchen. He remarked kindly that he wanted to eat what Aditi was cooking. She was visibly annoyed as this would not allow her to eat something she had been looking forward to. She quietly protested to her mother, but her mother lovingly asked her to let go. She requested her mother to make something else for the *Sangathan Mantri*. 'Then my mother said to me, 'Aditi, this one *paneer ka parantha* (the food she was making) will define your character. Is your character so cheap that it can be defined by one *parantha*?',' she recalled. For Aditi, this incident still gives her goosebumps. According to her, her mother's timely words like these made her see the bigger and long-term perspective on material things, rather than focus on immediate indulgences. In a similar experience of an epiphany, two *karyakartas* from ABVP's Delhi University unit, Pranay and Sohini (21-year-old, Brahmin female) participated in an ABVP initiative called '*Samajik Anoobhooti*' (realising the society) in 2016. Conceptualised in the form of a survey, in this initiative ABVP *karyakartas* visited different slums across Delhi. The aim of the initiative was to see 'how *they* live'. 'They' here is the definition of 'society'. In this case, it was people who lived in slums. The *karyakartas* were asked to see what were the living conditions in the slum, the facilities that were available to them, and what steps were being taken to make *their* life better. This experience was an eye-opening one for both members. They were shocked by the circumstances they saw: the unsanitary conditions, lack of municipal facilities, the apathy of the local government.[228] It showed them that people who lived in such conditions needed to be helped by people like *them* (Sohini and Pranay), who were 'more fortunate' (those coming from 'good' homes, thus implying financially secure).[229] This experience was one of the ways to transition from *bachpana* (immaturity associated with childhood) of the younger age to *samajh*.

Samajh (acquired wisdom) of the long-term perspective is rooted in *seva* through an association or *judaav* with the organisation. This incident, that Aditi recounted as an adult 16 years later,

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[228] The local municipal government was then headed by the rival political party member from AAP. During fieldwork, I saw that some Sangh members were confused (even, aghast) by the support that AAP received in some slum localities in Delhi. This emerged very prominently during the election campaigning before 2019 General Elections in India.

[229] 'Good' here is also indicative of cleanliness. Although outwardly, my interlocutors denied it, many a times, 'good' (*accha*) was used to pejoratively denote caste.

reminds her of why *seva* is paramount to self. Pranay also came to this realisation (*samajh*) after his association. Both used this word to indicate their current state of having a better understanding. This understanding (*samajh*) is important to rationalise the connections between *seva*, *desh* and self. I argue here that *samajh* is the crystallisation of the 'feeling rules' (instead of being disciplined through fear). Here, *samajh* is the state acquired through long-term association with values that are considered worthy in a particular milieu (*judaav*). Therefore, *samajh* would indicate a socialisation into the values of the *Sangh Parivar*. By serving the *Sangathan Mantri*, Aditi was accomplishing four goals. First, she was illustrating her wisdom on the value of age in hierarchy (age as a prized value, as mentioned in the previous chapter). Her needs are second to the older person who 'should' be served before her. Second, this incident is teaching her the value of sharing. Third, she puts her guests' needs before her, thereby affirming a refrain popular in her milieu: that 'guest is god', despite her wants. Lastly, the value of someone doing Sangh work and the members' needs is more important since they are working for the nation. The members are going beyond self and thus, for Aditi and the messaging she received, the least one can do is offer them food. She was not in danger of cheapening her 'character' since her mother offered her advice that made her understand (*samajh*) the values embedded in this act.[230] According to Pranay, ABVP is a place where one develops *samajh*. 'When you come in the ABVP, you learn that *desh* is important, society is important and *seva* is important,' he said, as we spoke at length about how ABVP's initiatives transformed his *bachpana* (immaturity). Pranay recounted how before he learnt to consistently 'think about our country', he would spend time with friends and 'do timepass'. After learning how to do *seva* through the ABVP, he also learnt that there were 'things' that he could do for a better utilization of time. These 'better things' were actions that could be done in the service of the nation. *Seva* as opposed to mindless 'timepass' was a better alternative and this he understood (*samajh aana*; to understand) through his association with the ABVP.[231]

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[230] *Samajh* was also raised as a lacking when a senior female *karyakarta* wanted to humiliate younger ones over their behavior. This has been discussed in the section on 'Conflicting hierarchies' under 'When *Bhaiya, Didi* come home'.

[231] For 'Timepass' as a conceptual category, see Craig Jeffrey's work on youth in Meerut (2010).

d) 'Feeling Rules', Hindu Nationalist Habitus, and *Samajh* (Understanding) through *Seva* and *Judaav*

Here is an example where affective bonds produce almost mythical connections between self-erasure, patriotism, and the Sangh. Pradnya's grandfather was a lifelong member of the RSS and ABVP. He is now 92-years-old and suffers from Alzheimer's disease. Apart from his wife, the only other family member he retains memory of is his granddaughter, Pradnya. According to Pradnya, he does not even remember his own son (Pradnya's father) and claims to have attended her father's funeral (her father was very-much alive). Pradnya provided this detail to indicate the acuteness of the disease. I will mention two instances from her here. First was a video of her grandfather passionately reciting a popular children's poem about wanting to be a good soldier for the country. Second was another video of her grandfather barely able to hold a pencil but attempting to draw a version map of India.[232] 'He does not remember anything. Remembers country (*desh*). He remembers the map of India. These people have stayed in the ABVP from early on that they have it in their hearts,' Pradnya spoke of her grandfather. In both these incidents, Pradnya's belief on the ideas of nationhood is heightened. She used these videos of her grandfather to illustrate that the territory of the Indian nation is sacred for some members of the *Parivar*. Pradnya, Bani and many other *karyakartas*, in the course of the time I got to know them, spoke of many such instances that reaffirmed their faith in nationalism, Sangh and ABVP. This affective relationship extends several generations and is one of the ways in which members articulated their *judaav* for the nation. This *judaav* moves them to be a part of the organisations and conduct activities that they believe are in favour of the 'nation'.

In the sections above, I showed how through the Hindu nationalist habitus, members had the vocabulary to associate their membership. Through the familial connections, there is *aastha*, a feeling of self-erasure and self-sacrifice, and *seva*. These emic terms lend themselves to having *judaav* for the nation (replaceable with the ideology and the movement), and are crucial pillars for the 'feeling rules' of the movement. These words and the feelings they evoke seemed to be more present among those who came from the Sangh habitus and were over time, repeated by

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[232] The reason I say 'version' is to point out that there are different interpretations of the Indian nation cartographically. This version is the one that is found in government-approved textbooks and maps (with Jammu and Kashmir in its full entity) and is also one of the versions that is used in the Sangh. Another version is of the '*Akhand Bharat*' with shifting borders between Afghanistan/Pakistan, integrated Bangladesh, and Jammu and Kashmir.

ABVP members who came from non-Sangh families. Further, the more time one had spent in the organisation, the affective power of these words and feelings increased, as opposed to those who were new and were still finding their feet in the organisation. This speaks to Hochschild's conceptualisation of 'feeling rules' (1979). Pradnya's assertion earlier, 'For us, land is not just a piece of the earth. We do not see our relationship to this country as one of just passport or voter ID. We call it our mother' is telling in its tone and content—this assertion is indicative of the script for feeling rules in the Sangh habitus. The use of the word 'we' to indicate a larger group's affective attachment to land is projected as a natural feeling, that of kinship, a mother. Similarly, Bani's description of being 'giving' or 'kind' is also a socialisation practice–a value that must be inculcated (or the language of the act should be deployed) to indicate the depth of the connection with the organisation. To recall Bani's assertion that '… '*you*' (emphasis mine) come later. There is nothing before or bigger than the country (*desh*)'.

Let us go back to an earlier instance in the chapter, when Pradnya had provided a description of her engagement with the communist ideology, about her journey to Bastar that was akin to a rite of passage and finally, making a deliberate but almost spiritual choice between the 'left' and the 'right'. Bastar as a spatial reference here is significant. This is because Bastar is one of the sites of intense interactions between the state and the communist groups in the area (Rego, 1994; Sundar, 2016). There are some aspects here that are worthy of note. First, her description of her entry into the ideological and emotional nuances of the ideology as a journey. For Pradnya, this description was metaphorically–and literally–a journey from her hometown to the Bastar district. For many other interlocutors too, their entry into the movement was described using the metaphor of a journey: from innocence and ignorance, to finding a 'home' or a metaphorical light in the organisation or their association with the movement. Second, this journey though is not taken out of context. The end destination of the journey is always connected to a 'feeling' present before the journey began – something that is rooted in the context the *karyakartas* come from. This almost circular path is articulated with a feeling of coming back home (home here would imply feeling or values) but with something extra: *samajh* (as wisdom or understanding). To illustrate, the values that Pradnya decided to pursue were values that she had from her parents: kindness, *seva*, patriotism etc. Thus, the choice of the ideological movement is articulated as a combination of instinct (which is, in this case, socialisation) and emotions or feelings. 'It felt like home', 'it felt right' were phrases that were oft repeated by older, more experienced *karyakartas* as an acquirement of *samajh*. What the

story and the emphatic way in which it was spoken signals that it is an essential aspect of her understanding of the difference between her own belief system and the one she opposes, her 'deep stories' (Hochschild, 1979). If the language of the narrative is examined, there might be patterns to the symbols employed (for example, the relevance of choosing Bastar, the use of '*lal salaam*', making a journey as a rite of passage).

What constitutes the emotional practices of the Hindu nationalist movement and organisation? I find Hochschild's description of 'feeling rules' quite useful in understanding the embodiment of their emotional practices. She writes, 'Rights and duties set out the properties as to the extent, the direction, and the duration of a feeling, given against the situation which is set. These rights and duties of feeling are a clue to the depth of social convention…' (Hochschild, 1979: p. 564). Thus, the naturalisation of 'patriotic feeling' as an effective affective mobiliser of the movement comes to represent the zenith of socialisation. Therefore, the articulation, 'How can you not feel angry when someone insults your mother' (mother here represents the kinship relation, but also the nation in the form of 'mother India') are just one of the ways in which these emotional practices appear to be naturalised and signify 'social convention' (ibid). This also speaks to the repertoires of emotional 'infrastructure' (mentioned in the previous chapter) of affect that the Sangh offers its members.[233]

What about those people who do not come from Sangh families or from the Sangh habitus? For many *karyakartas*, ABVP offers 'connections' – a way to leverage relationships through the Sangh outside of the organisation for material or symbolic gains. These connections could be friendships, relationships or connections articulated in the language of kinship (discussed in the later sections). Connections within the organisation are the crucial sites through which *karyakartas* navigate and understand this 'emotion work' (Hochschild, 1979: p. 561). It is these connections that helped through the passage of three stages: pre-*judaav*, *samajh*, and then the affective connection, *judaav*. *Samajh* in this process represents the acceptance of the emotional

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[233] Pradnya had told me that she would be in Srinagar for her fieldwork when the news hit that something might happen in Jammu and Kashmir. When there were speculations of army moving in, there was widespread assumption that there might be violence, but no one exactly knew what was going to happen. I texted all my known acquaintances and friends who were in Kashmir during the time to ask of their well-being. Pradnya replied a day later, when it was clear that Article 370 had been removed. She told me that she been advised to leave Srinagar a week before, much before anyone else knew what was going to happen. When I asked her if she had an inkling of what might transpire, she stopped replying. Despite my repeated attempts, she has not replied since.

and affective practices in the Sangh milieu, the 'emotion work' that is performed by all *karyakartas* to understand their place in the movement.

Everyday Processes of Building 'Connections' within the Parishad

In this section, I will describe the different peer connections that ABVP members make in the organisation. Through a description of these relationships, I show how these connections become sites of initial contact to the movement and then, a significant factor in socialisation and retaining of memberships. These connections also become the sites of informing the members of the emotional practices in the movement. For members coming from non-Sangh homes, these connections become a significant site for entering and mobility within the organisation.

a) Friendships, Alienation, and Becoming a *Karyakarta: Judaav* through Friendships

Friendship as a site of anthropological enquiry has been a small but increasing area of interest in the field (Osella & Osella, 1998; Eve, 2002; Desai & Killick, 2010; Bell & Coleman, 2020; Hansen, 2020). In most studies, friendships become an important site for socialisation into a particular milieu. 'Exchange' of knowledge of existing values and norms and 'clientalistic' ways of power relation are also some ways in which friendships have been studied in anthropology. My understanding of friendships comes from Birgitta Nedelmann (1991). She defines the key points of friendships as a social relationship. These key points are exchange of affection; information exchange on values and norms (introduction into the habitus); and most crucially, social relationships that, unlike kinship, can begin and end out of choice (friendships or romantic). Friendships also guide political decision-making and structure power hierarchies in the particular social context (Eve, 2002).

My experience in the field adds empirical evidence to these findings. I take the conversation further by showing the role of friendships as a way of socialisation and keeping memberships, an aspect that has not been studied for the Hindu nationalist movement in India. This could be because Sangh connections primarily emerge from kinship ties. Further, Sangh affiliates that provide more sites for forming non-familial connections, like the ABVP, have been given less focus than the RSS or the BJP. Familial affiliation to the movement plays a key role in orienting one towards participation, as has been shown by other scholars of the movement and my own data from the previous section. But friendships play an equally important role for the

movement, especially in the urban context. In my experience, I found that friendships were a strong factor for *karyakartas* who did not come from Sangh families. Friends became the first point of introduction to the ABVP, campus politics, and milieu of the Sangh. Further, for those members who also did come from a Sangh milieu, chance friendships became the deciding factor in finally affiliating with the organisation. In this section I will show the different ways in which friendships facilitated entry, socialisation and becoming a committed member of the movement. These friendships inculcated *judaav* for the fellow *karyakartas* and the larger movement. In the following sections, I will describe the contours of how friendships come to be, how they are articulated among ABVP members, who is classified as a friend, and who is seen as a non-friend/enemy.

i. Alienation, Friendships, and Personal Politics: How Some Students Join the ABVP

'Everyone has this experience. One of my friends who is 'neutral', she used to get asked: 'Are you joining ABVP? Did you find no other organisation to join?'. All because I had some friends who were in the ABVP and I used to hang out with her also. She stopped talking to me because she was afraid of being branded (as an ABVP person).'
–Aditi, ABVP *karyakarta*, JNU[234]

Anthropologists have shown alienation is a crucial factor among neo-Nazi and right-wing groups in Europe (Klandermans & Meyer, 2005; Hansen, 2020). This section would illustrate how for some members, especially in JNU, the tag of being from the ABVP and the sense of alienation that followed came first, before formally becoming a member of the organisation. Usually, for these members, it began with friendships and association with students who held views that were seen in consonance with the views of the Sangh (although many students were not coming from the Sangh or any of the affiliates). Aditi is one such student who is now a committed ABVP member in JNU and its Delhi state's executive committee. Aditi is a PhD student who is doing comparative research on tribal cultures in a state in India and another in a continent considered part of the 'global south'. She comes from a lower middle class Brahmin family from a town in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Her father and her grandfather were both Sangh members. She came to JNU from her hometown as an 18-year-old to study languages. She

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[234] 'Neutral' here refers to having no political affiliation. This aspect has been further discussed in the previous chapter and will be elaborated further in chapter 5.

chose JNU because it was subsidised and 'less flashy' as compared to DU. The campus and the institution are very dear to her. She has known it for all her adult life and now, having spent more than a decade here, she knows each nook and cranny of the vast campus.

When she first came to JNU, she approached the ideologically innocuous seeming help desk for more information.[235] She was accompanied by her father. A *Didi* (older sister; here, a form of address for the senior from the university) helped her figure out the admission process. The same *Didi* offered her a place to stay (in her hostel room) until she got the hostel allotment.[236] This *Didi*, as Aditi later found, belonged to Students Federation of India (SFI, student group affiliated to Communist Party of India (Marxist)). In exchange for this help, Aditi was indirectly asked for her presence and support during university elections. Her classmate, who later became a friend, was helped by an 'AISA *Didi*' (AISA is the All-India Students' Association, student group affiliated to the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)). When Aditi was initially tagging along with 'SFI *Didi*' as she refers to her, she heard a variety of rumours about the ABVP. Most of them were in connection to women's freedom. 'ABVP people will not let you wear jeans; they will not let you wear shorts…' or alleged incidents where RSS family members of a student killed a pupil in campus because of an inter-caste relationship. Aditi suspects that these rumours were a strategic construction by other student parties who were vying to 'be the sole well-wishers (*shubhchintak*) of women's agency' in the JNU campus. She too believed these rumours until she began interacting with different classmates who were either members of the ABVP or silently sympathised with the organisation's beliefs.[237] At first, Aditi found herself being associated with the SFI since she

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[235] The relevance of the help desk to the organisation will be discussed in a subsequent section.

[236] Residential accommodation during the initial months of university, both in DU and JNU, is a competitive site by all student groups to gain new members. This is a structural inadequacy by the university authorities of not being able to provide accommodation to students from outside Delhi. Hostel lists are awarded on merit and are announced much later, sometimes weeks and months after the semester has already begun. These delays are used by student groups in both universities to their advantage: to establish their presence and expanse of their work on campus; making new networks and inducting new students in their groups. An illustrative protest on hostel allotment has been discussed in chapter 5.

[237] When Aditi came to JNU, ABVP was reportedly a marginal presence on the political landscape of the university. As is being illustrated, many people did not outwardly want to associate themselves with it due to its reputation. As years have gone by, especially after the election of Narendra Modi to the central government (many interlocutors who were associated with the organisation before 2014 note this moment) as where people were more willing to openly be seen with ABVP members in JNU campus or officially register for it. This too has invited a variety of reactions from the *karyakartas* who have been associated with the organisation before this ascent of the BJP. Some see the new boom in membership as affirmation of their commitment to the organisation

'had' to repay the 'SFI *Didi*'. She did this by coming to the GBM (General Body Meeting of the student body of the campus), campaigning and voting for SFI members in student union elections. During that time, she claims that AISA members gave her a 'stink eye'. Later, when she started to be seen with friends who belonged to the ABVP, she was branded as a *Sanghi* (someone associated with or affiliated to the Sangh or a believer of Hindu nationalist politics). But as she was slowly becoming close with ABVP friends, the divisions between SFI, AISA or even Democratic Students Union (DSU) (reportedly, 'most radical' among left parties on campus) started to coalesce. Now, it was not just AISA, but all the student groups that gave her a 'stink eye' or branded her a 'Sanghi'.

There was another incident that brought her closer to her future *karyakartas* and away from the left parties. In 2011, many urban centres of India saw large protests against the government (Sharma, 2014; Roy, 2014, 2016; Gupta, 2017). Some civil society groups came together to protest what were seen as large-scale corruption scandals under the ruling government, United Progressive Alliance (UPA), led by the Indian National Congress.[238] A collective of prominent names came together under a banner called 'India against Corruption'. In Delhi, there were protests outside government buildings, tourist landmarks etc. by some citizens against the government. It was during this time that Aditi encountered a *Bhaiya* (older brother; here, a form of address for an older male) who was part of the collective. This *Bhaiya* organised a meeting of some prominent members of the movement in JNU. This meeting was protested by DSU, and its actions were supported by the 'left parties' on campus. To Aditi, 'Youth Against Corruption', the banner under which the meeting was organised, was not doing anything 'wrong'. To her and all her friends, there was nothing wrong in wanting a corruption-less India, to demand better of bureaucracy, and do it in a patriotic vein. She was 21-years old at the time. She was shocked by DSU and their act of 'tearing the *tiranga*' (India's tricolour national flag). To her, the 'left' could have also joined *their* (people supporting the anti-corruption movement) initiative and not supported the DSU. This is a discomfort that Aditi had shared many a times during our meetings. According to her observation, the 'left' in the JNU campus is constantly

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and the ideology; some others are sceptical or cautious about the new members. This too creates a different dynamic among members. Among many older RSS and Samiti members, as I mentioned elsewhere, the surge in membership is diluting a movement that has built itself on 'austerity and everyday antagonisms'. This is the case in ABVP as well. Almost all my respondents from the field hope that the 'Sangathan' would keep the longer committed *karyakarta* ('genuine') in mind when providing with opportunities.

[238] Sangh's involvement in the movement has been mentioned in the History chapter.

in-fighting throughout the year. But when it comes to the ABVP, 'all' the student parties come together, united. She argued,

> 'Why can't they take a stand based on an issue? It is not like *they* (left parties on campus) all agree on everything? In that moment, the left does not remain apart. In that moment, they go stand with the DSU. So then how do I believe when I see that you are not different? You can make a third faction and protest against them. But *you* (other left parties) never did it. I have been seeing it over the years.'

She was disappointed. After being referred to as a 'Sanghi', she saw that '…whatever was being portrayed was not the actual thing' (about the ABVP). During this time in 2011, she worked closely with students who believed as she did, and officially joined the ABVP.[239] She made close friendships with those students who later became the strongest members of the ABVP in JNU and it is those connections that have sustained her membership in the organisation (and vice-versa).

Vani, the present National Secretary of the organisation, joined the ABVP soon after arriving in JNU. She came to JNU in the year 2014, after completing her bachelor's education in a city in Uttar Pradesh. She came to JNU to study Sanskrit. She was grateful to the language. It gave her a chance to travel to Delhi and study in a prestigious university. JNU's reputation and cost of living allowed her family to trust that she would be safe in Delhi. The year she arrived, JNU administration was deliberating on expanding the department of Sanskrit to a level of 'School'. This would give additional powers and autonomy to the department. This bureaucratic move was protested heavily by students who were opposed to Sanskrit.[240] Vani saw the protest, and as a member of the department being protested, she was in shock. 'Why did they hate my Sanskrit?' she recalled the event, in a rare moment of vulnerability. These protests attacked

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[239] RSS and its Sangh affiliates were instrumental in raising massive support for the 'India against Corruption' movement. They saw this as a strong opponent of the ruling Congress government and it represented some of the values that they saw lacking in the Congress: honesty, ascetic living, and patriotism.

[240] Sanskrit is one of Indian subcontinent's oldest languages, with many classical literary works within its pantheon. It is also a language of many revered Hindu scriptures and hence, it is a venerable language among Hindu believers. Early work by Indologists (Max Mueller, for example) placed Sanskrit on a pedestal as a source of many present languages. Sanskrit, on the other hand, from a perspective of anti-caste movements is seen as a tool of oppression in the hands of dominant castes. Many student groups in JNU and elsewhere subscribe to this view and hence, protest its presence in university curricula.

most crucial aspects of her identity–as an upper-caste woman, as a north-Indian woman, as a person who believed in the supremacy of Sanskrit and its relevance to the Hindu scriptures that were revered in her home. She felt personally attacked. And thus, she decided to seek the support of her peers in her course and became friends with them. She found support with the ABVP, the only student organisation that openly supported the Sanskrit centre. Through their support, she met ABVP members, especially women, who would become her closest confidants and friends in Delhi. In ABVP, she found an affirmation of her life and her milieu that she felt was constantly under attack from the 'communists'.

Thunlai had known about the ABVP in her college in DU. ABVP was the only visible student party in her college. When they needed support from an organisation to protest the college administration, ABVP members from DU south campus showed up in full support. She was visibly impressed by their strength and from then on, was unofficially part of some of the ABVP initiatives in her college. She came to JNU for her Masters in a natural sciences course in 2014. Here, she saw ABVP as a shadow of their number in DU. But they were active in certain centres. She was initially helped by an 'SFI *Didi*' during her help desk but even then, she could see that ABVP had a stronger presence in her Centre. During her initial interactions, she saw that the 'left' were dismissive to her and her Masters' course cohort. 'They called us 'lab rats' and rote learners,' she recalled. This was the first way she felt misunderstood by the 'communists'. Second was in her early conversations with the unnamed 'SFI *Didi*' and her friends, who would ask her about her feelings of 'marginalisation of the north-east'. This confused Thunlai, she said adding, 'I grew up in Delhi, and sure, my grandparents came from the region, I have personally never felt marginalised. I don't know the marginalisation they had expected for me to experience. Wasn't this an act of stereotyping as well?' She felt like she was not seen as her own person by the 'SFI *Didi*' and her friends and was reduced either to her tribal identity or as a student of the Sciences. Her friends in the course that she joined were either apolitical or because of rising popularity of the ABVP (due to BJP's electoral victory), were attracted to them. She began attending ABVP's events and was soon integrated into the organisation. In ABVP, she found that her identity was also exoticized, but she was still considered 'Indian', as opposed to the feeling she felt in her interactions with the 'communists'.

Aditi, Vani and Thunlai are not the only *karyakartas* who were drawn to the organisation in this way. Their cases are illustrative of many present *karyakartas* who experienced feelings of

alienation in classrooms, hostels, and student-organised seminars. Scholars have noted that alienation is indeed a significant 'pull-factor' when trying to understand membership patterns in ideologically motivated groups, especially right-wing groups (Berlet, 2000; Linden & Klandermans, 2007; Horgan, 2008; Shoshan, 2015). Aditi, Vani, Thunlai, and many others in campus joined the ABVP as a political act to defend their choices after these experiences. It helped that they were committed *karyakartas*. They soon found themselves being promoted and being given opportunities that strengthened their bond with the organisation (a factor explored in the next chapter). The experience of alienation, being misunderstood and then finding friends (facilitated through older *karyakartas*) who thought a similar way, went hand in hand with their association with the organisation. Due to the way campus politics has shaped in the past few years, especially after the student protests against the government, there has been a stark polarisation among student bodies on campus. This has reduced interactions and antagonised differences further between students and their political affiliations. Due to the time many of these students came in, many do not have friends across the political spectrum (this stands true for all student parties). Thus, friendships in the ABVP are their source of sustenance, solidarity, and connection in the campus. Friendships are what keeps them committed to the organisation and the ideology.

ii. Role of Peer-Connections, Friendships and *Judaav* in Retaining Membership in the Organisation

Most members in the organisation spoke of friendships as crucial to their everyday life. As more time progressed in the organisation, connections with other ABVP members increased and that is where they found most of their friends. Same-sex friendships seemed to be the norm; I did witness some friendships among male and female *karyakartas* but usually, they would not be the same age. Inevitably, they would be articulated in kinship terms. Like all student groups, ABVP too had their own spots on both campuses where the members 'hung out'. DUSU office and the *karyalaya* office were those among them. These spaces, anthropologically studied as 'foci of action' (Eve, 2002), became spots where *karyakartas* across colleges, campuses and hierarchies interacted. Though the hierarchical divisions did not blur when they were together, these were the spaces that were inhabited by all. These were also the spaces where cliques among members became visibilised. For example, DUSU position holders had their own circles among ABVP members who occupied their respective rooms.

Caste affiliation also played a role in these friendships. Those *karyakartas* who did not frequent the DUSU office considered the latter as doing 'timepass' and looked down on them. Those who stayed in the DUSU office saw it as an opportunity to make and build 'connections' through friendships made here. Friendships also become dynamic sites of building alliances, gossip-sharing, venting, and being vulnerable. Many a times, among trusted confidants within the organisation, *karyakartas* would voice opinions about the organisation, its functioning and other members. These are opinions that they would not share with all members. Crucially, friendships within the organisation also became spaces to articulate but also retain disappointments, anger and misgivings. This is crucial to retaining members within the organisation and increasing longevity of memberships.[241]

b) Romantic Relationships

Neha, a 26-year-old Brahmin woman, is someone who has dated exclusively within the organisation (although outwardly, she looked down on the idea of dating and does not approve of others doing it). Her current partner, who she refuses to mention in front of other ABVP members, is also an ex-ABVP member (male). From other sources, I came to know that she has dated within the ABVP (Pranay being one of her former 'boyfriends' but they refuse to acknowledge each other now).[242] She aspires to 'open an NGO' with her current partner. She said that they both have a 'passion to work for the downtrodden' and do *seva*, and it made sense to them to build a career in that direction. As is evident, she has socialised and embedded herself in the organisation through this vocabulary. She spoke to her partner on the phone when other *karyakartas* were not around. On the phone, she was impatient with him, reprimanding him about his decisions (or lack of them). But when she was not speaking to him, she spoke of him quite fondly. He was 'not like the others' or a 'yo-cool dude' boy (implying that he was not reliant on material wealth for his personality). She was deeply appreciative of his vision for

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[241] In the next chapter, I will discuss how for those *karyakartas* who wish to fight elections, friendships are a crucial site of trust and comfort against inter-ABVP politics.

[242] Neha refuses to acknowledge any romantic attachments, past or present, among her ABVP juniors. In front of her juniors, she refers to romantic partnerships as 'timewaste' and disparages those who engage in conversations on this topic.

the nation. He was once a member of the ABVP with a high post, but she was secretive about the nature of his association with the organisation now.[243]

Most relationships remained secretive (reasons for secrecy are discussed later in the chapter) or were known only among few confidants, with trusted *Bhaiyas* and *Didis*, in the organisation. Among them were Sangeeta and Vyom, both law students doing their Masters in DU north campus. I first met Sangeeta during the open day of the help desk set up by the ABVP (among other parties) before the admissions start in Delhi University. She was only one of the two girls among a group of men at the table. She looked genuinely happy to be there – to speak to parents and their wards and give them directions or advice. I was waiting there for Vindhya (a 'senior' ABVP member from DU) but since I did not know what she looked like, I went to Sangeeta to inquire. I introduced myself, rather awkwardly, and I was pleasantly surprised at how open she was about sharing her time and contacts. She promised to introduce me to *bindaas* (cool) women from the ABVP and it was through her that I met Anamika (an ABVP member from DU ABVP; her story is elaborated in chapter 5). I think Sangeeta assumed I knew nothing about the organisation or the Sangh Parivar. Therefore, whenever I asked her a question for clarification, she would start from the very beginning: setting the context, how that particular aspect has developed and its present standing. Her tone was always full of affection and to some it might seem patronising (the act of spelling everything out), but for me it was very useful.

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[243] I was unable to retrieve a lot of information of caste, apart from the oft-repeated statements from *karyakartas* that they did not believe in caste and nor did the Sangh. There is one incident that did stand out in this regard. Neha and Vyom were discussing the EWS quota that was being implemented in the university for the first time that year. Vyom was sharing his views about the loss of 'merit' due to reservations and that 'meritorious' people according to him, also deserved some help. He then spoke candidly about how he desires a casteless society as well, but was against 'wrong people' taking advantage of reservations. 'Wrong people' according to him were those who take advantage of the SC/ST/OBC quota at the university. He went further to say that while the quotas might help, it will still not bring down the stigma. Neha turned to him sharply to ask him what he meant by that. Vyom explained that if his younger sister desired a relationship with 'SC/ST', he would discourage her. According to him, the society would not appreciate this union. Upon hearing this, Neha began shouting at him, accusing him of still harbouring orthodox views. During our conversations, she had previously articulated a lot of resentment towards her mother's views on caste. Neha referred to them as 'orthodox' and desperately wanted her to become more progressive. After many months, Neha confessed that the caste difference between her and her partner would face the obstacles that Vyom had described. Although he did end up agreeing whole-heartedly with her in that conversation, Vyom later told me that while in theory he believes that casteism is awful, he knows the 'ground reality'. He suspects Neha will sooner or later also believe what he was saying. These conversations speak to the dominant castes' interactions with the existence of caste inequality, through an arbitrary articulation of 'merit'. See: Deshpande, 2006; Jodhka & Newman, 2007; Subramanian, 2015.

Sangeeta seemed to me like a woman who is confident about her choices. Sangeeta is a 23-year-old belonging to a lower-middle class Bhumihaar family (dominant land-owning castes). She is from a city in central India which was the seat of a statehood movement in 2000s. The city she comes from is also known for its contribution to Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and UPSC aspirants, a steel plant and is now a state capital. Within the ABVP, she is valued for (in her own words), her 'good schooling' and the fact that she speaks good English. Vyom too is not from Delhi. He is 23-years old as well, comes from a small town near Kanpur and is a Brahmin. I first met Vyom at the Miranda House help desk. He stood unassumingly among other, flamboyant ABVP men. He was most talkative around Sangeeta and Neha, both women he looked up to. He was reverential around older and higher position members of the ABVP. For example, he would stand quietly (only punctuating his responses with '*ji, Bhaiya*' (yes, brother)) with his head bent when an older member that he respected was speaking). For Vyom, over time, his affiliation to the ABVP has also become about his identity as a Hindu. Like many other young, angry, educated Hindu men in the ABVP (Poonam, 2018), being in the Parishad is allowing him to loudly voice his scepticism about 'minority appeasement' (when the government seems to favour the causes of the religious minorities), 'leftist academia' (academic institutions influenced by the ideology of the left), and what he believes is a general silence that Hindus have to observe to be in India ('*Hinduon ka dabke rehna*', Hindus as being oppressed). He is convinced that the 'media is anti-Hindu'. In his circles, when the Kathua rape and murder case happened (2019), the conversations were more about how the focus on the temple as the site of the rape was a strategic ploy and how another Hindu girl who was raped during the same time did not get as much 'screen time' (coverage on the news).

Sangeeta and Vyom are very fond of each other. They met on a 'Supreme Court visit' that was organised by the ABVP. It was then that they became friends and joined the ABVP together. Like Neha, Vyom and Sangeeta kept their relationship a secret from other ABVP members. When I asked her if she and Vyom were dating, Sangeeta immediately took me aside. In a corner away from her ABVP seniors, said that they do not want others to know because their assumption is that it might not be appreciated in the organisation. Hence, they were not open about it. Why did she like Vyom? She looked wistfully and said, 'He is not like other boys.' She appreciates Vyom, aware of his dreams and insecurities. They were visibly good friends and Vyom looked to Sangeeta for her advice. He too reciprocates, celebrates her victories and supports her when she is feeling dejected.

At first, Sangeeta's explanation of coming into the ABVP was articulated in the appreciation of the organisation's work – *seva* for students. She was indeed very satisfied after long days of helping individual students during admissions and having the resources to mobilise for protest. But it also emerged later, she and Vyom had made a very conscious decision very early on in their law studies to be a part of the ABVP: as 'outsiders' to both law, Delhi, and ABVP. She pointed out that ABVP was the only organisation that took law students to the Supreme Court and offered internships with prominent lawyers. She was pragmatic: law needed connections, right from internships to jobs, and ABVP was an organisation that was offering these resources to her. 'This is such a big resource for people like us, who come to Delhi with no connections,' she articulated both their reasoning. Vyom also felt scared that his inability to speak in English might impact his future career. But due to the connections in the ABVP, he saw successful advocates (those who had practices) who did not necessarily have to engage only in English. Sangeeta and Vyom rely on each other for stability as newcomers in the organisation. Both Sangeeta and Vyom owe primary allegiance to each other and have become key sources of support in their time in Delhi. Like Neha, Vyom too was sceptical of those who only wanted to be in the ABVP for the power it provided. But he would never voice his scepticism out loud. He believed, like Neha, that he did 'genuine work' for the organisation (the definition of 'genuine' in this context has been discussed earlier). He uses his own aspirations and furthers them under the ABVP banner. For example, in 2019, he rounded up his group of friends from the Law Centre (Sangeeta among them) and provided 'law counselling' to students. He created a WhatsApp group, circulated notes, constantly spoke to aspiring students and even offered connections within the college administration. He admitted that he was creating this as a base for his future election goals in the college elections. In conversations when it was just the two of us, he spoke of how he felt 'small' in a big city like Delhi. 'Maybe that is why I want to fight elections. So that people know me,' and for this, he needed the ABVP.

Sangeeta, Vyom, Neha and many other *karyakartas* wanting to keep their relationship a secret did not come as a surprise to me. Rumours and secrecy were more prevalent in the DU unit than the JNU unit, in my fieldwork experience. I saw acknowledgement of a few relationships among members but through the grapevine, heard about many more. It was common among members to keep their relationships a secret or only share with few confidants in the organisation. Many a times, women and men alike spoke of their peers in relationships as

benefitting from those connections. Vindhya (27-year-old Gujjar female *karyakarta*), before her meteoric rise in the organisation, was 'secretly' dating an ABVP state executive member. Her ABVP competitors for the Delhi University Students Union (DUSU) ticket (to fight student union elections) from the ABVP used this knowledge to assume that she was receiving favours from the ABVP due to her proximity to power (this will be further elaborated in the next chapter). Vindhya spoke passionately about how women who aspire to be in politics struggle against negative rumours about them, specifically about their romantic relationships. Shaming younger female *karyakartas* about flirtations was a technique that I also witnessed among some older female members who wanted to retain their hierarchy. Older members in relationships tended to be more open about their partnerships than younger ones. Due to the milieu of the ABVP, it was not uncommon to outwardly address fellow *karyakartas* in kinship terms. Inter-caste relationships seemed common but as mentioned, not very visible. The more visible relationships seemed to be among homogenous caste groups. In my experience, I had only encountered heterosexual relationships.

Further, relationships outside the organisation were far and few between with many members finding partners within the Sangh Parivar (within the ABVP, BJYM or the BJP), especially those who came from Sangh families. This too was a factor that influenced how committed they were to the organisation. Among older members, some of my female interlocutors did end up marrying or getting engaged with the men of the Sangh Parivar. This also coincides with their familial associations within the Sangh. Hence, the habitus of the Sangh family remained tight knit. Thus, relationships do play a significant role in how involved one gets in the organisation. Relationships also signal towards their future in the larger Sangh Parivar and especially, mobility within the different affiliates. By finding partners within the organisation, the couples articulated their own aspirations in the language of the movement. I saw instances of this among women in the Rashtra Sevika Samiti (Tyagi, 2020) and this was a finding among ABVP members as well (see for instance, Neha's articulation of her own partnership). If one aspired for mobility within the Sangh, then having a partner from the organisation or another affiliate helped in gaining material and symbolic benefits of being a Sangh family.

c) <u>Help Desk: Crystallising the Connection Processes</u>

Help desk is a make-shift site (a desk) that is put up by different student parties, student bodies or any other group to provide helpful advice during various processes in the university. Most prominently, help desks as systems are present during the admission process to guide new students and parents around university bureaucracy. In it, students themselves use their knowledge and networks to provide the directions. The help desk is an opportunity created by student parties across public universities in India to establish influence and gain new members. In the same vein as hostel allotments by universities (illustrated in chapter 5), this too is a strategy that emerges from a structural inadequacy of the university administration. Each year, the university administrations (especially in public universities) introduce unclear promulgations. Further, the processes for admission and rules regarding entrance marks also change each year. For parents and students alike, these student parties are providing a vital function of making university bureaucracy legible. This becomes even more pertinent for parents who do not have the time or resources 'inside' the university to provide a smoother way through admissions. Further, student activists themselves offer a support network to students and parents who come from outside Delhi to seek admission.[244]

Earlier, all the admission processes had to happen in the university. This involved procuring admission forms and details about courses, campus visits, identifying facilities for hostels and PGs etc. This allowed student parties to have multiple avenues for acquainting themselves with prospective students. In the recent past, the initial steps have been moved online. Due to this, the opportunities for student parties have also become limited. Now, students and their parents come to campus during designated 'Open Days' and during admission after the declaration of cut-off lists. 'Open Days', a more recent introduction by DU and JNU, are organised for various goals: to introduce and troubleshoot queries about the admission process, to get students curious about university life and studies after school, and to acquaint interested students with the campus. Admission days in both universities span weeks. Usually, for admissions, it takes an entire working day (and sometimes more) for the entire process to be completed: first, the student needs to report to the college and course that they are eligible for. There itself, there can be a variety of issues: not enough photocopies of certificates, documents that are needed by the authorities but were not mentioned in official communication, caste certificates, etc.

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[244] A concept like the help desk is also mentioned in Kalyani Devaki Menon's work among Hindu nationalist women (2012). Her work ethnographically shows how women regularly offer time and resources at the public hospitals in Delhi and become a source of support for those who need assistance.

Then, the students wait to be enrolled, pay the fee, deposit the payment slip to be officially enrolled in the college or the university. Then, after a successful enrolment, they have to find avenues for residence around the university. For someone without pre-existing networks in the city, this would be a whirlwind of a few days.

Help desks are a site of a student's initial socialisation into the university, especially university bureaucracy. If they choose to seek help through student parties, help desks are also the site that they first engage with the university politics. Further, the presence of all prominent student groups and parties allows them to witness the diversity on campus and the competition within the student parties themselves. Student parties have adapted and managed to retain their influence in these processes through the help desk. Student parties are present early morning, much before the university officially begins the 'Open Day' to answer questions by incoming parents and students. All student parties occupy prime locations around the entrance gate with a banner and a bench. Student parties try variety of methods to make themselves visible: large banners, badges, brochures, and constantly mobile party activists. Their members float freely around the periphery, wearing badges that imply connection to the help desk, and help those who come towards them. I also noticed that when a student or a parent appeared to be standing alone or looking confused, student party members would themselves approach them for an offer to help. In most cases, they were able to provide assistance. In the recent past, ABVP (and other student parties) have been releasing detailed lists with phone numbers of *karyakartas* on a variety of issues: admission inquiries (at various stages during the process), specific-course related inquiries, region-wise designated *karyakartas*, college-wise designated *karyakartas* (alumni or present students of the college). They also hold online webinars to introduce the course, its requirements, career prospects, much before the admission requirements are officially declared by the university. There is a promise of direct communication with a person who can help with every post that is done online.

What does the space of the help desk represent in terms of my research question? What is its role in the socialisation and retaining of memberships for the organisation and the movement? Here, I would argue that the help desk comes to represent the networks and processes through which connections are made and maintained in the ABVP. The help desk also becomes a very

modern manifestation of *seva* that ABVP offers on campus.[245] This expanse of infrastructure being offered is due to the presence of a large cadre that exists in these universities. The people willing to help and devote weeks of their time and resources for this are also offered incentives (as will be shown in the next chapter). For now, leaving aside the benefits accrued by existing members, these sites are of primary importance for establishing contact and gaining new members, especially those through an impression on their family or kin. 'Call *Bhaiya/Didi* and keep in touch with them' was a sentence I heard many a times after the student and their parent had received help from the *karyakarta*, often exchanging numbers to solidify the contact. In all these conversations, they establish connections instantly. This is done through body language, establishing common areas (geography, caste, kin etc.), sharing their own experiences and providing direct access to themselves and the organisation they represent. I saw all ABVP members providing their personal phone numbers, phone numbers of members who might be able to help the parent or student or calling people in the university directly. As will be shown through the description of protests during admissions (chapter 5), this act truly lays an impact on the parents and students (especially parents). The act of offering 'emotion work' (Hochschild, 1979) is extremely crucial to laying the foundation of affective relationships in these organisations. In the next section, I will demonstrate how everyday *karyakartas* sustain the movement through care and socialisation.

Reverence and Affective Hierarchies that Sustain Commitment: *Judaav* through *Bhaiyas* and *Didis*

'I saw Vani Didi protesting and was very impressed by her. I went to her to express my appreciation and offer support. She hugged me and told me, 'We need more juniors like you'. Then I came to know that she was in the ABVP. I wanted to know more about it (the ABVP). So, every time after that there was a protest, she called me. I joined ABVP because I wanted to be like Vani Didi.'
–Antara, ABVP *karyakarta,* JNU

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[245] Thank you to Dr Atreyee Sen for pointing this out.

'When I first saw Vindhya Didi speak during her election campaigning, I was struck. I approached the people who were with her. They told me that they were in the ABVP. I was surprised by how nice the Bhaiyas were. I felt protected around them.'
–Samriddhi, ABVP *karyakarta*, DU

'We were protesting in our college and ABVP came to support us. I did not know about them then because we are a non-DUSU college. When they saw that we were getting lathi-charged, Bhaiyas came and surrounded us. The Bhaiyas and Didis took an active stand for us. That is why I have a soft corner for them.'
–Barkha, ABVP *karyakarta*, DU [246]

Using kinship terms to address older and younger *karyakartas* is quite widespread in the ABVP (and across the *Sangh Parivar*). I assumed that this was because of the inherent belief of the organisation that articulates itself as a family and has modelled itself as a way for entire families to be embedded in the organisational structure (Sarkar, 1991; Mathur, 2008). As shown in a previous section on familial ties and membership, familial relationships do have a significant impact on how members enter the organisation and their learning of emotional practices in the movement, directly impacting the durability of their membership. But, in the ABVP, the connections between older members, usually referred to as older siblings, perform a crucial function for the organisation and the ideology. *Bhaiyas* and *Didis* (older brother or sister) use their own investments of time, resources and affection, to bring in, socialise and retain members in the unit, based on an idea of mentorship. An individual older member has their own clique and their sub-groups are socialised into their own milieu. Therefore, it was not uncommon to see rivalries and friendships replicated between two older members and their respective cliques. These *Bhaiyas* and *Didis* often carry the additional responsibility of identifying potential members and also gain from their successes in the organisation. Promotions, demotions, and who gets to contest party tickets (strategies of 'cutting', 'anti', and camps, discussed in chapter

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[246] A 'non-DUSU' college is one that does not vote in Delhi University elections. This has an impact on the strength of the student party in the college. In such a case, college politics is also muted and localised.

4) is primarily in the hands of older members.[247] There are several permutations and combinations to the 'formula' for success within the organisation, especially depending upon one's own goal within the organisation. There were some who preferred to spend close to 50,000-80,000 euros to fight for an election ticket in DUSU and appeared to have all the power of the organisation. There were those who even had the DUSU post holders in the palm of their hands as they appeared to be 'king (or queen) makers'. Connections and structural privilege determined this power. As members invest time and effort, these connections are how ABVP retains members and creates life-long loyalists.

The *Didis* and the *Bhaiyas* almost embody the site at which affective relationships can be converted as a source of mobilisation for the ideology. The interactions between older members with their juniors (depending upon how close the relationships were), ranged from being patronising or displaying anger to showing genuine affection. The affectionate conversations, often vulnerable and private, were very important in maintaining the connection between the organisation and the *karyakartas*. In all the interactions when younger *karyakartas* spoke of their affection towards the organisation, it was in connection to older members.

On the part of the younger *karyakartas*, the journey of socialisation into the organisation lay from learning the emotional practices of the organisation and understanding the various hierarchies present, to finally acknowledging them wholeheartedly. This understanding took the form of a reverential acknowledgement of the age and position in the hierarchy of the organisation. Most *karyakartas* displayed a similar way of showing reverence: showering high

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[247] The older members or the ones that have been in the organisation for a long time are very diplomatic, careful with words that details stop mattering. As an outsider, it seems where they finish the organisation begins. I preferred talking to the younger people because they have their own examples to share. Perhaps, when you are an older member, when you have been intensely associated, you begin embodying the organisation. There are some common traits that I have noticed that are indicative of socialisation within the organisation (mainly among men). For example, the older members are always fiddling with their phone (sometimes multiple phones). They are engaging with multiple issues at the same time. Hence, it becomes difficult to get them to answer longer questions. Many members' body language indicates that they are carrying the world on their shoulders. Most times, across the Sangh Parivar, they break conversations and give directions to juniors around. They are also dismissive of any other politics around, often using oft-repeated examples to make their point. They walk fast, they talk fast and expect people to get to their point immediately. I personally do not gain much from these meetings because I never get to hear their personal trajectories, opinions, or insights. It is the same in Samiti where after a point, members choose to articulate their entire habitus in the terminology of the Sangh. As I mentioned, their own personal experiences are articulated solely in the language of the ideology. This to me indicates at least the knowledge of the desired way to carry oneself in this habitus, if not a complete embeddedness in the milieu of the Sangh Parivar.

praise, acknowledging their official titles in the organisation, body language (bowing heads, slightly slumped, especially among men), and not showing active dissent. Although this might seem like an ordinary way of showing respect, in the ABVP, understanding the nuance signalled towards socialisation in the organisation. There is a key link between reverence, socialisation and membership in the organisation.

In this section, I will show the ways in which *Bhaiyas* and *Didis* of the organisation perform affective labour to socialise members (especially introducing them to emotional practices described above) and retain them in the organisation. This will be shown through illustrative profiles of three members in the organisation and discussing further examples of how an active intervention by an older member reaffirmed a younger *karyakartas* commitment to the organisation. As mentioned, reverence signals the crystallisation of the process of socialisation into the organisation. But what happens when members are new and commit a *faux pas* in acknowledging hierarchy? How does the organisation step in to restore and educate the new members about ultimately yielding to power? This will be shown in the subsequent section.

a) <u>Affective Attachments and Organisational Bonds</u>

i. Neha

I had first heard of Neha in a Rashtra Sevika Samiti camp (in Delhi) four months after Ramjas violence in 2017.[248] I was speaking to 17-year-old Akansha, a student in high school, about her dreams after school. Her older sister, Anuradha, was Neha's junior in a DU college. They were from the same neighbourhood in north Delhi. Anuradha joined the ABVP and soon became a 'fan of Neha *Didi* and her activism'. Akansha was in awe of the stories that were told to her by her sister: the campus life, the reputation of colleges and the politics appealed to her. 'Do you know what happened in Ramjas?' she asked me ecstatically. I told her that I had heard that some violence had taken place. 'Yes! There was a lot of fighting! Neha *Didi* was present from ABVP's side. It was Neha *Didi* who took my sister under her wing and told her about the importance of holding their ground in the university.'

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[248] Ramjas incident (2017) is discussed at length in chapter 5.

As mentioned earlier, Neha is a 26-year-old Brahmin woman. She comes from a family of small-business owners who run 'PGs' (Paying Guest accommodations) in the north campus. Her family originally is from Uttar Pradesh. She stays in a lower-middle class area in north Delhi, surrounded by prominent villages with known caste affiliations that make Delhi. Like hers, most families that make up the area are migrants from neighbouring states.[249] Neha has been in Delhi University north campus since she was 18. She began her studies in BA Political Science (conducted in Hindi) in a non-DUSU women's college (the colleges that do not take part in the DU student union elections). She did appreciate her academic discipline but was not studious. She was one of the first women from her college to join and establish ABVP. In fact, it is due to her that there is now a dedicated ABVP unit in her college. She reaches campus usually by 9 am and leaves around 7 pm. Her days are long, mainly with her '*Parishad ka kaam*' (work for the ABVP) and sometimes studies in between. In private, Neha has her misgivings about the organisation. She considers herself a moral compass and decides who is 'here for the right reasons'. She believes that she will 'do good work', irrespective of her association with ABVP. She has fierce supporters (among them younger women) and those who believe that she is a 'genuine *karyakarta*'. One of the reasons why her efforts towards the organisation have been considered 'genuine' is because she has never openly articulated a desire for 'power', usually indicated through a want for an election ticket or a high post within the organisation (this aspect and the idea of a 'genuine' reasoning will be discussed in chapter 4). She claims proudly that her family does not have money 'to throw away for a political career', hinting sarcastically at those in the ABVP who spend millions of rupees for a potential DUSU career. As will be illustrated in the chapter on elections, this works better for her because

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[249] The neighbourhood of Delhi that Neha comes from has been a BJP stronghold and has seen decades of RSS mobilisation. It is also an area where different political, religious, cults and so-called 'gurus' flourish and find followers. The aforementioned villages and the access to the capital city and all its resources situate this area in a middle-spot. There would be private English schools where the main language of communication is Hindi; there are buildings made of glass standing alongside an electric pole with 'illegal' and highly dangerous wires; there are large SUVs attempting to cruise a road filled with potholes, all kinds of vehicles and cows. The neighbourhoods are settled along caste lines and caste affiliations are widely used to refer to neighbours. Due to the availability of cheap accommodation, the neighbourhood now sees university students take up residence. This is also an area with a formidable Hindu presence, fairly ghettoised. To come to the university, Neha first walks ten minutes to the main road from her home. She then takes a shared e-rickshaw from the main road. The e-rickshaw takes 45 minutes to take her to the nearest metro station and sometimes, even longer. She then takes the metro to the University. From the university metro station, she either walks or takes another shared e-rickshaw. The milieu that she comes from is representative of many ABVP members. In fact, three prominent *karyakartas* of subsequent years belong to this neighbourhood.

as a high-ranking ABVP member, she has power over those who chase electoral means to climb within the organisation.

Neha is one of the most widely revered *Didis* in the ABVP north campus of Delhi University. When I finally met her in 2019 (two years after she was first mentioned to me), she was preparing for an MPhil entrance exam in Political Science, all the while taking charge of establishing a unit of the ABVP in a women's college in DU. She was in-charge of setting up the help desk outside the college, making connections inside the college administration, recruiting ABVP members who could assist her in this 'momentous task', as she referred to it. Vyom and Sangeeta, her self-proclaimed 'fans', were among them. Neha accompanies female *karyakartas* home when they are running late for meetings. She calls their mothers and reassures them of their safe return. She visits them at home and is friendly with their parents. 'I'm with Neha *Didi*' is a sentence I heard many a times from some female *karyakartas* while they spoke to their parents if they were running late. Parents who knew Neha did not ask further questions. Those who did not would be visited by her soon enough. Sangeeta, Vyom, Anamika, Jeevika, Rita, Barkha, Akansha and her sister Anuradha, are among the many who look up to her. She seldom spoke but was forceful when she did. Jeevika was impressed with Neha because she did not indulge in *faltu* (unnecessary) matters and worked single-mindedly for ABVP. If someone (in all the cases, a younger member) did not agree with her point of view, she would get exasperated and react with silent treatment towards that member. In fact, patronising (that, younger members do not know any better), silent treatments or personal insults are widespread methods to ascertain control in the organisation. 'The difference between Vindhya *di* (colloquial short form of *didi*) and Neha *di* is that Vindhya *di* will want power. Neha *di* does not want any of that. She truly wants to work for the country,' Anamika, a BA student and ABVP *karyakarta* noted. She was not alone in this observation. When younger *karyakartas* described her, they looked up to her for her desire to 'work for the country' (by doing ABVP work) without a desire for power (the idea of *dayitv* or *seva*). They sought her for advice in internal fights, admired her persistence for the organisation and her unshakeable belief that she was always correct in her thinking.

Now, at 26, she does not have friends outside the ABVP. She does not keep track of her MA or MPhil cohort. By her own admission, her friends, confidants, even *dushman* (foes) are in the ABVP. From a socialisation point of view, she is completely embedded in the DU-ABVP

habitus. In every big ABVP gathering–formal, informal or a protest–she is present. As an ABVP 'veteran', she does not worry herself with the daily affairs of the college unit she started or the squabbles among lower-level members. She only responds to the messages and calls from ABVP higher-ups or her favourite younger *karyakartas* who admire her. Some of those who began their ABVP journey with her have seen her rise with suspicion. But they dare not articulate it explicitly. Neha is a very busy woman—she is busy with setting agendas, organising events, and meeting ministers in the Union government, taking ABVP agendas with her. 'How is your MPhil preparation going?' I asked her a few months after our initial meeting. She rubbished my question away, '*Woh toh ho jayegi. Ye kaam zyada zaroori hai.*' (That will take care of itself. This work (ABVP work) is more important).

ii.   Manoj

Manoj has a certain confidence about his position in the organisation. Or possibly he just portrays himself in this way.[250] He comes from an RSS family and the ideology is known to him. He spent three years in an elite DU college, and this too accrues him a lot of respect in the ABVP circles. He is now enrolled in a master's programme for Law at DU and is sought after for his academic achievements. Manoj is one of the *Bhaiyas* that is revered among the cadre members of the north campus. Younger members go to him for his advice on college politics. They seem to respect his knowledge of the Sangh and its history, and his unshakeable political views. He is reliable even when there is a need to physically fight.[251] They admire his poetry which is rife with ideological overtones and want to become orators like him. Manoj is relied on by older, higher-ranking members. He gets work done quick, gives sharp instructions to those around him, and maintains connections with the local bureaucracy and the police.

Both Sangeeta and Vyom refer to him as a confidant. When Sangeeta was thinking about fighting elections in DUSU, it was Manoj who listened to her concerns and promised his full

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[250] On social media, Manoj posts his own videos or photos where he is the centre of attention. Most times, he is doing ABVP work but the context is the background. The photos and speeches are of him alone or him in the centre of the frame. I find this aspect quite interesting. This uploading pattern is very different from other members, who post on their social media in a myriad way. But for Manoj, for the four years now that I have known him, this has been the sole pattern.

[251] Manoj as an agent of violent Hindutva will be discussed in chapter 5. Here, I will only focus on his role as an older *karyakarta*, mentor and revered *Bhaiya* among my interlocutors.

153

support. But Manoj also went a step further and advised her to invest time in the organisation, rather than spend millions of rupees fighting elections.[252] He had the insight that despite the power of DUSU, the key decisions were still made by ABVP position holders and that is what he advised Sangeeta to aim for. It was Manoj who advised Vyom to assist Neha in establishing a new college unit. This would allow him to take a leadership role in the new unit and gain more experience in the organisation. Vyom could use this to leverage opportunities later. Manoj was the first to arrive on the scene when Anamika (19-year-old female Brahmin *karyakarta*) called for help from her ABVP seniors when 'fighting the left' in a college clash (this event will be discussed in chapter 5). Manoj was also the one who took care of Barkha when her name became known internationally for causing violence in a university in Delhi. Manoj made sure that Barkha made the right decisions to protect herself from the backlash of her involvement. As would be shown in the protest chapter, it was due to Manoj's support and position in the organisation that she was able to not only evade any repercussions from the organisation but strengthen her own position in the local ABVP unit.

iii.   Sonam

One afternoon, Aditi met Vani outside the small marketplace in JNU called '24X7'. Vani seemed angry with Aditi, playfully accusing her of ignoring her messages and calls. Aditi first played along with her. But when she sensed Vani was trying to look for an explanation, Aditi revealed that the stress of the upcoming draft submission had an adverse impact on her mood. She was unable to focus or work. 'I immediately left for Sonam *Didi*'s house. There she fed me, listened to me and gave me advice on how to proceed. Now that I have had this rehab, I can continue to work for a little bit,' she told Vani. Vani then expressed her own discomfort at how her PhD was progressing and told Aditi to come to her 'anytime' she was stressed. She also asked about Sonam's well-being and was happy to know that Sonam was back in Delhi. 'I will also go see her now. I also want *ghar-ka-khana* (home cooked meal) and some love,' Vani told Aditi.

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[252] Further conversations with Manoj also revealed his own attitude towards those who aspired for DUSU. He saw close association with the Sangh as yielding 'better results' than a single-minded preparation for DUSU. This is important to hint towards the internal hierarchies within the organisation.

Sonam is an ABVP member from JNU who is now an Assistant Professor in DU. Sonam was one of the few active and visible members of the ABVP before its rise in membership in 2014. She had been an active member since her Bachelors degree at a university in Uttar Pradesh. She, along with her partner, came to JNU in 2012 to pursue their Masters. Both came from middle-class, upper caste Sangh families in Uttar Pradesh and were active members of the organisation. They were like the revered older siblings of the JNU unit members. They would counsel those who felt alienated in the university and provide unrestricted access to their respective hostel rooms to their juniors. They both believed in the movement and thus, spent a lot of time cultivating relationships across the campus that later turned to committed memberships including Aditi, Vani, Thunlai and many others. Sonam took charge of the ABVP unit and stood for JNUSU elections in 2015. She received resounding support from the younger female *karyakartas*. When Sonam married her partner, they made a home in Delhi that was a haven for these younger women and men. It was Sonam who introduced me to Aditi and Vani.

Sonam, Manoj and Neha are not the only older *karyakartas* performing the role of care for younger members. For the younger ABVP members, the older *karyakartas* provide a tether to the organisation. They provide an entry into the values of the Sangh habitus, 'feeling rules' of the movement, and provide access to their existing networks. As can be seen from the role performed by the *Bhaiya* and *Didis* above, their advice and support is not limited to the work of the Sangh. Being a reliable older figure, they are also mediating the mobility of these younger *karyakartas* outside the home. They are confidants, mentors and source of affection for the younger *karyakartas*.

This kind of care work requires a lot of attention, time and resource investment. The impact of these actions is a strong foundation for relationships within the organisation. Sonam, Neha and Manoj are the lifelines with which the organisation is sustained. When the organisation's heads require *karyakartas*, they rely on the revered *Bhaiyas* and *Didis* to mobilise their own networks, fostered through care and nurturing, to perform those tasks.[253]

b) <u>When *Bhaiya, Didi* Come Home</u>

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[253] By articulating relationships within the organisation in kinship terms could be a way to dissolve heteronormative sexual attraction between members in binary, co-educational organisation. Thank you to Dr Atreyee Sen for pointing this out. During my fieldwork, there were two instances that allowed female *karyakartas* to spend time around their 'crush' and seek time away from home by actively deploying the '*bhaiya*' label.

This is a regular trend in homes that have male members in the Sangh, and among ABVP members–both male and female. In the ABVP, female members got a chance to stay late, stay overnight or even undertake trips due to the influence and connection made by a *Bhaiya* or *Didi* (mainly *Didis*) in their home. In many instances, when a younger member was getting criticism from home on the phone while doing ABVP work, they would go to their trusted *Didi*. The *Didi* then would either accompany them home and speak to the parents or call the parents themselves to assure them of their wards' safety, as demonstrated from Neha's biography earlier. The district, state and national conferences of the ABVP require members to put in late hours or travel for a few days. Most female *karyakartas*, especially those who do not come from Sangh families, begin preparations to convince their families for the trips through the intervention of older *karyakartas*. This is done through introductions of their *Didis* to their families and inviting them home for meals or an overnight stay. The phone numbers of older members are given freely when there is travel. In the following section, I will illustrate the ways in which older members are able to retain members through personal and intimate connections representative through Jeevika's journey in the organisation.

Jeevika is a 22-year-old woman from the Kshatriya (Rajput) caste. Her parents migrated to Delhi from Bihar when she was very young. Soon after moving, they got involved in the ISKON movement and now, Jeevika and her entire family are devotees of Hindu god Krishna.[254] She joined university to study Hindi. It was in college that she first got the chance to hear about the ABVP. She readily joined the college unit under Neha and was soon actively involved in the campus initiatives. She loved being a part of the ABVP – she missed classes, faced a threat of suspension from the course due to poor college attendance, and lost touch with her college friends. But to her it was worth it. She was quickly recognised for her commitment and was promoted to being a campus-level girls' coordinator within three years. Under her, her college unit grew, and she made a special effort to make her juniors join the organisation.

Her own connection was intensified due to some formative experiences with older *karyakartas*. In her first year in the ABVP in 2016, she joined the DU unit to protest against the 'anti-national

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[254] International Society for Krishna Consciousness or ISKON is a religious group devoted to the worship of Hindu god, Krishna. It was founded in 1966 in New York, USA. ISKON is a proselytising group and believes in strict ideas of purity, pollution, and addictions.

activities' in JNU. The protest ended late, and she was worried sick about her mother's anger. In that moment, she approached Samriddhi. Samriddhi, an ABVP *karyakarta* studying Humanities, was one of her beloved *Didis* from the campus. Samriddhi called Jeevika's mother from her own phone and assured her that she would bring Jeevika home. Jeevika was dropped home by Samriddhi late at night. The next day, Samriddhi came to stay at Jeevika's home, making connections with her family and explaining the circumstances that delayed the protest (Jeevika mischievously told me that this frequency did not give her parents enough time to yell at her). Two years later, in her third year in the organisation, Jeevika was attending the *Abhyas Varg* (workshop camp) for Delhi-ABVP. The camp was held for three days. On the last day, Jeevika was electrocuted by a naked wire. She fainted. She was immediately taken to the nearby hospital. On the way, a *Bhaiya* was consistently rubbing her feet and the vice-president of ABVP's north India division fed her sugar (reportedly remedies for electrocution). After she was released from the hospital, she remembered being carried by *Bhaiyas* into the room of a national executive member of the ABVP. She woke up to Vindhya and Samriddhi waiting by her side with food. Her parents were in constant touch with the national secretary of the organisation. Her beloved *Bhaiyas* and *Didis* had not slept a wink that night, but instead waited for her to get better. She was touched to see that they only went to bed after they had seen her eat. This incident stayed with her. I am unsure what the remedies did for the ailment. Here, they are significant because Jeevika remembered these gestures very fondly and they meant a lot to her. Her parents had threatened to pursue legal action against the organisation after the electrocution incident, but Jeevika had laughed it off. Instead, she became even more resolute in her work for the ABVP.

Many *karyakartas* were consoled and supported by their seniors in the organisation when they did not receive the support of their parents for their work in the ABVP. The seniors, *Bhaiyas* and *Didis*, never recommended antagonistic approaches but instead tried their best to smooth things over. Many a times, *Bhaiyas* and *Didis* were involved in deep personal matters of the *karyakartas* and their families. One important aspect that this kind of connection does is to go beyond the university into the private lives of the *karyakartas*. This, following from the success of the Sangh model, enables a more resilient membership and a deeper socialisation into the organisation. In these instances, ABVP did not remain a student organisation, or an important arm of the Hindu nationalist movement on the campus: it transcended boundaries to be involved in the home, just like the Sangh. This is not common among student parties in India

but is common among other Hindu nationalist organisations. This engagement enables a more resilient membership and a deeper socialisation into the organisation. Those *karyakartas* who did not have the support of their families did lose out on opportunities to '*do Parishad ka kaam*' (work for the Parishad). Mere presence ensures that there are possibilities for later gains. Therefore, *karyakartas* themselves are keen to extend their ABVP networks and bring them into the home.

c) Hierarchy and *Samajh*: How *Bhaiyas* and *Didis* Reign Supreme

'Seniors in the organisation know everything. They have all the information. They would even know that we are sitting here and talking.'
–Jeevika, 22-year-old ABVP *karyakarta*

Jeevika said this to me with a lot of confidence. But this sentence was not meant for me. It was meant for two juniors who sat in the room with us. She was elaborating on how elections are fought in DUSU and the role of ABVP seniors in the organisation. A campus in-charge and deeply involved in the ABVP unit's functioning in her alma mater, Jeevika wanted to give the impression to the juniors that she had a huge role to play in their future within the organisation. 'In the college unit, I know what everyone is up to, even though I am not there. I will not do anything now. I will just take a step when they (her own seniors in the ABVP) ask me about *their* character. Then, I will reveal everything', she continued.

Jeevika describes the knowledge of everyday activity in an almost mythical way. Post-holders and higher-ranking members of the ABVP take the most important decisions for the organisation. But it is in the hands of influential campus-level and state-level leaders, upon whose advice they act. For example, Samriddhi explained that when a person expresses an interest in fighting university elections, a network is set up to find out if they have the resources and influence to fight elections. The network consists of designated campus-level post holder and their circle of *karyakartas*. In the next chapter, it will be shown how in order to petition for their ticket in the ABVP, candidates have to win over the long hierarchy of ABVP post-holders. The posts given are also in the hands of someone above them in the hierarchy.

Earlier in the year, there was a fight between a unit member Rita, and the north campus girls' coordinator, Jeevika. Jeevika was upset with Rita for not giving adequate respect to her as a campus-level post holder. She would advise Rita and Barkha (a second-year DU student and ABVP member from her unit) on how to conduct themselves as 'respectable girls'. Her advice would be in the form of yelling at the way they spent their time outside college, personal attacks on their vanity, insinuations on their 'bad' intentions for being in the organisation, to 'stay away' from shady men, to not be naïve and give their phone numbers to any 'random' boy, and demanding reasons for why they wanted to hobnob with the 'seniors' in the organisation. Jeevika's issues were primarily with Rita, who she considered the 'evil mastermind' determined to bring her down. Since, Barkha usually tagged along with her college *didi* Rita, she was also not in Jeevika's good books. Jeevika would always address Barkha as the one who was easily influenced, the one without any power to make out what was best for her. She would tell Barkha, 'All this dirt in your brain has been filled by Rita. I am watching everything.' Barkha would respond, sometimes in tears, sometimes exasperated: '*Didi*, I am fed up. I will leave everything.' The fight between Jeevika against Rita and Barkha became so virulent that 'seniors' got involved. There was a meeting called at the ABVP headquarters. *Bhaiyas* and *Didis*, who were considered impartial judges of character, were called for resolution. Before heading to the meeting, Barkha was resolute in wanting to show all the 'proof' of Jeevika's harassment. Rita declared that she would 'rather die' than shake from her stand. She knew her Manoj *Bhaiya* would support her. They had also reached out to Samriddhi, who was also close to Jeevika. But Samriddhi was closer to Manoj and thought Jeevika was in the wrong. Manoj's influence in the organisation and his support helped: Jeevika has since been respectfully removed from her position and Rita and Barkha single-handedly oversee the college unit that Jeevika helped build. 'When Jeevika *Didi* was spreading rumours about us, we went straight to Samriddhi *didi*, Manoj and Gautam *Bhaiya*.[255] They saved us,' Rita told me after the 'drama' had ended.

Judaav as a Driver of the Hindu Nationalist Movement

A concept that was developed in this chapter was *judaav*. *Judaav* as affective connection is produced through relationships. *Judaav* encompasses within itself the feeling rules and

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[255] Jeevika was a campus-level ABVP position holder. Manoj and Gautam were state-level position holders and higher than Jeevika in the organisational hierarchy.

emotional practices of the Hindu nationalist movement. Family is a crucial site for cultivating this affective connection to the ideas of the movement. Through familial socialisation the importance of the values is indicated. These values are religiosity and spirituality (linked to territorial nationalism), faith (as opposed to a lack of faith among communists), a love for the country and a desire for public good through *seva*. Through an exposure of these values through familial connections and later, older *karyakartas*, *judaav* is produced, acting as a measure of socialisation and connecting members to the ideology and the movement. *Judaav* and its values appear circular and self-sustaining.

The way I have seen *judaav* as a measure of socialisation among *karyakartas* is through their use of emic terms. Among *karyakartas* coming from non-Sangh families and in the 'deep stories' of *karyakartas* coming from the Sangh habitus, a trend emerges to indicate the embeddedness in the organisation and the movement. I see it occurring in three stages: pre-*judaav, samajh* and *judaav*. First is the stage I call pre-*judaav*, where the *karyakartas* are introduced to the values that are considered important as emotional practices of the movement. These values are not limited to the Sangh. But as mentioned earlier, locating them in the Sangh framework allows them to become the blueprint of mobilisation. Values such as kindness, respecting religious practices from the home milieu, respecting hierarchy, desire to help those who are considered less privileged, an orientation towards familial connections and aspiration for a better life. These values become naturalised over time, and as described earlier, *karyakartas* acquire *samajh* (understanding) – entering the vocabulary and the desire to be part of the movement. *Samajh* in Bourdieu's schema of praxis is gaining of the 'emotional repertoire' in the available 'feeling rules' (Scheer, 2012: p. 202). Entry into *samajh* indicates the cultivation of *judaav* through an articulation of one's own religiosity and spirituality. Reverence and acknowledging the inherent wisdom of hierarchy and locating one's own position in the structure are indicators of socialised embeddedness in the organisation.

a) Seva as a Component of Cultivating *Judaav*

Seva becomes an important aspect of *judaav*, articulated in the language of working for *desh* (country), patriotism and Sangh's motto *Vasudeva Kutumb* (all the world is a family). Values such as kindness, accommodating others' needs, desire to help those less fortunate find the framework of *seva* in the Sangh habitus. *Seva*, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, is a

way the Sangh has been able to maintain its public character throughout its existence. Desire for *seva* is also part of the emotional practice of being in the Sangh habitus. Alongside the desire for *seva* is also a set of related 'feeling rules': self-erasure or minimising of oneself at the cost of the ideology or the *Sangathan*. This is indicative of being socialised in the movement.

b) <u>Hierarchy as a Measure of Socialisation into the Movement</u>

Hierarchy is the key word in exerting authority, be it age or rank within the organisation. The way Jeevika talks about older ABVP seniors, hierarchy seems to provide the *karyakarta* with proxy-mythical powers. *Samajh* is already attributed to the higher ups in the organisation due to their position in the hierarchy. *Samajh* here is articulated as knowledge gained from experience. This is used to teach, undermine, or encourage younger *karyakartas* who supposedly lack it because of their inexperience.

The knowledge of internal hierarchy plays the most important role in how one establishes themselves for success within the organisation. Who to be reverential to is a skill that is learnt from experience within the organisation. Understanding the different forms of hierarchy (gender, caste, age, kinship, organisational hierarchy (within ABVP, within the larger *Sangh Parivar*, and even, beyond) is a way of socialisation within the organisation and determines the *karyakarta's* success. In the example of the clash between *karyakartas*, what emerges prominently is that hierarchy is operationalised according to the Sangh affiliation (Manoj having more power than Jeevika). Further, it is understanding one's own position in the hierarchy, articulating one's own aspirations with this knowledge and in the language of the movement. This aspect that I called 'aspiration for hierarchy' is reproducing the structures with no aim of altering the status quo, the way the Sangh has functioned for almost all of its existence. What this socialisation indicates is the engagement with the 'game' that emerges from 'practical sense' (Scheer 2012: p. 202) or 'pragmatics' (Metcalfe, 1999).

What happens when hierarchies clash? Although the members always claimed a united stand (ABVP as a family), different cliques started emerging as the fieldwork progressed. As mentioned earlier, *Bhaiyas* and *Didis* have their own cliques, unofficial camps that are often in-fighting and these rivalries are materialised in everyday interactions. Most jarring in this regard was the example of the first woman from the ABVP who became the DUSU vice-president. After a member privately suggested her name, during the middle of my fieldwork duration, I expressed surprise at to why no one had mentioned her name before. She looked slightly uncomfortable to mutter, 'Politics'.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I showed that the success of the movement lay in creating a physical infrastructure of affective mobilisers. In this chapter, the emotional infrastructure has been illustrated through socialisation into emotional practices through connections. I have shown how relationships and connections have built the movement and the organisations from the ground up. It is these relationships that provide the affective atmosphere through the production of *judaav* that sustain and nurture the movement. This arterial network is crucial to not just the ABVP, but the Sangh Parivar. Behind the movement lie emotional and material investments and, key connections that take the form of familial ties, friendships, partnerships, and deeper connections. Friendships provide avenues for *karyakartas* coming from non-Sangh connections to enter the organisation and be socialised. Relationships play an important role in how one is involved in the organisation. Relationships also become possible sites for mobility within the different affiliates in the Sangh Parivar. This chapter demonstrates the care work that goes into sustaining memberships by older *karyakartas*. For this, they are rewarded with reverence by younger *karyakartas* who, in order to assimilate within the organisation need to understand the hierarchical structure and embed themselves within it. This marks a process of socialisation within the organisation. These values are used by the karyakartas to fashion themselves as committed members of the organisation. Those who do not assimilate and seek to bypass the hierarchical structure, face repercussions that might impact their presence in the organisation. The aim of the *karyakartas* then is to negotiate the structure through their own connections and leverage them for success. What this chapter most importantly shows is that people lead others into an ideological movement and make the static ideas intelligible and

contextual. Without individuals constantly negotiating and engaging with each other, there can be no ideological movement.

Now that the *karyakartas* have been socialised, acquired *judaav*, how do they make informed decisions about their future? The next chapter will attempt to show how this knowledge is used to fight elections and the role that this plays in their personal lives, for the ABVP and the movement.

Chapter 4:

Tayyari (preparation) for Aspiration:
Self-fashioning as a Student Leader and the Drive to Fight University Elections in the ABVP

Introduction

> *'ABVP is like primary school. BJP is like middle school.*
> *RSS is the school completion certificate.'*
> –25-year-old female ABVP activist, JNU

Electoral democracy at a glance appears like a simple linear progression of willing individuals who contest elections, campaign, and accept the results of the voting process. Electoral democracy, in reality, is a much   dynamic, contested, and vivid affair. As Lucia Michelutti (2020) shows, elections are not just temporal events occurring at regular intervals. People interested in participating need to mobilise between the election cycles to remain relevant.[256] The simple linear progression with seemingly three set stages (choosing to stand for elections, campaigning, and voting) is punctuated with many complicated equations that need to be solved before an individual can proceed to the next step.

At a university level, a student party contests university elections to gain control of the official student-run government or student union. A student union is a student government that has official legitimacy. Depending upon the university, the student union has the power to make key decisions regarding student welfare. Philip J. Altbach (1966) sees 'student unions' as an important body in the university campus. He suggests that the presence of a student union has the potential to inspire more radical political activity (Altbach, 1966: p. 178). As demonstrated in chapter 2, there are many politicians in India at the national level who started their careers as student politicians. Further, student unions have made interventions in the larger political landscape of India – the *Navnirman* movement (1973), the JP movement (1974), struggle against the Emergency (1975-1977) are just some of the examples. University students resolve

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[256] As I will show in chapter 5, the mobilisation for elections begins through carefully scheduled protests by student parties at different points during the academic year.

to attain a position in the student union and the power that comes with it. In this ethnography, I found that in places like DU and JNU, where the stakes are quite high for individuals and the party, the process of fighting elections does not begin with the year that these students contest and win the elections. Rather it begins much earlier, as has also been shown by Michelutti (2020) for elections on a larger scale. In public universities like Delhi University, democratic student elections are carried out through a convenient reading of Lyngdoh guidelines that were instituted by India's highest judicial body in 2006 (discussed in the up-coming sections).[257] ABVP and other student parties have found ways to adapt to restrictive guidelines by playing hide and seek with rules on student campuses.[258] On the other hand, in a campus like JNU, when regulations are contested and at times, even rejected, parties like ABVP and NSUI find it extremely difficult to attain power through the student union.

Students invest large amounts of time and resources to lobby for their candidature. The question that I am asking here is: why do students invest spectacular amounts of time and resources to win a student union election in a university? What emerges from the analyses is that student politics is essential for a reserve cadre building in the Sangh (and for its electoral wing, the BJP). In terms of the larger Hindu nationalist movement, presence of these student bodies is favourable to the *Sangh Parivar* as student parties ensure the Hindu nationalist ideology is accessible to a large number of students on campus. On the other hand, from the point of view of student activists, two views emerge (depending upon access to the Sangh habitus): for one group (that comes into the organisation without Sangh connections), this process reveals a complex relationship between individual aspirations, student politics, legal guidelines, and ABVP hierarchies. For them, holding power over the student union is the first step towards a larger, more formidable goal: a journey towards political power and a stable position in the

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[257] Education in India is provided through state and non-state ('private') support. The national and state government run schools and universities come under their jurisdiction. Hence, constitutional rules, such as a uniform pay scale for employees, institution of affirmative action policies apply here. 'Private' educational institutions are expected to adhere to government set mandates and levels to be 'recognised' by the government and gain legitimacy. Rules that apply to public universities, especially in the case of unionising, student governments, fee structures, and rules for corrective reservations do not apply here. Public universities are more in number, and thus invite a more diverse and larger student body. In my study, I am exclusively looking at public universities. See also: Bhatty & Jaffrelot (2021).

[258] Guidelines and laws in a democratic institution assume that rules help mitigate certain inequalities. Here, by performing democracy, I intend to indicate towards the ways in which student parties follow democratic guidelines and rules 'on paper' but are deliberately bending the rules laid by the institution. This is detailed further in the chapter.

parent political party. As shown in the previous chapter, the other group are those who come from the Sangh habitus. They have the cultural capital that allows for more fluid mobility through the hierarchy of the organisation. These *karyakartas* look at the people who 'want to do politics' with a certain disdain (difference between 'selfish' and 'genuine' *karyakartas* highlighted in the previous chapter). Those that do not benefit directly from a Sangh habitus try harder to enter the ranks of the organisation by demonstrating their willingness through elections. The findings point to how elections become a way to petition to the larger *Sangh Parivar* for a more stable place in the organisation (if one does not already have that place guaranteed through the social capital of coming from a Sangh family). Over time, the simple linear equation that was mentioned above becomes increasingly complicated, with *karyakartas* from non-Sangh habitus confronting their precarity in the organisational structure. In the previous chapter I showed the ways in which friendships, kinship, connections and networks enable the initial membership and subsequent socialisation. In this chapter, I argue that it is these connections that are sustaining the movement and allowing it to flourish.

In this chapter, I show how students are aware of the 'investments' and self-fashioning required to make their place in the larger political playfield of India. This will be illustrated through the everyday lives of aspiring student politicians. Students are aware of three factors when they begin this journey. First, as demonstrated from the previous chapter, they must first ascertain their place in the larger hierarchies (including caste hierarchies). Through these socialisation processes and networking, they gain knowledge of resources they must leverage to attain a higher position within the organisation's hierarchical structure. Secondly, they are constantly engaging with a precarious system of risk, rewards and their own unstable position within the established hierarchy. Thirdly, election strategies indicate the specific ways in which kinship and informal networks are mobilised to navigate legal and official rules. Referring to them as 'informalisation', these strategies are crucial to fighting elections and for articulating aspirational goals for the future.

In this chapter, I will detail the way ABVP *karyakartas* fight student elections in DU and JNU to attain control of the student unions. In the next section, I will begin by describing the paradigm shift that occurred in university campuses across India through the 'Lyngdoh Commission' (2006) and illustrate how contemporary student politics has found a way to adapt to a Supreme Court directive on how elections should be conducted. Then, I will describe the

individual process of elections in DU and JNU, respectively.[259] Through this, I will describe the socio-political ecosystem in which individuals take the decision to become 'candidates' (people aspiring to fight elections) and what compels them to invest tremendous amounts of resources to be a part of election process. I will show how young *karyakartas* begin thinking about a future career in politics while still at the university. Apart from learning the emotional practices of the movement and the organisation, I will illustrate the resources and networks that are mobilised by the student *karyakartas* to be considered serious candidates by the parent party. Like the previous chapter, I will rely on emic terms like *Mazbooti* (strength), *tayyari* (preparation), *anti* (to go against someone), *cutting* (to sabotage) etc. to demonstrate the *karyakartas'* articulation of their journey and investments for their aspiration. Lastly, I will discuss the ways in which informalisation, hierarchy and strategies of disavowal are operationalised through elections.[260]

Lyngdoh Guidelines

University students have been extremely active in creating possibilities of political socialisation within and outside campuses. As illustrated in chapters 1 and 2, India has seen a vibrant student movement since the time of the establishment of higher education institutions.[261] Many student-led interventions in post-Independence India were led under student unions in various universities (*Navnirman Andolan* of 1973 under student union in Gujarat University and its affiliate colleges; *Sampoorna Kranti* (1974-1975) under Delhi University student union). In fact, during the Emergency, student union leaders were specifically targeted by the regime since they had influence over the institutions (for example, SFI in JNU and ABVP in DU, since they had won union elections) (Jayaram, 1979).

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[259] A larger part of this ethnography is based in Delhi University since it is a larger and open campus, and thus has a larger student body.

[260] In this chapter, I focus on the election fighting strategies and everyday lives of student *karyakartas* in the ABVP. ABVP does not exist in a vacuum in the university campus. In both DU and JNU, there are strong student organisations that compete with the ABVP. These student parties and organisations have their own rich histories, networks, and socialisation practices. Due to the nature of the ethnography, I will be only focusing on the strategies of ABVP members.

[261] There have been mentions of student activism from colonial reports in 1880s (Weiner, 1963) and post-Independence (cited as 'student indiscipline' (Shah, 1990)).

The phase under review in this chapter has been coined as 'post-liberalisation student movements and agitations' (Martelli and Parkar, 2018). In early 2000s, there had been incidents across India in quick succession that brought forth the ways in which student politics needed some regulation. Incidents of vandalism and harassment were rampant in university campuses.[262] In August 2006, student leaders in Madhya Pradesh assaulted a professor mediating student elections. The horrific incident saw the inability of police and university administration to intervene against violent student leaders (and the support they had of national political parties). The professor succumbed to his injuries and died of a heart attack.[263] In response to the increasing instances of student politics taking a violent turn, the Supreme Court of India was given a list of recommendations by a committee constituted under former Chief Electoral Commissioner, James Michael Lyngdoh. In September 2005, the Human Resource and Development ministry of the government of India formed the committee. The 'Lyngdoh committee' worked for nine months to produce suggestions that would transform 'certain aspects of student body and student union election' (HRD report on the commission, September 2005). The report was submitted in May 2006 and in September of that year, the Supreme Court directed for its implementation.

a) Lyngdoh Committee and its Recommendations

The Lyngdoh Commission guidelines were to provide a framework to universities for conducting student elections. These guidelines suggested 'direct elections' for small campuses (citing JNU and HCU by name). For larger campuses, there were suggestions of 'indirect elections' and a hybrid model (where elections are held at college level and the college representatives constitute an executive body to elect the highest position holders). The student bodies were to only have registered university students and no involvement of the faculty.

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[262] Times News Network. (2011) New V-C at Meerut University, *Times of India*, 11 September 2011, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/New-V-C-at-Meerut-University/articleshow/10098678.cms [accessed on 8 February 2021].

[263] NA. (2006) Two ABVP Leaders Arrested for Ujjain Professor's Murder, *Outlook Magazine*, 31 August 2006, https://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/two-abvp-leaders-arrested-for-ujjain-professors-murder/411432 [accessed on 27 December 2022]. See also: Mishra, N. (2006) Brutal Murder of Ujjain Professor Exposes Politicians-Student Unions Nexus, *India Today*, 11 September 2006, https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/crime-/story/20060911-murder-of-prof-harbahajan-singh-sabharwal-in-ujjain-784724-2006-09-11 [accessed on 20 January 2023].

When fair and free elections were not possible, the Lyngdoh guidelines suggested that the university or departments should work to constitute student bodies based on nominations. It proposed that these nominations should not be based on 'purely academic merit'.[264] The election process was mandated to be a maximum of 10 days and was to be conducted annually. Elections were recommended to be held within '6-8' weeks after the commencement of the academic year. The commission suggested a gradual transformation of the regulations (providing a time frame of five years). It further suggested reviews of the student representation every two years and mandated that the reviews take into account all stakeholders in the university.[265]

Altbach (1991) coined the phrase 'permanent student' to describe individuals who continued to stay on campus to engage in university politics, long after their studies were over. This was an issue that was hotly raised during Lyngdoh discussions. The age of the candidates was also decided to be under 22 years for a candidate enrolled in an undergraduate course and under 25 years for a postgraduate course. A relaxation of three years was given to research students in universities; they could take part in the election process till they attained the age of 28. The students were to have no 'arrears' (failed papers) (the committee refused to prescribe a particular mark for eligibility). The interested students should have been enrolled in the university course that has a total duration of more than a year. Further, the committee suggested a minimum 75% attendance or minimum attendance prescribed by the university, 'whichever is higher'. The students contesting should not have any criminal or disciplinary action, within and outside the university. Lastly, the committee recommended that audit reports of the university elections should be published not more than two weeks after the declaration of the results.

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[264] Further, these nominations were to be seen as an 'interim measure', while acknowledging that the nomination system is riddled with 'several flaws' and put the condition of using this system for a limited time.

[265] "The primary objective of these reviews will be to ascertain the success of the representation and election mechanism in each individual institution, so as to decide whether or not to implement a full-fledged election structure" (Lyngdoh Commission Recommendation, 6.1.5).

b) Retaining of 'Party Playthings' and How Lyngdoh was Received

'With the view to prevent the inflow of funds from political parties into the student election
process, the candidate*s are specially barred from utilising funds from any other sources than*
voluntary contributions from the student body.'
--Lyngdoh Commission Report 6.6.4

'Earlier there was a power of the 'student leader', they were influential.
Lyngdoh has ruined that'.
–Ramesh, ex-DUSU joint secretary, ABVP *karyakarta*;
now apprenticing with a BJYM member

Ghanshyam Shah (1990) in his study of student movements observed that student parties were not more than 'special pressure groups' of their parent organisations. When the Lyngdoh recommendations were first suggested, they were expected to be game changing in the way student politics and elections were conducted. Smriti Kak Ramachandran's piece (2006) is representative of the hope for change that these recommendations generated especially regarding student politics moving beyond being 'playthings' of bigger political parties.[266] The hope was the students would be able to establish their own brand of politics and identity. But has that been the case?

In my study, I found that student politics is representative of the larger politics being conducted outside the university. Political parties across the spectrum are deeply involved in the execution of university elections. The committee attempted to cover all its bases of making student

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[266] Kak (2006) writes,

'The recommendation to keep political parties out has for once got the Congress and the BJP to talk the same language. Both parties claim that their "presence is to foster the future leadership of the country". They claim that in a democracy where students fight elections based on ideology, political parties are like a "source of inspiration". In other words, they insist that the umbilical cord cannot be snapped. With both the Lyngdoh Committee and students taking divergent views on the issue, a middle path offered by others calls for students to maintain their identity and not end up as playthings of any political party'.

See: Ramachandran, S.K. (2006) Campus elections: Party Time is Over, *The Tribune*, October 14 2006, https://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20061014/saturday/main1.htm [accessed on 11 February 2021].

politics an independent enterprise: implicitly, when it tried to limit the election spending to rupees 5000 (approximately 57 Euros), to explicitly declaring that no non-student can be a part of the election process. But political parties have found a way around the recommendations. The case of the Delhi University is the starkest where DU authorities have not challenged the regulations set by the committee but have allowed a free reign of the interpretation of the Supreme Court mandated rules.[267]

In my participant observation, interviews and social media documentation, it becomes starkly obvious that in the case of ABVP, the *Sangh Parivar* with all its might, is mobilised for the Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU) elections. This is the case across the spectrum of student parties and political ideologies present on university campuses. But in all the cases, these mobilisations occur 'unofficially' since the rules assert for independence of student parties. Thus, ABVP's denial of connection with BJP (that it is not the student wing of the BJP) is not only strategic, but also required under law, a way that the strategy of disavowal has been mobilised during university elections.[268]

Between 2006-2012, there were no student union elections in JNU. JNU fought a four-year battle with the Supreme Court (2008-2012) to attain a five-point relaxation in the guidelines. One of the most prominent was the easing of age limit for research scholars for contesting elections. Second was the number of times students could contest elections (the committee put a cap on one). They also found an extension of campaigning time from 10 days to 30 days. Apart from JNU's direct contestation of the rules, there have been other critiques of Lyngdoh commission that have come from student leaders in campuses across India (as Ramesh's quote points towards). DU authorities did not fight any legal battle to adapt rules. Instead, there are 'official rules' followed and entirely new strategies of informalisation devised to avoid legal ramifications of not following the rules. Almost every year, DU elections are under purview

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[267] For example, to establish the student elections as a university enterprise and limit outside influence, a regulation states:

> 'During the period of the elections no person, who is not a student on the rolls of the college/university, shall be permitted to take part in the election process in any capacity. Any person, candidate, or member of the student organisation, violating this rule shall be subject to disciplinary proceedings, in addition to the candidature, as the case may be, being revoked.'

[268] The argument of political parties' intervention in university elections was that they were creating and grooming future leaders. The Lyngdoh Commission put this onus of creating these 'leadership programmes' on the university instead.

from governmental institutions (as illustrated later in the chapter) but the process of fighting elections has been perfected in a way that no one faces repercussions. In the following section, I will describe the everyday lives of aspiring student politicians and *karyakartas* of the ABVP. I will focus on the students' own meaning making practices of student elections and the processes of their self-fashioning as aspiring student politicians. This will be demonstrated through ABVP units in two campuses: DU and JNU. Further, I will illustrate how student politicians use informalisation strategies to fight elections in their campuses.

Tayyari and *Tapasya* (Preparation and Struggle): How ABVP *Karyakartas* Fight for DUSU

In this section, I will demonstrate the conditions required for a *karyakarta* to begin aspiring as a student politician and fight elections. Crucial for DUSU-aspiring activists is *mazbooti* (strength) to fight elections. *Mazbooti* comprises of various factors and determines the claim that activists can make towards their parent party to give them an election ticket. But before we go into how students fight DUSU, it is imperative to know why DUSU is important for them in the first place. Why is there such a struggle to fight DUSU elections? In the schema of electoral politics in India, DUSU is important because it is an election that is very well-known, owing to the reputation of the university and the scale of the electorate. Deep involvement of national parties attracts more attention to the goals at stake. DUSU is widely considered as one of the most successful routes to becoming a politician in India. DU politics has given many contemporary politicians.[269] Successful DUSU candidates from the ABVP have gone on to join BJP in influential positions and this too is a significant factor for its attraction among the *karyakartas*.[270] There is an aura of respect attached with '*isne DUSU lada hai*' (they have fought DUSU) among student politicians. By fighting in DUSU, one carries with them the

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[269] Ex-Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, ex-Sports Minister Ajay Maken, former Parliamentary Affairs and Sports minister Vijay Goel (senior leaders) and many others are a testament to that (see table on ABVP alumni and table on future trends of those who fight elections).

[270] Shakti Singh, DUSU president from 2018-2019, joined BJP in a ceremony hosted by ex-BJP Delhi unit chief Manoj Tiwari (both from the state of Bihar, an aspect discussed later); ex-DUSU Secretary Mahamedhaa Nagar was made the *Pravakta* (spokesperson) for western UP before crucial UP elections in 2022.

impression that they can win a constituency if trusted with a ticket by the 'party'.[271] Some students claimed that DUSU is even bigger than a Member of Parliament (MP) election because the electorate consists of all the student body of the entire university: a more diverse constituency spanning across the national capital region.[272] Out of 72 colleges in DU, 52 colleges are in DUSU. The aspiring 'candidates' (ABVP *karyakartas* interested in contesting elections, henceforth referred to as candidates), even before receiving a ticket and official go-ahead from the party, are required to go to each college and meet with students. They are required to tell them about ABVP and its work.

Pranay knew of the ABVP before joining DU. He had seen his cousin brothers' involvement with the organisation. He first encountered the organisation himself through the help desk during his admission process in 2012. His cousin had directed him to go find the ABVP help desk. He was assured that the people there would help him in procuring and filling the admission forms.[273] He joined the ABVP once he started university. Months later, there was a horrific rape of a student in Delhi. ABVP was among the several organisations that had mobilised anti-rape protests in the city.[274] Many students were mobilised by *bhaiyas* and *didis*. Pranay was among them and he found his anchor (*judaav*) through these protests.[275] Through socialisation in the ABVP, in Pranay's own articulation, there is a transformation from *bachpana* (childhood naiveté) towards becoming an aware member of the nation. This *bachpana* is present during the school years and even, the first two years of under graduation, he observed. The socialisation involves a realisation of the higher place of the nation and community. One of the ways in which this is done is through 'exposure to society'. Pranay

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[271] Iftikhar, F. (2020) Delhi Assembly Election 2020: Six Former Delhi University Presidents in the Fray, *The Hindustan Times*, 24 January 2020, https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/six-former-du-presidents-throw-hat-in-poll-ring/story-V6Vyjz14IErDkNWuqn6E0K.html [accessed on 6 January 2021].

[272] This claim needs to be substantiated as in the recent years, only 40% of the student body of the university votes in the elections. In 2019-2020 DUSU, 1.3 lakh students reportedly cast their votes.

[273] Pranay says that people manning the help desks would buy 50-100 forms so that students did not have to stand in line for them at the university. This was before the admission process was moved online.

[274] A consistent ABVP claim has been that it has been the sole organisation which is still fighting the case and its repercussions, including the Juvenile Justice Act and capital punishment for all the accused. Members also claim that 'Nirbhaya's' parents attended ABVP's events till 2019.

[275] Pranay's *judaav* (affective connection) has been discussed in the chapter on connections to show this impacts socialisation into the organisation.

specifically notes ABVP's initiative '*Samajik anubhooti*', a survey activity done in poor areas of Delhi (the initiative began in 2016). He was 22 years old at the time. Jessica Taft (2017) has noted, '… activist stories of the self are socially patterned and embedded in larger cultural vocabularies, interpretive frameworks, and discursive contexts' (Taft, 2017: p. 28). As explained in the last chapter, through Pranay's self-articulation of his involvement (and most other activists as well) in the organisation, I see a learned use of the emotional practices and 'feeling rules' as a way of being socialised in the milieu. For example, for Pranay, the idea of a particular kind of patriotism should be a default ('natural') feeling among all inhabitants of a territory. The conceptualisation of 'insult' to the symbols of the nation: the idea of the army, the integrity of the nation-state, the idea of a nation embodied in the female form – all invoke a reaction that makes the case of patriotism a personal objective. Further, his use of the Hindutva ideas of religiosity: vegetarianism, the narrative of Hindu temples, and everyday rituals are repeated in a way that he is located firmly within the framework of the ideology and its symbols. This reflects how individuals are socialised into a movement: to identify what aspects are valuable and how assimilating those values will bring material or symbolic benefits. Thus, his use of the words that describe an entry into 'political' reflects the discourse that surrounds him, the 'embedded' nature of his own journey into the movement. This is, as Taft notes, a way for him to make his claim into the movement.[276] [277]

Pranay is from a village near Delhi's national capital region. He belongs to the Gujjar caste and was 26 years old when I met him. At the time, he had been in the organisation for eight years. His father is a wealthy farmer and landowner. Pranay enrolled in a bachelor's course for Hindi when he entered a college in Delhi University. He decided in his third year of undergraduate degree that he wanted to DUSU *ladna* (fight DUSU elections). He did not come to this decision abruptly. Through his socialisation in the milieu, he was able to ascertain that it was people

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[276] In my analysis of Rashtra Sevika Samiti members' entry into the movement, similar thread emerged. Members who were new to the movement (not coming from familial connections) needed to prove their connection to the ideology by associating their connection to the symbols before coming into the organisation and the movement (Tyagi, 2014). I see members of the ABVP making a similar claim and this is how I see it as 'learned behaviour' and a measure of socialisation.

[277] This aspect of ideological socialisation as eventually appearing 'natural' is what RSS and its networks have been successfully able to do. Mathur (2006) argues that we must take the claims of RSS that it is a cultural organisation very seriously. I add to this by showing how the RSS is able to create an ideological 'infrastructure' (thank you to Prof. Rupa Viswanath for her advice on this) to enable such a deep and committed socialisation into the ideology.

like him who fought elections and the activities he was required to do before he could fight them. He had been working in his college unit of the ABVP diligently and was the president of the college's ABVP *ikai* (unit). He attended, and more importantly, brought 'numbers' (number of people) to the protests that were organised at the university and city-level. He frequently 'hung out' at the DUSU office and was a reliable *karyakarta* for the ABVP post holders in the campus. He was also in the good books of some of his ABVP seniors and knew that his caste would help him gather a significant vote share during the elections. In his second year in the organisation, he sounded this idea with some trusted seniors (*bade bhaiya*, older brothers) in the organisation. These seniors asked him to check at home (*ghar par baat karo*: speak with family members)-- implying to check with his family whether they would fund his *tayyari*, his preparation for fighting DUSU elections. He expressed the inclination to fight DUSU to his father. His father cautioned him that politics is the game of cunning and that Pranay would not be able to play that game. 'My father thought that I was too sensitive (*kaccha dil*: weak heart) for this. But I told him that politics also needs good people and I want to bring honesty (*imaandari*) to dirty politics.'

Ananya, on the other hand, came from a family of Sangh-BJP members. She also comes from the Gujjar caste and has roots in a village in Haryana, near the National Capital Region (NCR). She joined the university in an off-campus college in 2010 at the age of 18 to study Political Science. At the time, she knew only of the Sangh and not the ABVP.[278] There was an active ABVP unit in her college and she joined it. She became deeply involved in her unit, organising events and taking part in the protests. Soon, her senior in the unit introduced her to ABVP members in the north campus. She attended four-levels of *Abhyas Varg* (short duration camps; levels are campus, zonal, state, and national level) within her first year. Her intense involvement led to her being made the north campus' girls coordinator (colleges in the north campus and north Delhi) within a year. All parties need to project a female candidate and all parties were struggling to find women to make a DUSU panel. There were not many visible women *karyakartas* when Ananya began her association with the organisation. 'When I joined, there were only three women, surrounded by a sea of men during the anti-rape protests in 2011',

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[278] Delhi University is scattered across the capital and has two campuses (north campus, south campus). Colleges that are not in these regions are referred to as 'off-campus' colleges. Apart from women's colleges (except Miranda House), the most sought-after colleges in the university are in 'north campus'. DUSU office and the ABVP Delhi office are also located in the north campus.

she recalled.[279] Ananya's connections and her involvement in the organisation led many to speculate that she wants to fight DUSU elections. These rumours were fuelled especially since she was a powerful female *karyakarta* in the ABVP: an uncommon instance from a decade ago.

Ananya claims that there was a 'buzz that was created' in her name, and she slowly warmed up to the idea that she would want to stand for elections. During her time, there was a practice of 'parachute candidates', where the student party, to get the *samikaran* (equation) of the panel right, would project candidates that were not involved intimately with the organisation.[280] Upon seeing the 'parachute candidates', most prevalent in the case of women, Ananya thought about her place in the organisation and decided to stand for elections.[281] She followed the same procedure as Pranay: first inquired with her trusted seniors in the organisation, who asked her to check at home. Once she got a go-ahead from her father, she ventured to ask within the ABVP. '*Unhone kaha aap tayyari shuru kar do*,' (they asked me to start preparing) she recollected. I used Pranay and Ananya's initial journeys as student politicians to introduce the different aspects of socialisation into the milieu. Having set this foundation, I will outline the basic requirements for candidates' DUSU aspirations in the following sections.

a) Enrolment in the University

Bare minimum to begin preparation for elections is to be an officially registered student in the university. Some courses are more favoured than others if one wants to fight DUSU elections. Discipline of studies is also important as part of this decision. Choice is based on the department's regulation of attendance. DUSU, due to Lyngdoh guidelines, requires its candidates to have cleared all past papers and this is also the reason why many candidates take a year or two to clear their 'ER' (Essential Repeat; papers with less than 40% marks) and then contest DUSU. More flexible the department is with respect to marks and attendance, the more attractive it is for the candidate. A master's course in Buddhist Studies is a lucrative course for

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[279] The number of women in the ABVP has increased in the recent years.

[280] Panel *samikaran* is explained later in the chapter.

[281] 'Parachute candidates' is a well-known strategy that is used extensively in national and state elections in India. A candidate is considered a 'parachute candidate' when they contest elections for a position or place they have little connection to. They are invoked specifically for elections and have minimum engagement with the constituency before or after the election season. It is primarily done to cut the vote share of a particular candidate. For example: Jha 2020.

those who want to contest DUSU (since there are no attendance requirements).[282] Law studies provide an element of respect (as being perceived 'more intellectual') than the course in Buddhist studies. But the disadvantage with Law faculty is that the student is subject to more rigorous requirements: of attending classes. Hence, to better their chances, candidates enrol in Buddhist studies, an entrance exam that supposedly requires no preparation and no pressures to maintain an attendance record. Pranay tried for the Law entrance exam for a year after his bachelors. The year he enrolled for Buddhist studies, he got 'cut' (significance discussed in a later section) from the race for ABVP ticket. Hence, he had to wait for another year to get a chance to contest. Vindhya is Ananya's junior in the organisation and also comes from the Gujjar caste. She is from Ghaziabad, a city in the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh. Vindhya first completed a degree in English literature for her bachelors in a college in DU and then enrolled in the Law faculty. She was detained for two semesters due to her attendance record. She too changed to Buddhist studies so that she could contest DUSU.[283]

b) *Mazbooti* (Strength): Ability to Mobilise for DUSU

Not everyone can mobilise the numbers required at large events. The ability to mobilise is key when someone is preparing for DUSU. Pranay says that when if there was need to bring 50 people to the protests, he said he 'tried for 51'; this was one of the ways to show *mazbooti* (strength in their candidature).[284] This is indicative of 'leadership' within student politics. An *ikai* is known by the biggest influencer *karyakarta* – someone who can mobilise numbers in college. 'My old college unit is still associated with my name because I was holding fort there,' said Pranay. Discussed below are some of the factors for *mazbooti*.

i. Entourage

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[282] Lyngdoh guidelines recommended that either the attendance is set to 75% or set by the university. But it does mention in the clause 'whichever is higher', which means that 75% should be the bare minimum. Delhi University's department of Buddhist Studies uses a part of the guideline (by setting its own attendance limit).

[283] The changing of subjects is also indicative of how education is not the sole aim of these students coming to university. Politics is seen as a promising future career.

[284] During Help desk season, the ABVP members claim that NSUI students interested in contesting DUSU have to bring people for their help desks because their college units are weak. Those students that are 'hired' by NSUI wear badges in the name of the interested NSUI candidate. ABVP, since they have the numerical strength, claims that they do not have to resort to this and wear ABVP badges only.

To fight DUSU, a candidate needs an immediate entourage of at least 10-15 people at all times–an array of supporters who will mobilise resources, take calls, organise and assemble numbers of people. Kin, friends and acquaintances are roped in before pre-election campaigning and assigned various tasks (*sambhaalna*: to take responsibility). Most of the members of an entourage come from the same caste group as the candidate. These people, *karyakartas* claim, come to help because of the goodwill that the candidate has established by doing 'good work' with the students. The entourage is always present with the candidate, hanging around them, answering phones, and handling aspects of the relevant stage of campaigning–a core group that the candidate relies on, the base for which informalisation strategies are operationalised for elections (explained later in the chapter).

The entourage is known by the candidate they surround. The members of the entourage themselves derive a sense of entitlement from the strength of their candidate (probability of them getting a ticket). In a local market around the north campus in Delhi University, shop owners are repeatedly harassed by the entourage members using names of candidates to get their way–all because their associating candidate is contesting DUSU. People use the name of the candidate to get favours, assert control of the situation, and display their power. *Hawaabazi* (literally, to throw air) is a term *karyakartas*, their entourage, and friends used for this kind of behaviour-- of throwing their weight around (see also: Jeffrey, 2010; Björkman, 2014).

This has decreased in recent years because there is a need for a good 'image' that a candidate needs to sustain. 'It is fun, but we know it is not the right thing to do,' a member of Pranay's entourage observed. Pranay said that the entourage needs to behave well when they are canvassing because the impression of the entourage also registers in the minds of the voters. 'Mature', 'decent', and 'approachable' are qualities that a respectable entourage needs to have. Irresponsible entourages or individuals associated with a candidate have cost him their ticket and reputation. Sohini, a 26-year-old female Bhumihaar ABVP member, gives an example of Sunny Dedha, an ABVP member who won the election for vice-president in 2015-2016. She explained that while Sunny *bhaiya* was kind, his entourage was violent and aggressive. This landed him in trouble with the organisation and earned him a bad reputation. 'Now a serious candidate never considers Sunny *bhaiya* as a mentor if they want a ticket from the *Parishad*,'

she said.[285] The benefits that the entourage might derive for helping a candidate are also transactional. These relationships result in mentorships and have a possibility of the favour being returned in the future.[286]

ii. Pre-election Campaigning

When Ananya was given the go-ahead to contest from her family and close associates in the organisation, she first 'declared' herself: of doing *tayyari* as an aspiring candidate. She made a team of her close associates within the organisation (choosing her entourage) to first begin her pre-election campaign and establish herself as a probable ABVP candidate. She was then 21-years-old and in the last year of her undergraduate studies (preparing to study Law for her Masters). Pranay had invested in the process before nomination by pre-campaigning three times in his DUSU career so far. 'Pre-campaigning' process is to show the organisation (student party leaders) that aspiring candidates can mobilise votes and have the resources to conduct election campaigning which also showcases their *mazbooti*. Before elections, 10-12 candidates are identified as 'serious' aspirants. These are the candidates who might get the ticket. The aspiring candidates are then sent to designated colleges. Each aspiring candidate, before being given a ticket (a month before a panel is declared) is given a 'route' (physical route of the colleges they need to cover) by the ABVP state committee. They must exhaustively campaign for ABVP as a prospective party for the elections in those routes. They introduce themselves and the organisation to the students. They ask for votes on behalf of the ABVP and tell their voters that they might stand in the elections. This practice, that requires a minimum of 10-15 lakh (ten to fifteen thousand euros) from the candidate, is to show their *mazbooti* to the organisation.[287] For ABVP members, this would involve visiting ABVP *ikai* in different colleges. The ABVP *ikai* would mobilise students and prepare to meet with the aspiring candidate.

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[285] Dedha typifies the 'goon' image that is associated with the ABVP. During his reign in DUSU, he was involved in assaults and vandalism. For example: PTI. (2017) ABVP Leader Sunny Dedha Booked for Assaulting NSUI Member at DU, *DNA*, 10 March 2017, https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-abvp-leader-booked-for-assaulting-nsui-member-at-du-2349134 [accessed 11 January 2021].

[286] The way these relationships are activated is elaborated in a later section on informalisation strategies.

[287] One lakh = 1,00,000; in currency, one lakh rupees would be approximately 1100 euros.

A candidate's connection to the *ikai* is dependent on their personal relationship with ABVP members in that unit. Sohini noted, 'How many people welcomed you in the college, how many people garlanded you, how many cars and people followed you – these are all the things that indicate how influential you are and your potential to get a ticket.' To demonstrate one's *mazbooti* is to show the resource mobilisation that a candidate is capable of, also indicative of the networks that a candidate can summon (also, Srinivas, 1955; Björkman, 2014). During these days, these candidates are observed by the ABVP echelons that are making their decision of the finalisation of tickets, based on the responses received by the candidate. If an aspiring candidate knows that someone else in the ABVP is also doing *tayyari* and they have a more solid ground in a college, they build their connections elsewhere. This is a practice of building alliances across DU, so that when time comes for fighting elections, they have the *mazbooti* based on relationships that have been built over the years. Caste kinships are also mobilised during these times, especially those who have kin studying in DU as well.[288]

What pre-election campaigning ends up guaranteeing is a promotion of ABVP as an organisation that is contesting. Ananya claims that it was ABVP that began the practice of 'pre-election campaigning' because the official time given to campaign after receiving the nomination is too short: 10 days. Even before tickets have been allotted to the students, ABVP as a serious election party has already been established. This is also how student parties in DU manage to stick to the Lyngdoh guideline of 10 days of election campaigning, through the unofficial pre-election campaigning. Thus, pre-election becomes one of the ways in which rules are not technically broken but are bent (quite substantially).[289]

The crescendo of *mazbooti* is culminated in an event called '*shakti pradarshan*', a rally of the candidates to show strength and support. 'Your support base is made visible then,' Pranay proclaimed. All the friends, networks, and acquaintances of the candidate are part of the *shakti pradarshan*. People are hired to add mass to the crowds. Constitution of the crowds also sends a message to voters. Those with aggressive and masculine crowds are not favourable, as they

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[288] Caste kinships are especially important to mobilise resources (cars, people, money) during elections. This would be further also explained in the next section and its relevance would be elaborated in the section on informalisation strategies.

[289] 2019 was the first time that ABVP declared a list of 10 aspiring candidates; there was secrecy about who would eventually get the ticket.

tend to 'intimidate voters'. During *shakti pradarshan*, having female supporters at the forefront of a male candidate sends a message that the candidate respects women and gives him a 'softer image'. A female *karyakarta* remembers Pranay's entourage as, 'Pranay *bhaiya* was always respectful to girls. But even *bhaiyas* (other male members of his entourage) with Pranay *bhaiya* were decent. They were all nice *bhaiyas*, unlike many who try to use their position to talk to girls and say awkward things.'

iii. Nomination and 'Ticket': Declaration of the DUSU Panel

After the unofficial go-ahead given by the ABVP to begin *tayyari*, candidates after the pre-election campaign go through another round of filtering by higher ABVP position holders, dramatically at midnight. By this time, around eight candidates are left and they seek to file nominations. The days before the finalisation of the panel are a nail-biter for *karyakartas*. It is an atmosphere highly charged with intrigue and anxiousness. The candidates make final appearances at the DUSU office and the *karyalaya* of the ABVP.

Finally, five to eight candidates file their nominations. They are already aware of the position they would be contesting in the panel (president, vice-president, general secretary, joint-secretary). There are more names given for nomination than the panel so that the party does not lose out if nominations are cancelled or become invalid due to election rules. 'I was a bundle of nerves! All these years of work and months of preparation would all go (to waste) if there is even one mistake on the form,' Ananya remembered her day of filing her DUSU nomination. DU authorities then scrutinise the forms, reportedly a very difficult task to pass. If they pass, there are supporters of each candidate waiting outside the filing centre to celebrate with the candidate. It is after nominations are confirmed that the parties declare their 4-member panel (*panel samikaran banna*, to make a winning panel composition).

Due to the intense internal competition within ABVP, two to four years are the average number of years that a candidate needs to finally obtain a ticket to contest DUSU. Pranay's journey in the organisation is representative of most *karyakartas* who aspire to fight elections. He had done his *tayyari* zealously for three years before he got a ticket as he had spent three years in the ABVP college unit. In the next two years, at ages 21-22, he prepared to enter Law faculty. During this time, he was building his support base, and lobbying with the organisation. In his

sixth year, he enrolled in the Buddhist studies programme. At the age of 23, he was hopeful that he would get a ticket to contest elections, but due to panel politics (*samikaran*, discussed later in the chapter), he did not get it. At age 24, his seventh year as an ABVP member, Pranay was finally given the go-ahead to begin his *tayyari* and later received the much-coveted 'ticket'.

c) Attracting Voters

i.   Self-fashioning as a Candidate

> *'You need to straighten your hair if you want to fight DUSU'*
> –Sohini, ex-north campus girls' coordinator

Jeevika, a recently graduated MA student in Hindi, is a 23-year-old woman *karyakarta* who comes from the Rajput caste. Jeevika, an ABVP post-holder (Girls' coordinator of north campus, DU), said that when a woman *karyakarta* began wearing saffron *kurta* and straightened her hair, 'they' (other ABVP peers) knew she would declare herself a candidate soon. Straight hair indicates that the woman candidate is well groomed.[290] A saffron *kurta* is to show affiliation to the *Sangh Parivar*. Saffron is the colour of the *Bhagwa Dhwaj* (Bhagwa means saffron), the flag that *Sangh Parivar* members pay ultimate homage to. For men, the 'uniform' of a candidate is a white shirt and blue jeans. For women, it is a *kurta* (long tunic) and straight hair. These are just the small ways in which candidates fashion themselves as aspiring politicians in Delhi University. Ananya said that she climbed terraces and on the shoulders of the men in her entourage to say her piece, once while being held by her feet campaigning from a ledge. She claims she lost her voice, all this while wearing her hair loose and ensuring no sweat puddles in her armpits in Delhi's sweltering heat. Ananya recalled that in the days of campaigning, to look presentable to her voters, she would go through four-five *kurtas* a day and visit a beauty salon every day to maintain the straight hair. She recalls,

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[290] In literature, hair holds metaphorical meaning to indicate honour. Straight hair in Victorian literature has been used to indicate purity, a virginal heroine, and was used to contrast with the curly hair (or messy hair) of the antagonist. Hair has been used has indicated docility; straight hair designates a woman who conforms and desirable to patriarchy (Gitter, 1984). Studies have also shown that women with straight hair are considered more professional. This bias leads to disadvantage women with curly hair, disproportionally impacting Black women (Rosette & Dumas, 2007: p. 407). I draw my hypothesis from tropes above -- the need to project themselves as good and groomed women.

'There is a certain standard that women have to adhere to if they are to be taken seriously. It is 35 degrees Celsius outside but you cannot tie your hair up. It is torture! I had to change my *kurta* for each college because I would get puddles of sweat in my armpits after each campaign.'

While women have to appear spotless, men should look *saaf* (clean). *Saaf* is a look that embodies a groomed beard or a clean-shaven face, white shirts and fitted jeans with spotless shoes. 'If you look unkempt, no one will look at you, let alone listen to you,' Sohini said. There is also a more implicit need to look 'good looking' or desirable. Pranay was considered a 'full-package candidate' by his supporters for the following reasons: he spoke well, was a good *karyakarta*, could organise events, and lastly, 'the girls liked the way he looked'.[291] When photos are circulated, candidates need to look their best self. Grooming is part of the process of *tayyari*, which leads to a more 'refined' candidate by the time the panel is declared. While both are required to look 'attractive', there is certainly unequal pressure on female *karyakartas*.

ii.   Poster Politics

Posters are an exercise in image recollection and image interpretation to produce recall value. Posters are still seen as the most effective way to propagate among 'neutral students' (students that have not been affiliated to any party). Official Lyngdoh rules prohibit poster spending beyond 5000 rupees (57 euros). Candidates find new and innovative ways to swerve the rules in their favour and avoid penalties. Some of the strategies include changed spellings, adding of vowels, use of famous figures of the namesake, graffitis and, cups of *chai* at tea stalls etc. For example, before the 2015-2016 elections, billboards began appearing across Delhi. These billboards had three elements: the name 'Priyanka', an image of actress Priyanka Chopra, and the number '4'. These billboards were linked to the candidate who was running for vice-president from the ABVP, Priyanka Chhawri. For outsiders, these posters held no importance and made no sense. But for people versed with DUSU politics, these posters were a way to hoodwink the election officer by clearly stating the ballot number of the candidate, while evading any direct link to her.[292] The fact that these subtle indications were enough for

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[291] Pranay got married during his BA and has a young child. He shared that he has to keep these aspects of his life hidden because this would make him 'less desirable' as a candidate.

[292] An NSUI candidate, Rocky Tusheer, followed the same strategy in 2017 (Singh, 2017).

interpretation points to the deep socialisation into student politics. The National Green Tribunal every year pulls up Delhi University authorities for the excessive wastage of paper through pamphlets and posters. The candidates claim innocence via these tactics. Usually, the university authorities fine the candidates a measly 5000 rupees and forget about the whole affair.

iii. 'Dummy' Candidates and 'A-names'

Names on the voting machines are listed alphabetically. To sway undecided voters in their direction, candidates try to place their names at the top of the voting list. Many candidates add the letter 'A' to their names while filing for nomination to increase their chances of getting votes. It is not uncommon to see names 'A.A.A. Mohit Nagar', 'A.A. Ashutosh Mathur' in the candidate list.

It is also common among competing organisations to nominate 'dummy candidates' of the same name, for the same post.[293] This is done to cut the vote share. Ananya claims that in her year, NSUI filed 'dummy candidates' named Ananya, spelled differently, to cut her votes. During the voting process, there is no mention of the organisation except the ballot number and the name of the candidate. 'Those Ananyas got 5000 votes! They did not even need to campaign!' she exclaimed. Despite these phantom namesakes, Ananya won her seat.

iv. Social Media

> *'I have shouted slogans, but whenever I felt that the police would beat me, I would slowly fade away into the background.* Mujhe thodi na DUSU ladna hai *(I have no desire to fight DUSU)! There were those who deliberately posture themselves and be visible. Some use this as a way to propel themselves forward–to come into the limelight.'*
> –Samriddhi (ex-north campus girls coordinator)

Shouting and leading slogans are signal to *karyakartas* who among them has political aspirations. There is a pressure to attend protests and be visible (through memory and

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[293] Like 'parachute candidates', putting 'dummy' candidates is also a strategy to cut vote share in the national and state elections. In this strategy, similar or same names of candidates are registered to contest elections. See also, Srivastava (2014). This is different from 'dummy' as a campaign strategy described later.

increasingly, social media documentation) if a *karyakarta* wants to climb higher in the organisation. Sohini's remarks are significant in this regard: most candidates highlight their photographs in protests, especially in confrontation with the police, as a sign to indicate their devotion to the cause of the students and organisation. Pranay's pre-election campaign was full of his photographs in protests: a sign that he was devoted to public service. This is just one of the ways in which candidates project themselves as an election candidate to their parties and potential voters. Social media is relied on heavily during mobilisation. Social media analytics also indicate how these candidates are able to mobilise interest on the ground. Facebook pages around candidates are updated with photographs, posts, reports on college visits, and hash tags are employed even before a candidate officially declares that they are vying for a ticket. There are individual teams behind every candidate working on different aspects of canvassing. Each candidate has a dedicated social media team. After a candidate is given a ticket, the *Sangathan* (ABVP) handles the social media. Candidates need to utilise their social media extensively and there is constant pressure to update their feeds. 'If I have left a college after campaigning, within five minutes my social media should reflect my visit and mention the people I met by name and if possible, with their social media handles,' Pranay explained. There is a dedicated team: someone who takes the photograph, sends to someone else who will edit the photograph and then someone who uploads the photograph. At the same time, the entourage has to take pictures, upload it on their personal social medias, and tag the candidate and his page to generate the social media presence.

v.   'Dummy'

'The guy was waving differently. I squinted my eyes and it was his dummy!'

Three years after his election campaigning, Sohini was pulling her friend's leg about hiring the 'worst dummies' for his campaign. 'They looked like him but everyone could tell they were not Pranay.' 'Dummy' is also a term used during the final stages of election campaigning. Since the time for official campaigning is 10 days, candidates hire lookalikes to go to each constituency and campaign as them. These doppelgängers allow the candidate to continue the intensity of their campaigns across Delhi–a formidable figure of 52 colleges across the national capital region. Sometimes, a team member handling photographs and social media commits a *faux pas*. The dummy strategy backfires as sometimes, the team uploads simultaneously and

the voters comment on the unlikelihood of the candidate being in two places at once. Thus, social media posts are also intricately timed and planned to not arouse suspicion.

vi.   Daily Routine during Election Campaigning

After finalisation of nomination, the university officially gives the candidates 10 days for election campaigning. Individual state-level leaders of the organisation work with candidates and plan everything about their campaign. During election campaigning, the daily routine of a candidate is strenuous. Clocking an average of walking 10 kilometres and 18-hour days, candidates in total spend 30-35 days canvassing across Delhi (including pre-election campaign, but excluding the time and resource investment before official *tayyari*).

Pranay described his typical day as waking up at 6 am and reaching the first college (pre-decided for the day by the ABVP in-charge assigned to him) for canvassing by 8:30 am (before classes begin between 8:30-9 am). The candidate and his team begin speaking to students, going into classes and canteens, a process repeated in multiple colleges. This continues till 6 pm, until college campuses empty out. They rest between 6 and 6:30 pm in their cars, waiting for students to make their way home.[294] Candidates and their teams then direct their attention to where students live such as college hostels, paying guest accommodations, neighbourhoods outside campus where students live, eateries frequented around campus for evening meals and, metro stations. Candidates claim they do not have time to eat, and they snack in their cars between colleges. Cold drinks are prohibited so that speaking and sloganeering are not hindered. Around 10 pm, the candidates have a meeting with the organisation's leaders and brief them about their day's campaigning.[295] They are then given their route for the next day. The meeting continues till midnight. The candidates and their team then have to plan their route that has been given to them. This involves informing ABVP units, friends, and acquaintances in the target area about their planned route for the next morning. The entourage and the candidate finally return to their election base between 2-3 am in the morning.

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[294] Colleges that run 'morning' and 'evening' courses are planned separately.

[295] Officially campaigning stops at a 'particular time' (10 pm) but friends of the candidates continue canvassing late into the night. Sohini told me that she had campaigned for Pranay in her campus till 2 am.

Friends and ABVP units wait for the candidate with impressive welcome arrangements (garlands, bands, posters, slogans etc.) at the respective colleges. Their job is to introduce the candidate and chart out a canvassing route for them in their college. Called 'class to class' campaigning (also done during pre-election campaigning), candidates aim to reach as many classes and college spots as possible, introduce themselves and the organisation, and put across their agendas for the elections. Ananya said that the average time she spent in each class was two-three minutes, asserting that she was consistently hurried because she was taking too much time. 'I took my time to explain my points and spoke till I was satisfied,' she remembered. During her campaign, she spoke about ABVP, how it is the most reliable student's organisation and her agenda of women's security. She promised her voters mobile Police Control Room (PCR) vans outside every college, self-defence classes, and fully equipped medical rooms.

Who Fights, Who Wins: The Formula of *Samikaran* (Equation)

'There is nothing more exciting than elections in Delhi University. It is an experience of a lifetime.'
–Neha, 22-year-old, Brahmin female ABVP *karyakarta*, DU

A panel consists of the post of president, vice-president, general secretary, and joint secretary at the level of the university.[296] *Samikaran* is the formula of constituting a winning panel in the elections. *Samikaran* is the election strategy: the coming together of identity math. My interlocutors are in a consensus that for the past few years, there is a prominence of Jats, Gujjars, Yadavs, and Rajputs in DUSU elections (see table in the appendix). This formula changes dynamically according to who has presence 'locally' (referring to the national capital region). Prominent regions and identities have their own groups and are considered a homogenous vote bank (disabled students, students from the north-eastern states in India, students from Hindi speaking states, and specific state demographics prominent in individual

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[296] Individual colleges in DU also conduct elections and student parties project their candidates in them as well. While college elections are more low-key, they help elect 'councillors' who go on to join the DUSU executive body, which mainly controls the financial endowments to the student union.

colleges).[297] In this section, I will show the factors that determine if a *karyakarta* fits the bill for fighting student union elections. These are implicit factors that students come into the knowledge of when they begin to aspire for more powerful positions in the university. Based on these factors and other tactics, *karyakartas* attempt to solve the equation and fashion themselves as the right fit. The intricacies of this knowledge determine how a *karyakarta* conceptualises and articulates their *tayyari*. Although these factors are well-known among those who are embedded in the milieu, when first speaking about aspiration to become a candidate, these factors are deliberately veiled. This is because they indicate the nature of politics in India that builds on systemic privilege and perhaps, even put doubt on the ideas of democratic, free elections in the minds of the voters. *Samikaran* and related political strategies show that there is more going on behind the curtains and that election campaigning is just the tip of the iceberg: for both the voters, and the *karyakartas* who are new to this habitus.

a) Money Matters[298]

'If you want to make a future, you need to invest in it.'
–Ramesh, ex-DUSU joint-secretary

Pranay sees politics as a career path. He was not academically oriented, unlike his brother who excelled in the natural sciences. His father funded his brother's studies to become a pilot. In the same way, his father left no stone unturned (in terms of money) for Pranay's election campaigning. 'To fight DUSU, you must have a minimum of 50 lakh (50-60 thousand euros) with you,' Sohini gives a ballpark figure of the money required to fight elections (also, Björkman, 2014: p. 618). Contrasting this with the local Delhi MLA elections, *karyakartas* say that since the scope of coverage is so vast (52 colleges across the Delhi region), it justifies the volume of capital needed.[299] This practice has been normalised across student parties in Delhi

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[297] For example, students from Kerala in particular colleges or the emphasis on the students from '*Poorvanchal*' (Hindi speaking from Eastern UP or Bihar) is increasing. This was reflected in the selection of a Rajput candidate from Bihar in 2019.

[298] During these conversations, I was told to not mention the figures since the official rules cap spending at 5000 rupees.

[299] Jeffery (2008) finds that OBCs find ways to invest in local bureaucracy and political networks for upward social mobility. I find this reflected in my ethnography as well. The links between caste, capital mobilisation and the relevance of Delhi's geographical location will be elaborated later in the chapter.

University. Pre-election campaigning alone costs approximately 10-30 thousand euros ('between one to three lakhs for each day for 10 days'). Pranay went through this drill thrice. Costs after ticket and nomination are another ball game altogether. Ramesh reportedly spent 80 thousand euros (77 lakh) on his campaign for joint secretary in 2015. Janani, a 22-year-old Buddhist studies student from Jat caste, spoke with pride that her DUSU victory was relatively cheap: 'only 15 thousand euros'. Raju Rawat, a candidate who won the post of the DUSU joint-secretary in 2013, is regarded highly as someone who fought his elections in 'just five thousand euros' (five lakh). '*Uske ladkon ne bahot mehnat ki* (his boys worked very hard),' Ramesh said, emphasising on the need of having a good entourage and good networks. Sohini also remembered Rawat's campaign as one of the last one's that was 'genuine' since he did not rely on capital to win his campaign.

Where does this money go? Money is primarily used for 'political sociability' (Kumar, 2019: p. 2).[300] First and foremost is the visibility of large SUVs (predominantly, white Fortuner cars) sporting the candidates' name that are deployed, ranging from 10-15 in number that house the entourage of the candidate. 'You show your money power through these cars,' Nishchal mentioned, a *karyakarta* and part of Pranay's entourage. '*Woh itni gaadiyan ghooma raha tha matlab uska accha chal raha hai* (he had many cars sporting his name in campus, which is a good sign),' Sohini recalled, indicating his *mazbooti* (campaigning going well). Secondly, the money is needed for hiring and maintaining of crowds in Delhi for the period of election campaigning. One needs a sizeable sea of people behind the candidate as a show of support, especially during *shakti pradarshan*. This mass of people is many times hired, especially during the day of nomination. Young men from villages around the national capital region (usually within caste networks) are given daily allowances, hosted in apartments in areas around Delhi (for example, Maurice Nagar is a neighbourhood adjacent to north campus of Delhi University). These individuals have to be transported and provided for (*dhyan rakhna*; to take care) with food, and 'facilities' like non-vegetarian food and alcohol. Thirdly, money is needed for posters, billboards and editing work for social media. 'If I follow the Lyngdoh guidelines, with 5000 rupees, I will not be able to cover even 10 colleges,' Pranay claimed, justifying the large volume of money needed to fight elections. Most of the *karyakartas* skirted around the

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[300] Here, I understand 'political sociability' from Kumar's explanation as social transactions, involving material or symbolic exchanges in the context of elections or voting (Kumar, 2015: p. 2).

claim that money is distributed among voters. All members maintained that reportedly no money goes to the ABVP, all the while claiming that within NSUI (National Students Union of India, youth wing of the Indian National Congress), leaders are paid off. There was also a consensus that men have to spend more money on their campaigns than women.[301]

b) Caste

A team member of a NSUI-affiliated DUSU member believed that '*NSUI Jaton ko ticket de, ABVP Gujjron ko* (NSUI favours Jats for tickets, ABVP favours Gujjars),' a view also held among some members of the ABVP.[302] Pranay began his *tayyari* in 2016. He was surprised that he was 'cut' (denied a ticket) at the last moment in 2017. The act of making the 'cut' comes from higher echelons of the ABVP. His entourage of *karyakartas* reasoned that it had to do with the caste math that is done before elections–there could be only one Gujjar and he was at the time, dispensable. There seems to be more fierce competition between two people of the same caste doing *tayyari*, than inter-caste rivalries (table in the appendix details the caste and gender particulars of ABVP candidates from 2010 onwards).

Pranay is now a seasoned member, speaking of the organisation as an extension of his own identity. The first time we spoke, he spoke assuredly that there was no casteism in ABVP–an impression of ABVP that outsiders apparently have. It might be rare that someone's surname comes up, he claimed (though in the very next sentence he said that surnames and their caste affiliations were common knowledge). He asserted,

> 'There is no *bhed-bhaav* (discrimination). We all sit in a line and eat together. The plate
> that I am eating in in the morning, might be used by some other student in the evening

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[301] The way this was explained to me was using the example of expenditure for men in boys' hostels across the campus. Female candidates do not have to indulge their male voters with alcohol, food, and even, sex workers (only 2 members spoke about this to me directly) to the extent that male candidates do. There are numerically more male residences and dormitories affiliated to the university than female ones. The role of alcohol is quite common is establishing 'political sociability' and has been demonstrated in Kumar (2019) and Picherit (2019).

[302] This view of associating Jats with NSUI-Congress, other castes (especially Gujjars with ABVP-BJP) is a view that transcends college campuses. Farmers' protests in India (2020) had invited a variety of responses. One strand is that castes in Haryana alleging that the farmers protest were a Jat-protest against the non-Jat rule of the BJP in Haryana. See for example: Daniyal & Lalwani (2021).

and I might get someone else's. We might not necessarily do this at home, but we do it when we join the ABVP.'

While outwardly in the expanse of the *Parivar* there is a claim of caste blindness, there is clearly a cognisance of how that blindness is performed (the acute awareness of transcending traditional purity/pollution points in that direction, as also demonstrated in an earlier chapter through 'strategies of disavowal'. See also, Deshpande, 2006, 2016). Yet, despite the performance of caste blindness in the everyday life in the organisation, caste also plays a crucial role in who can aspire for elections in Delhi University elections (particularly within the NSUI and ABVP). Castes that have historically been associated with land wealth around the Delhi region (Jats, Gujjars, Ahirs) are identified as the most willing to spend the resources to fight university elections.[303] While the theatre of the elections takes place in north campus of DU, the real caste math happens in the colleges of south campus where the population of those who can aspire for elections is higher. South campus attracts more 'locals', those who can mobilise resources ('man power, muscle power').[304] This caste math is determined primarily with the ability to spend cash during the elections.

'General' category students are those who do not fall under the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes lists. Sohini pointed out 'general' category students are not a significant vote share and are considered 'others' in the election caste math through the *samikaran*. An extremely ambitious *karyakarta* Anamika mentioned matter-of-factly, that 'Brahmins' like her are not given tickets in DUSU and she will climb within the organisation through her 'hard work'.[305] She was encouraged to do *tayyari* by her friends but she laughed the suggestion away because 'in DUSU politics, being a Brahmin is a taboo'. My understanding of Anamika's belief that being a Brahmin is 'taboo' comes from the fact that in DUSU elections, being a Brahmin does not yield benefits (whereas Brahmins dominate the Sangh

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[303] This aspect on why particular castes are involved in electoral politics in this region will be discussed later in the chapter.

[304] Although Delhi University is highly competitive and requires high marks for entry, colleges in north campus are considered more 'elite' in the context and invite higher percentage cut-offs for entry. Thus, there is also an internal hierarchy among Delhi University students of their campus affiliation.

[305] Nupur Sharma, now a BJP spokesperson, is cited as a rare case of Brahmin fighting DUSU elections in the recent past (she was DUSU president in 2008). She was most recently in the news for insulting a religious leader on national television.

hierarchy). It is the castes that are not dominant in the Sangh hierarchy that jostle for their place in DUSU elections and aspire for a higher position thereafter. The way I decipher 'hard work' in this case is the social capital accrued through Sangh relations and implicit in that is a Brahmin identity, similar to the idea of 'merit' as conceptualised by Ajantha Subramaniam (2019) (here I would also invoke Satish Deshpande's finding that in such a schema upper-castes (2013) project themselves as casteless, while other non-dominant castes have to align with state given vocabulary of caste to be recognised). In the ABVP schema, unlike OBCs who petition through election process and victories, dominant caste students find themselves as position holders in the ABVP. In the caste *samikaran* that takes place, I find a reflection of my finding regarding hierarchies and aspiration. While Sangh hierarchy continues to be dominated by Brahmins, there is a way in which other castes find a way to aspire for a place in the set hierarchy. The Sangh structure allows them to aspire for a position but within the limits that have already been set. Thus, here I see an apt example of non-Brahmin OBC castes that have traditionally not been a part of the Sangh hegemony find a unique position within the structure.

c) The Role of Gender

'No matter how 'feminist' these organisations try to portray themselves, across parties, there will always be more men on the panel.'
–Akansha, 22-year-old ABVP Brahmin *karyakarta*

'If a young girl wants to succeed in politics in India, she has to become mentally invincible.'
–Vindhya, 24-year-old Gujjar ABVP *karyakarta*

ABVP has come a long way from struggling to project women candidates for its panel (including 'parachute candidates') to now. Ananya feels that her visibility and success within the organisation propelled many other ambitious women to come forward and claim their posts. Pranay's camp claims that he was 'cut' in his first year of *tayyari*, even though he was 'deserving' (an idea similar to 'hard work' and 'genuine'). There was a woman needed on the panel and he was the only candidate who was replaceable (based on caste and region *samikaran*). Pranay's camp still holds grudges against the woman candidate who got to contest in 2017 (both are from the same caste group). *Karyakartas* also give an example of Anjali Rana, who was able to fight in her first year (a rare instance) because she fit the *samikaran* of

the panel. She is currently the vice president of the BJYM's Mahila Mandal (Women's group of BJP's youth wing). In every election, there are female candidates needed for one of the posts in a four-member panel. The constant composition for almost a decade now has been three men and one woman: this seems to be the formula for framing a DUSU panel. Within the organisation itself and inter-panel rivalries, women compete against women and men compete against men. Female candidates are projected against other female candidates from different parties for the same post. While there is a caste math that takes place, there is also gender math. In the past four years, three Gujjar women and one Jat woman have won from ABVP. In the past five years, there has always only been one woman in the panel. To make the most popular candidates compete against each other, positions within the panel are kept secret by the organisations. The position given to the woman is also a way of strategy where competing parties keep their female contenders and their position in the DUSU panel declaration secret until the very end. They might strategise dynamically based on reliable information leaked from different camps. Ananya's position in the panel was decided dynamically as she was a recognisable face during the elections in her year. She wanted to and 'deserved'[306] to stand for 'Pres' (president of DUSU) but the organisation asked her to compete against NSUI's strongest candidate, Ritesh Verma as the vice-president. Verma is also a Gujjar and by making her stand against him, she divided the caste vote. She ended up winning her seat as vice-president and was the first woman from her community to win DUSU.

Female activists find that succeeding requires an extra skill over their male counterparts: to become immune to rumours about themselves. When Vindhya, a female ABVP member from the Gujjar caste declared herself as desiring to fight elections, her opposition, both within and outside the organisation, fanned rumours about her. 'I have been accused of extremely vulgar things, from within and outside the party but I have always fought to establish myself and my talent,' she asserted. Even today, *karyakartas* speculate over her of use blackmail to get her DUSU ticket, of seizing other's platforms and protests, claiming credit, and the list goes on. Women seeking power and facing questions over their honour is not a new trope. *Karyakartas* note that when a woman gets a ticket, initial conjectures are around who is supporting her, especially in the case of women who are not coming with relatively high monetary resources and networks. '*Isske peechhe kaun hai*?' (Who is behind her) is a question that both suggests

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[306] The idea of 'deserving' is discussed in detail in a later section.

and alleges a dishonourable reputation. 'There will be questions about your character, no matter how 'genuine' you are,' Sohini, a 25-year-old Brahmin female *karyakarta* noted. If someone is in a relationship within the organisation, that relationship comes under the lens and is branded a transaction (*use karna*; to use) to fight elections.

Within the same caste, candidates need to compete with each other for a position to fight DUSU–the same pattern is also reflected in gender category. Due to the trend of one woman per panel, the competition, through the *samikaran* math, would be then most intense among women of the same caste aspiring to be candidates. Samriddhi asserted that it is women who bring other women down, a 'curse' in politics. 'You know how women are,' she said, implying that there is an inherent need among women to compete with each other. 'We can't keep secrets. It is Kunti's curse,' Vindhya also noted.[307] But she quickly contradicted her earlier statement, adding 'backstabbing' is infrequent and there is a presence of sisterhood in the organisation.

In the previous section, the variables of *samikaran* math were elaborated. I demonstrated how different aspects of identity work in tandem to create possibilities for a candidate to fight elections: capital mobilisation, caste and finally, gender. For this, young aspiring *karyakartas* begin to learn of these factors early on in their association and hope to use this knowledge to fight elections and do *tayyari*. This is just the second layer of socialisation and self-fashioning into the world of student electoral politics at the university. In the next section, I will show the different strategies that candidates and their teams learn and execute during the *tayyari* process. These are another level of social codes that these university students need to learn to negotiate university's electoral democracy.

Peechhe ki Setting (networks behind the scenes), Camps, *Cutting*, and *Anti*: Informalisation, Opacity, and Survival Strategies in Student Elections

Nazar is a 23-year-old Brahmin woman *karyakarta* and Ramesh's '*muh-boli behen*' (sister, not through kinship bonds but through mutual affection). She noted that she worked hard as an

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[307] Kunti is a figure from the epic Mahabharata. Kunti is the mother of five sons, who were together called the Pandavas. Kunti's curse is a reference to a curse by her elder son, Yudhishtir. Kunti had received a boon from a deity that allowed her to bear sons. She kept a secret about a son she had out of wedlock. Her son accuses her of keeping a secret that could have prevented the fratricide that occurred between the families. According to the story, he then curses her and the entire womankind that they would not be able to keep secrets.

ABVP member but did not know how the '*peechhe ki setting*' (networks behind the scenes; strategies that are not observable to common *karyakartas*) worked. To understand this complex system of risk, rewards, and long-term benefits, Sohini claimed that a *karyakarta* needed to work in the organisation for four-five years. But just working is not enough–one needs to access the labyrinth where such decisions are taken to 'work internally' and understand how this system works, for *peechhe ki setting* to be made visible. To 'work internally' is to be exposed to the otherwise secret and complex workings of the organisation that would not be visible to someone outside the circle. These are just some of the strategies that the *karyakartas* deploy to further their aspirations in their milieu.

To gain access in these hallowed circles is itself another level of socialisation within the organisation. This is most visible in the 'camps' identified among the *karyakartas*. Ananya's first order of business when she decided to do *tayyari* was to form her teams in each college. 'I had been in the ABVP for a long time and I had *my people* who I could count on,' she said. The game of alliances and which organisational worker allies with which ABVP post holder is a math that *karyakartas* must do in the early weeks of entering the organisation. Those coming in with Sangh networks are already aware and have an advantage over those who have no connection to the Sangh. There are camps behind every candidate within the organisation. To illustrate: Vinod Kulveer College (name changed) is a women's college. It is a 'non-DUSU' college. This implies that this college does not vote in the DUSU elections. But the women *karyakartas* of this college's ABVP unit were always found at the beck and call of an aspiring candidate. North campus girls' coordinator Jeevika consistently admonished Rita (20-year-old, Jat woman *karyakarta*) and Barkha (18-year-old Brahmin woman *karyakarta*) for hanging out with an aspiring candidate and not staying in college and doing ABVP work (a part of their fight has been mentioned in the previous chapter). Jeevika even felt entitled to report to Barkha and Rita's parents that the girls were 'on the wrong track'. 'You know the reputation girls have when you hang out at DUSU (the DUSU office), even though you have no work here?' she threatened them with questions about their honour. 'You are wasting your time by spending it with the candidate–let him at least get the nomination.' What is implicit in her command to Rita and Barkha is to weigh their benefits and make a conscious decision with whom to align with within the organisation.[308]

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[308] The competing tensions between electoral and organizationally aligned *karyakartas* is elaborated further in a later section on 'Life after Elections'.

a) *Cutting* and *Anti*: Ways of Political Strategising

Camps are particularly visible in the run up to the declaration of candidates done by the ABVP state and regional level leaders. These camps try to outdo each other, spread rumours, and engage in attempts to 'cut' the other from the running. Interestingly, considering that there are set ideas for caste and gender in the panel, the *cutting* and *anti* (colloquially, against someone; explained in the following paragraph) are occurring within same caste and gender groups. *Cutting* and *anti* are strategies that are seen as the reality of being in the business of electoral politics. These are socialisation practices that are learnt. These are also the strategies that point to the everyday life of being a *karyakarta*. Competition is cut-throat: students begin collecting 'negative points' (something that is dishonourable or would decrease the stature they currently hold in the organisation) about a fellow candidate when they are doing *tayyari*, so as to ruin their opposition's chances of getting a ticket, within the party and across party lines. Illustrating the power of these strategies, Ankiv Basoya's dramatic *cutting* is often recalled. Ankiv Basoya was an ABVP candidate who won the DUSU elections in 2018-2019. After his victory, it emerged that his BA degree had been fake. ABVP denied this vehemently. The position of the president went to the vice-presidential candidate winner, Shakti Singh (from the ABVP as well). This was seen as an example of how *cutting* can happen at any stage. Rocky Tussheer (DUSU president 2018 from the NSUI) was enrolled in Law Faculty and Buddhist studies and this information was used to *cut* his ticket, both by the ABVP and within NSUI. *Anti* is a strategy that has to be invoked by creating the right conditions (creating rumours, hurdles and problems for other candidates) but its impact is not in the hands of the candidates. The act of *cutting* is strategising for one's own promotion over another candidate in order to be projected as the reliable, election winning face of the organisation. It is a skill that is both learnt and assumed to be 'inherent'. 'You need skill for this. You need to know how to *cut* someone else,' said Dhiren, a 26-year-old Gujjar man from Pranay's entourage. Dhiren and Sohini as Pranay's confidants, claim that Pranay's honest behaviour led to, often times, the situation being *anti* against him. *Anti* is when things go against you. Pranay asserted that he cannot be a sycophant (one of the strategies to avoid the situation from becoming *anti*) and that made him lose the post, despite having 'overwhelming support' on the ground (popularity among *karyakartas*). 'One has to keep a man happy to get the ticket, but that has never been my nature,' he lamented, implying that sycophancy is a key skill that is required for success. Through his lament, he

signaled towards the labyrinth that has the knowledge of *peechhe ki setting* and connection to upper echelons of the ABVP–something that has not been completely accessible to him, despite his best efforts.

Friendships (within and outside ABVP), caste networks, and kinship relations are extremely important to the candidate and their election journey: whether it is to advise the aspiring candidate if they should attempt *tayyari*; campaign alongside the candidate in 18-hour days; mobilise resources; answer phone calls and, essentially handle campaigns. These networks also obtain information about possible 'attacks' such as *cutting*, rumours within camps, strategies of other candidates, sourcing the materials for each group of voters (for example, supplying boys' hostels with alcohol and food; list and contacts to different regional groups) etc. Friends of the candidate in the organisation make special efforts to raise slogans (albeit discreetly) for their friend, while campaigning for ABVP candidates. Pranay asserted that he saw who his '*sache shubhchintak*' (well-wishers) were during this phase in his life. He had seen his friends campaigning for him till 2 am in the morning, sometimes using their money and networks to mobilise support for him. Ananya remembered that her largest number of votes came from her brother's alma mater.

Since the university is spread across Delhi, it is also the time caste associations and kinship networks would be activated in support of the candidate, especially of those whose ancestral roots are near Delhi. What does this mean for the movement and student politics in Delhi University? One implication is that certain landed castes around the national capital region (apart from those who come from wealthy families in other parts of Delhi) can be the only ones who aspire to contest DUSU. Thus, university elections, much like other elections in the country, are controlled by those from dominant castes and also have the ability to mobilise capital (this aspect is elaborated in a later section).

b) <u>Informalisation Strategies: For the Movement and the Ideology</u>

Why do students need to use their own resources and networks to contest elections, especially if they are from a strong student party like the ABVP? This has been explained earlier: to aspire for a successful political career and the benefits that come with such a position. The question then arises: how do they do it? One of the ways in which student parties are able to do this is

through the candidate's own networks and resources that do not necessarily need to be mobilised in an official way. The official (legal, as mandated by the Supreme Court of India) guidelines for conducting university elections in India from 2006 onwards fall under the Lyngdoh guidelines. The Lyngdoh guidelines, as described above, require strict caps on the amount of capital invested and the deployment of tools for election campaigning (posters, on-ground mobilisation, and use of social media). The Lyngdoh guidelines have stated that only 5000 rupees (between 50-60 Euros) can be spent in the election. But as the candidates' experiences show, 5000 as a monetary figure is impractical and they require much more investment for a serious stake in the elections. The unofficial figures spent by aspiring candidates are more than this amount (the average amount spent is between 14 lakhs to 70 lakhs (15 thousand to 80 thousand euros)) and the official authorities do not castigate them for breaking the rules. The expenditure is visible, yet officially the candidates only disclose an expenditure of five thousand rupees.

Informalisation processes as strategies emerge as an important aspect in this chapter. Informalisation strategies are requirements that emerge as a result of the legal and bureaucratic constraints that govern elections. They operate through particular social avenues (caste, kin, local organisational networks etc) to accumulate and express power. The prominence of these strategies points to 'informalisation' as the basis of elections–various tactics through which victories of candidates are designed or participated in. 'Informalisation' is a concept I am using to indicate the networks of kinship and friendships that are activated and come of use during the mobilisation and socialisation for the work of the movement. These are not formalised relationships. What I mean by that is that these networks are not in contractually articulated networks of power: for example, a boss and their employee.

On a larger scale, informalisation is a way to obfuscate the action (the task) and value of labour (the resources that labour is able to mobilise) that goes in to do an activity for the movement. By relying on the language of goodwill, kinship, family, or other ideals, the labour for the ideology is hidden. There is a party worker (*karyakarta*–one who does work) but the compensation is in kind and indefinite.[309] Further, the labour expected is also not clearly

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[309] Informalisation as a strategy of gaining through existing networks and cultural capital will be discussed later in the chapter.

defined. For example, in the entourage of the candidate, a member can be called to do a variety of tasks and there are no hours fixed for their work. What is expected is that for this undefined and unregulated work, there be a promise of compensation. This is also reflected in a larger trend among organisations that connect between organisational work, nature of membership, and labour. To elaborate: organisations, such as the *Sangh Parivar* (and not exclusively only *Sangh Parivar*) enable participation in two ways: within the individual organisation (e.g., ABVP, BJP, Sewa Bharati). But also, in events such as elections, there are overlaps in the organisations and the same process is carried out on a larger scale.[310] Why are these strategies required? For this, I would refer to the work of Michelutti (2020) who has shown through her work on criminality in politics in India that elections are not just for winning. People fight elections to protect their businesses–in a way protect their resources as well. Student politicians speak of power as a resource that would be available to them once they achieve the symbols that occupy power, like a position in DUSU and in the future, being recognisable in the BJP. Thus, it is an engagement with getting more secure with resources and power that seems to be the logic for this investment (also, Picherit, 2019).

i.   How are Informalisation Strategies Operationalised?

From the work on student elections and mobilisation for political violence, it emerges that these networks are transactional (there is an expectation that the favour might be returned). Many a times, there is also involvement of money (to borrow for mobilising capital). Most prominently, informalisation networks are activated in the linkages of caste, kinship, and friendships. All of the networking and transactions are working around the rules, playing between a thin line of what is allowed and what is not. Scholarship on 'informal political networks' illustrates the way informalisation strategies are operationalised (Jeffrey, 2000; Harris-White, 1997; Brass, 1997). For example, as mentioned earlier, Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs, large cars) are

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[310] For example, as mentioned in chapter 2, during the 2019 General elections, BJP workers were not the only Sangh Parivar members doing election campaigning for the BJP. My interlocutors from organisations in Sewa Bharati, ABVP and the Rashtra Sevika Samiti in different parts of Delhi were involved in election campaigning for the BJP. The members claimed that they were not campaigning for a particular party and were only going door-to-door to encourage citizens to vote. The narrative in the appeal for votes though prominently pointed to the work of the BJP government at the Centre and paeans for Prime Minister Modi's character. But here is where the informalisation strategies that comes to fruition: Election campaigning is by rule supposed to stop a few days before elections. But due to pre-established networks in *shakha* and other forms of congregating, they could continue to campaign for their fellow affiliate until the Election Day. In fact, it is these networks that work like arterial veins to supply strength to the powers in the Centre: BJP & RSS.

deployed in different parts of the city to campaign for the candidate. These demonstrate power as a symbol of *mazbooti* to contest elections. Given the legal limit of 5000, candidates cannot hire or rent the cars for a long period without it exceeding the given amount. Here, informalisation works when a candidate can request the services of SUVs from within their larger kinship networks (my interlocutors spoke of borrowing the cars of their uncles, village kin, etc). There are no financial agreements made. Hence, while they are not technically *spending* any money (in terms of financial transactions), they are still able to mobilise for much more (which someone lacking in such networks would not be able to). The payment for the drivers, petrol and food for the people becomes a supplementary cost and is not counted in the main expenditure. Further, these cars are bracketed as 'goodwill' from the community/candidate's supporters. Hence, if they are pulled up for breaking the rules, the candidate can claim no connection to them.

The role of kinship, in the example of elections in this chapter, is paramount in executing these strategies. Within caste networks (since many individuals within the caste are competing for a single post), one's own kinship networks become important in executing every aspect of the election-right from gaining advice on whether a *karyakarta* should do *tayyari*, to how their individual strategies are implemented. The examples of both Pranay and Ananya shows that siblings, cousins, and other close caste and kin networks are the primary sources of support for the candidate. Kinship networks are those that do the tasks and in return, symbolic and even material gains are expected from the association. These gains do not have to be immediate since there is a pre-determined network in place. For example, Pranay's entourage consisted of many young men from his community. Many of them came from the same village. Pranay groomed one of them, Aashish, to take over as ABVP unit president of a DU college after him. In return, Aashish was at Pranay's beck and call during Pranay's *tayyari*. Three years later, Pranay was helping Aashish lay down the groundwork for the latter's *tayyari*, providing him with capital and cars, along with his own network. Aashish won the DUSU post in 2019. In 2021, Pranay was facilitated as a high-performing member of the ABVP in a function organised by Aashish. In another example, Ananya relied on her brother's network in his college to gain votes in 2015. When her brother began his *tayyari* in 2019, she mobilised her college network and all the connections she had made in her time in office to specifically rally for her brother. Their father's networks as a powerful member of the Delhi BJP also were utilised. She organised an awards function to honour 'inspiring women' and used the services of an NGO

affiliated to her father to do the work during the event. ABVP members who allied themselves with her also joined in to help out. In the event, she introduced her brother to the guests and high-ranking officials in the Sangh family (the chief guests of the event), laying the preliminary groundwork for his *tayyari* to become a serious candidate in the eyes of the ABVP. This was weeks before even pre-election campaigning for the year had begun. These networks had to be operationalised outside the official declaration of her brother as a candidate and outside the 'election cycle'. This is in consonance with Michelutti's finding that elections are not just a temporal event that take place on the election day (Michelutti, 2020: p. 23). 'Election season' is a more approximate time frame to understand election practices and strategies in India.

It appears that these strategies need to be employed for two-fold purposes. First, these strategies are used to navigate legal and bureaucratic constraints during elections. Secondly, kinship networks are used to do work to reduce compensation. As shown from the example of SUV cars above, these cars are not only important to indicate a reserve of capital, but also serve as mobile advertisement. Thus, while technically they are not breaking any rules regarding posters and its related expenditure, they are able to do exactly that. Or the example of posters with actress Priyanka Chopra and the number '4' are an instance of this way of bending the rules without technically breaking them. Ananya's usage of the employees and infrastructure of the NGO her father runs did not technically count as 'election expenditure' but ABVP members claimed that 'everyone knew' (meaning, other ABVP members) why the awards were being held–to project her brother as a serious candidate for DUSU even before they had begun nominations. The aspect that 'everyone' knew the expectation of the end goal, it appears then that this is a strategy that has been used in the past and is part of being socialised into the ABVP election strategies.

ii. '*Desh Ke Liye Kaam*' (Work for the Nation) and Personal Aspirations: Informalisation Strategies and Informal Expectations

ABVP members skip classes, spend their own resources and time for the candidates. To see members invest their time and energies into campaigns of their friends and older *bhaiyas and didis* answers one of my central questions on why members join the organisation and how they are subsequently socialised. The unanimous answer from my interlocutors was that they believe that ABVP works for the students and the nation and they are, through their engagement in the

election process, working for the country. But is that the end motive? As mentioned earlier, there is a transactional expectation of taking part in these informalisation strategies that members exercise. I will bring the example of Sohini and her disappointments with the organisation to the fore. As was mentioned, Sohini worked for weeks until 2 am in her neighbourhood, an active student area, to campaign for her friend Pranay. She used her own resources to access, speak to, and spread the word about his election. Similarly, she worked extremely hard during Ananya's campaign since Ananya had been her college senior–she was part of the crowds that Ananya brought with her to protests. Sohini was using her position as a north campus girls' coordinator to mobilise support for her. Sohini expected that since she had been an active *karyakarta*, Ananya would support her candidature to reach the ABVP State Executive. But it emerged that Ananya had in fact disparaged Sohini in front of other ABVP seniors. Her networks told Sohini that Ananya had been instrumental in her gradual side-lining in the organisation. This is where informalisation strategies underlie an expectation of returning the favour and therefore are in its nature transactional. Sohini expected to be compensated for her work for the candidates through symbolic means: being awarded a higher place in the ABVP hierarchy, and a future potential for being in the good books of those in power in the organisation. When she was side-lined, she articulated her disappointment as anger. During her work for Pranay's campaign, she laughingly admitted that she used Pranay's name in stores and restaurants around north campus to get benefits such as free food and discount on clothes. This points to the ways in which informalisation strategies might be repaid–the individuals in the network can articulate for themselves what they should be compensated with and none of it is direct repayment.

Since this entire complex process occurs outside legal and official rules, it is aptly described as *peechhe ki setting* (Hindi; literal translation: networks behind the scenes). What this process describes is that there is an official, transparent front that is orchestrated under the rule of the law and official rules laid down by the university authorities. But, around these official rules, there are networks and activities that operate towards the goal as well. This applies to the informalisation techniques employed by the students and student parties. Does this reflect the larger trend of how politics is conducted in India: that the primary mode of operation in the

political system is informal? From the way most widely publicised student elections in India are conducted, it does seem to point to that.[311]

Not everyone wants to fight elections in the ABVP but the ones who fight DUSU have aspirations to eventually join the BJP. Pranay stood for elections because he wanted concrete power to do things in the university and later, outside the university. He reasoned, 'It is only when you have the power of the post that someone listens to you. There is also a saying '*gaddi ka nasha*' (the intoxication of having a seat of power)–I also wanted to feel if there is any truth to it.' When Ananya first witnessed the sea of support for a *didi* who was standing for DUSU, she thought to herself 'why not me?'. There is definitely an element of being 'famous' that attracts student leaders to fight DUSU. The idea of 'fame' implies being 'known' among powerful people and having sway in important places. DUSU *tayyari* in itself is a competition to show who is more influential and can pull more crowds. Sudhanshu, a 27-year-old Rajput *karyakarta* and an ex-DUSU office holder, explained that when he was a 'normal *karyakarta*', his calls to the college office were mostly ignored. When he became the student union president in his college, the administration staff was forced to listen to him. His capacity to exercise power increased when he won a DUSU seat; he could have access to any department of the university and 'get things done'. Seeing this gradual increase in access to resources is translated as 'fame' among student politicians and is a valuable resource.

In this section, I have shown the work that goes in to becoming a candidate and eventually a student politician. *Karyakartas* work extremely hard to stake their claim for becoming candidates. This hard work is translated into an overall understanding among their peers that the *karyakarta* 'deserves' to stand for elections. The idea of 'deserving' comes from the candidates' or *karyakartas'* own assessment of their investment in the organisation. An individual 'deserves' when they have worked hard and obtained visible benefits for the organisation. This value of 'deserving' is a currency that legitimised their position in the Parishad and also, allows them to make claims within and outside student politics. In a way, it is similar to Anamika's assertion that she will 'work hard' to cement her place in the

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[311] I also see the phrase *peechhe ki setting* describing the way the final choosing of the candidates remains a calculated mystery to everyone except the upper echelons of the ABVP and the Sangh (discussed in a later section).

organisation. Both indicate a *karyakartas's* deep involvement with the Parishad and the ideology: a learnt socialisation of them having achieved valued position.

In DU, aspiration for DUSU is the first step towards establishing oneself politically. It is an individual aspiration in a context where ABVP is the hegemonic presence. Here, the *karyakarta* is relying on the Parishad for their goals. In JNU, to a large degree it is the Parishad that finds itself strengthened by its cadre and relies on its *karyakartas* to create avenues for Hindu nationalist student activism on campus. Until recent years, it had a meagre presence on campus. In the following section, it is another shade of aspiration that is articulated– student politics as a strategy for the assertion of ideology against anti-Hindutva forces on campus.

JNUSU: ABVP's Fight for Ideological Assertion against Anti-Hindutva Groups

Mandakhini is a 24-year-old Brahmin member of the Rashtra Sevika Samiti from Assam.[312] She is a third generation Sangh member, an affiliation beginning with her grandfather who was part of the RSS. She was associated with the ABVP in Guwahati during the 2012 Delhi rape and murder case. She came to JNU in 2018 to begin her MPhil in Sanskrit. She came to JNU with a purpose: that people like her 'need' to be in JNU otherwise '*those* people would be further emboldened.' By *those* people she was referring to the JNU students accused of sedition and promoting 'anti-India' sentiment.

On 9 February 2016, a group of students at JNU got together to denounce state enforced capital punishment. With the involvement of the media and ABVP, there began legal proceedings against students who were rumoured to be participating in the event, along with an overwhelming focus on the lives and politics of students in a serene and politically active campus in India's national capital.[313] It was after the '9 Feb' event, as it is popularly known, that Mandakhini decided that she would come to JNU. 'I could not believe that this could happen in a public university, running on tax payers' money and subsidised living. How can you speak of cutting (*tukde*) of your own mother?' she noted indignantly, conflating the idea of a mother and Mother India. By 'cutting', she is using the words that are often associated

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[312] Unless specifically mentioned otherwise, all ABVP interlocutors from JNU are from the Brahmin caste.

[313] The incident would be further elaborated with first person histories in a later chapter.

with the group of students that were reportedly shouting anti-India slogans or the '*tukde-tukde gang*' (the act of breaking or cutting), referring to a slogan that wished that India would break into self-governing states. 'Those who don't know, will go towards the other side if we don't make *our* presence felt. If we are not many in number, we will not even be an alternative,' she noted. The 'other side' here refers to the student parties against the ABVP, specifically, the ones affiliating to the umbrella of 'left'.

Mandakhini is not the only one who came to JNU after 2016 to help grow ABVP's influence in JNU, a university known for its progressive and radical student politics. Like all parties on campus, ABVP members have also made their presence felt in JNU campus strongly to catch students early on towards their ideology. This is done through organising 'help desks', conducting interest-generating programmes, and publishing pamphlets. There is a move towards marking a stronger presence on campuses that have been critical of the Hindu nationalist ideologies that is being coordinated by the *Sangh Parivar*, especially in universities like JNU, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Jadavpur University and universities in Hyderabad, among others. Students are encouraged to apply for bachelor courses in JNU. Free coaching is offered to pass JNU entrance exams at all levels. Early in the year, JNU's ABVP unit already starts hosting open days, online meetings, distributing department-wise details for aspiring students. In JNU, the aim for ABVP's campus politics is to become a formidable and influential force on campus. Historically, ABVP has not had a strong presence in JNU.[314] In the recent years, the membership and influence has increased especially after the Modi-government came to power.[315] Thunlai, a 27-year-old, doctoral student from Delhi, observed that Modi's election helped those 'right-wing activists' to come forward who were earlier afraid to be visible. Those who get involved as a *karyakarta* in JNU are not doing it just as an extra-curricular activity. It is a mission many of these *karyakartas* hold sacred and they have a *judaav* (affective connection) for their mission. As Mandakhini noted, theirs is a fight for their ideology and 'every day they go in for battle'. An analysis of the manifestoes and speeches from the past

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[314] A group called 'Free Thinkers' was founded by Anand Kumar in early 1970s. It was an umbrella organisation for students who were not attracted to the left-leaning parties like SFI, AISA and AISF. Some ex-JNU students traced their political participation as 'Free Thinkers' in the university before the official presence of ABVP on campus. The organisation won JNUSU for the first time in 1974. Nirmala Sitharaman, current Finance minister of India and BJP-leader, was part of 'Free Thinkers' during her studies in JNU.

[315] ABVP has gained tremendously from having institutional support in becoming a stronger force.

five years (table in the appendix) shows that ABVP's predominant struggle is against the Left groups and their ideology on campus.[316] The narrative that ABVP has propagated is to posit itself as a 'nationalist' organisation on campus, struggling against 'anti-national' communist organisations.

One of the ways in which ABVP seeks to assert more power is through holding power in the JNU student union. A JNUSU panel consists of a president, vice-president, secretary, and joint secretary. JNU also has fiercely contested 'School' elections: various departments are housed under umbrella administrative units called 'Schools' and these are influential positions that are also sought after. Some 'Schools', particularly Natural sciences, have a stronger ABVP presence. Social science and Humanities departments are where the non-ABVP presence is considered stronger.

a) <u>Socialisation into Campus Politics and the ABVP</u>

'I found them making fun of Ram, criticising Mahabharat, speaking ill of Krishna, calling Maa (mother) Durga a prostitute. I found them disagreeable and I wanted them to stay away from me.'
–Vani, female *karyakarta*, JNU ABVP [317]

'I used to give mixed votes. I used to vote for the left and for ABVP. But the way that ABVP was being treated, I was gradually becoming a sympathiser... Sympathiser as in I was not hesitating to vote for an ABVP person...'
–Aditi, female *karyakarta,* JNU ABVP

Aditi officially joined the ABVP five years after she entered the JNU campus. She comes from a Sangh family. Now a doctoral student in the School of Languages, she noted that initially she was part of SFI (Students' Federation of India; aligned to Communist Party of India (Marxist)) for a year since she had been helped by a 'SFI *didi*' during her admissions. 'They help during help desk and you repay the favour by voting for them in elections,' she said. She entered the

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[316] Activists who fight elections in JNU are generally older in age and in academic terms (pursuing MPhil or doctoral degrees) than their counterparts in Delhi University.

[317] 'Them' is a reference to the left parties on JNU campus.

university when campus politics was rife with effects of the Lyngdoh recommendations and ABVP was a small and singular Hindu nationalist presence on campus. Many JNU students note that their political baptism occurs in the JNU campus (also noted in Martelli and Parkar, 2018). Campus politics in JNU is volatile, radical, and emotionally charged. Vani came to JNU in 2013 from Allahabad to begin her Masters in Sanskrit. Before coming to JNU, Vani said that she only mingled with female friends and studied for her classes. 'But after coming here, my mind opened up. I felt that life should not be limited to studying,' she recalled. She felt that this 'investment' into academics should be for a 'larger goal' to bring about social change for the benefit of the nation. It was in JNU that she first encountered ABVP and the Sangh at large. Thunlai found ABVP as the only stable student party in her campus in DU. She came to JNU to continue her studies in Biochemistry and after her MPhil degree changed to Humanities. She observed that after coming to JNU she became more 'right-wing'.[318] [319]

Karyakartas articulate ABVP's presence in JNU campus as one of a 'persecuted minority'. My interlocutors claim that students in the previous years denied any Hindu nationalist sentiment or kept quiet as strategies to 'survive' JNU as a 'nationalist' student. ABVP students have noted that it is only in the recent years that they have begun to actively assert themselves on campus. Soham (age 35) is currently an Assistant Professor in a college in DU. He was an ABVP member in JNU (he is presently a BJYM aspirant, desperately trying to make inroads in the BJP). He recalled that the organisation only began contesting campus elections in late 1990s and even then, they did not have enough members to project onto a panel. Aditi also noted,

> '... ABVP could not exist. Even if they (ABVP members) wanted to stick posters, they used to do it at midnight, lest someone sees them putting posters under the ABVP banner... By the next day, most of them were ripped off. If you talk about teachers ('nationalist'), there was no space for ABVP or nationalist teachers...'

Aditi observed that it is the politically charged environment in JNU that forces students to pick sides. 'There are very few 'neutral' students,' she said. These 'neutral students' have to

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[318] Martelli and Parkar (2018) on the other hand find that students might not necessarily join organisation to assert themselves as political activists. My finding with ABVP activists in JNU points to the opposite of this reasoning- that *karyakartas* join student groups specifically to become political and most as political Hindus. This could be indicative also of the polarisation on campus at this present political moment.

[319] Aditi, Vani and Thunlai's journeys have been elaborated through affective connections in the previous chapter.

reportedly 'keep their head down, work hard, and finish the degree.' As was mentioned in the previous chapter, everyday experiences had compelled Aditi to align with the ABVP. She gives examples of her peers who wore vermillion on their foreheads as a marker of being a Hindu believer. These students were identified by their teachers or peers and asked: 'Are you a *Sanghi*?' (a reference to being associated with the RSS). 'Most of these students did not even know what 'Sanghi' was,' she said. They, like her, grew up in homes with Hindu rituals and practices. Thunlai's socialisation into the organisation encapsulates the common way students become political on a campus like JNU. It was when she came here that certain people gave her a 'negative story or feelings about a religion that is followed by our parents'. Now in her sixth year in JNU and ABVP, she said,

> 'When you come to JNU, you become more right-wing. You probably were not that Right before or even aware about your ideology. Then you see the posters and learn about the Left, and you realise that *this* (ABVP) is a better place... It is here (in JNU) that you need to speak against it (the Left organisations).'

Although Vani does not come from a Sangh family, she was educated in Saraswati Shishu Mandir, schools affiliated to the educational wing of the Sangh, Vidya Bharati. When she came to JNU in 2013, she found ABVP in consonance with her values. Vani found ABVP as the only organisation that respected her discipline, the language Sanskrit, and its presence in JNU. 'Had it not been for Sanskrit, I would not have come to JNU or even Delhi. ABVP respected that.' These students felt that a vilification of practices marked their social milieu and upbringing in a negative light. Mandakhini recalled her initial days in JNU as ones where she felt despair, fear, and insecurity. She said, 'I wondered why our people (*apne log*) are not as strong... we have such small numbers despite working so hard.'

Apart from being a singular Hindu nationalist organisation on campus, ABVP in JNU has struggled to attract women *karyakartas*. Mandakhini sadly noted that 'Girls automatically go *there*.' 'There' is towards the student political parties affiliated with the left (although women are present in a bouquet of ideological student groups, not just the left). Thunlai joined the ABVP in DU but was inducted into the ideology in JNU. Before joining, she too associated it with being a patriarchal organisation that promotes Hinduism. After joining, she claimed she was able to see the 'real' ideology. ABVP *karyakartas* have to repeatedly quell 'rumours' about the organisation when speaking to potential members. A constant impression that ABVP

members have to address is that ABVP will not let them wear 'short clothes' or curtail hostel privileges if it wins elections. They articulate this as their 'biggest challenge', both to recruit female *karyakartas* and win votes for JNUSU. In the past four years, female membership has increased. JNU ABVP claims 50-60 women are regulars to their protests and meetings.

b) <u>ABVP as an Electoral Candidate for JNUSU</u>

'ABVP does not keep you on the back foot. If they see a spark in you, they will bring you to the front foot and take you as high as you want to go.'
–Vani

'When I came in 2009, ABVP did not have enough people to fight a panel. Now we have more than 10 people ready to take on leadership roles.'
–Aditi

Vani came to JNU in 2013. She became particularly active and joined the organisation in 2015: leading protests, help desks, class campaigning and engaging administration and students on a variety of issues. In 2016, she was the girls' coordinator in JNU. In 2017, she stood for the post of JNUSU president in the ABVP panel. She lost the election but made her place in the ABVP national executive. Since 2019, she has been the national general secretary of the organisation. Her meteoric rise in the organisation is unique and she is aware of it. It was the organisation, she claimed, that urged her to stand for elections since she demonstrated 'leadership quality'. 'Leadership quality' here, like DU, indicates the willingness of the *karyakartas* to take initiative and be successful in those initiatives. Mobilising–through personal networks and strong public oratory skills–is a key 'leadership quality' both in DU and JNU. Employing metaphors from the sport of cricket, Vani's position in the organisation illustrates that once it finds a loyalist, it keeps them close. There are enough incentives provided to keep bright students within the organisation. This has been the pattern for members from the JNU unit: their struggle for the ideology is rewarded with high positions in the organisation.

JNU campus has student parties spanning across the spectrum and representative of identity debates occupying the world outside the campus (Martelli and Parkar, 2018; Pathania, 2018). Parties across the left, right, centre and outside the spectrum, coexist alongside student groups based on identities. Traditionally, the process of elections in JNU is based on speeches, class-to-class campaigns, posters, and flyers. Increasing use of protests, social media, and programmes of student engagement are also done with the hope to garner more votes. ABVP members claim that establishing itself as a serious contender for JNUSU has been an arduous journey. Aditi, who has now seen the organisation for close to a decade and has seen ABVP grow in numbers, recalled,

> 'When we used to campaign, *they* shut the door on our faces (left-leaning students). (Demonstrates) 'ABVP?' (makes a sound of slamming door). You are not going to listen to what we have to say. You talk about dialogue and you won't even let us speak? They used to throw the pamphlets at our faces. (Demonstrates) 'ABVP?' (Throwing action), this is how *they* used to throw it....'

Earlier, parties like DSF, SFI, and AISA campaigned separately. After 9 February 2016, and especially after incidents across campuses in India (FTII, Rohith Vemula and HCU, Jadavpur), some student groups found common goals and student parties began to collaborate to fight against ABVP. Aditi noted this change in her campus with the rising influence of ABVP, 'Now it is becoming equal-equal (the influence of 'left' and 'right')' and the organisation it seems has come a long way from being ignored. Aditi observed,

> 'The biggest proof is that the effort from our side is lesser than *their* side. All the Left organisations have united against us. Now they have formed the united Left front or Forum because ABVP's vote share is increasing... It means that ABVP as a power is rising....'

One of the most revered election traditions in JNU are the speeches given by panel members to the larger JNU student body. The JNU presidential debate is an impressive event that invites the entire JNU student body to see open debate among the contesting candidates. Nothing of this sort occurs in DU. The speech proceeds in three parts: the speech prepared by the aspiring candidate, questions, and answers between the competing candidates and then rounds of public questions. It is a highly charged evening and many a times candidates are able to cement their

popularity during this event.[320] Students noted that this debate was representative of the high academic standard of JNU. 'Being from JNU, there are standards to a presidential debate that are not there in other universities... here money, show of force does not work,' said Saloni, an ABVP *karyakarta* from JNU highlighting the reputation of the event and comparing it to the way elections work in the campus across the city, especially DU.

Vani contested elections in 2017. Against her was a consolidated panel of 'Left unity' (from AISA, SFI, AISF and DSF). There were also candidates from NSUI, BAPSA (Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students' Association) and two independents. For Vani, it was a 'life changing game'. She was worried about her ability to address more than 3000 students. Vani had witnessed her first debate in 2013 and had seen an impressive speech by a senior *bhaiya* in the ABVP. 'Half the things were foreign to me!' she remembered. She recalled being terrified before her speech. Her speech went smoothly and she was able to answer all the questions 'thrown' at her, she claimed. Aditi remembered the speech in awe. She recalled that Vani was suffering from a fever that night. 'Her tenacity is highlighted in the fact that she did not excuse herself from the speech. She knew what was at stake and she soldiered on,' Aditi recalled. What was at 'stake' was the reputation of the ABVP and its goal on campus. It was this speech that caught the attention of the ABVP high command and from then on, Vani has not looked back. 'I would have never dreamt of doing this had it not been for the organisation', Vani said. She is now a prominent proponent of the ideology–not just in JNU, but wherever ABVP has presence.

In the sections above, the struggles, goals and processes of socialisation into politics were illustrated. For both JNU and DU, stakes for electoral victory are high. In DU, students must come into different strategies, mainly through kinship, to achieve their goal of fighting and winning elections. In many ways, elections in JNU work very differently than DU. The volume of resources required is much lesser, both due to the fact that JNU is a smaller campus and the electorate is more polarised. The election campaigning also functions differently, with all student parties not campaigning in silos but actively confronting each other on issues in the public sphere. The aim of political assertion for ABVP-JNU students is more rooted to their habitus and *judaav*, apart from personal aspirations. Within the JNU unit, the selection of those who will fight for the elections is based on their loyalty to the ABVP unit and its projects in

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[320] Students in JNU, both allies and opponents, remember the speech that sealed former JNUSU president Kanhaiya Kumar's victory in 2015. Kumar is now a member of the Indian National Congress.

the university. Further, there is much less in-fighting for elections than the DU unit. ABVP has gained membership and visibility in JNU in the last decade. Due to low ABVP numbers on campus, intervention through JNUSU seemed slightly difficult. In JNU, unlike DU, there is lesser competition within the unit to stand for elections. But this lesser competition within the unit is in no way less intense when seen from the point of view of campus politics. Although all units claim to be self-sufficient, due to high stakes like DU, the ABVP echelons are involved in the choosing of the contestants for JNU elections as well. In the following section, I will illustrate the next step in the student politicians' journey- after they have won elections.

Life after the Elections

a) <u>Time in Office</u> [321]

'Everything is sorted when you are in the office. No one cares about what it took to get there.'

–Vindhya, ex-DUSU secretary

The DUSU office is nestled between the Campus Law Centre and the Arts Faculty. Outside, there are always large SUVs parked, taking up space on the pedestrian paths (these paths are especially designed for students with disabilities). There is a large, shady tree that covers the small entrance into the one floor building. Students sit outside, on the low wall surrounding the office, waiting on DUSU business, or eating the food being sold in two food stalls outside. There are five large rooms in the main block and another extension behind it with two rooms. These rooms are designated to DUSU office holders, with the president assigned the two biggest rooms. All rooms are air-conditioned, with no natural light, and variety of seating options, stray chairs, and couches. There is an impressive table and chair for the office holder. Hanging behind it on the wall prominently is a roster of names of the position holders before them. These offices are given to the DUSU post holders as spaces to meet with students and conduct DUSU activities. But it is hardly that.

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[321] This section deals exclusively with DUSU ABVP *karyakartas* since JNU ABVP has only seen one member make it to JNUSU in the past five years.

DUSU office is an ecosystem on its own. These rooms are always filled with the individuals associated with the student party. During my fieldwork, NSUI members filled the one room assigned to their candidate who held the position of the vice-president. The remaining rooms were filled with ABVP members. Students from the opposing parties do not show hostility— they sometimes even greet one another when they cross each other in this space, especially those coming from the same caste-groups. These rooms are not used by just the office holders– they are used by their party to hold meetings, to sit together in air-conditioning on brutal summer days, or to wait for something exciting to happen. Most often, the DUSU office bearers might not even be in the office as it happened with the offices of the president, which was used by ex-office bearers and other members for their work.

It was in the President's room at the DUSU office where I met Vindhya. She had asked me to meet her there while she finished leading the protests that ABVP had organised against the syllabi of various courses in Delhi University. I waited outside the DUSU office, while students on particularly busy day of protests, shuffled in and out. Vindhya arrived an hour after of our scheduled time with a band of 20 people behind her. They were in high spirits as their protest had been 'very successful'.[322] She saw me as she approached with her fellow protestors, waved, and continued to walk inside as I followed her to the DUSU president's office. ABVP students sat there occupying all chairs and sofas, all with their heads bent and concentrating on their phones. As Vindhya stepped inside, some stood up, acknowledging her. The girls went towards her and hugged her, congratulating her on the protest. The boys put their hand on their chest, a gesture common among student politicians. She told them that her father 'was visiting campus' (signalling that he was an important person) and was sitting in the office meant for the joint secretary. The students seemed excited at the news and some left the office to see him.

Vindhya comfortably sat on the seat behind the desk, the names of DUSU presidents from 2010 hanging behind her. Beside her were portraits of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and Swami Vivekanand. She motioned for me to sit across from her while other ABVP members returned to their phones. 'You know, this is not a random organisation, we work very hard here,' she

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[322] It was later in the day that there were reports of violence that had taken place at the sociology department of Delhi School of Economics, the protest that Vindhya had led. See also: Ibrar, M. (2019) Syllabus Row at DU: Article on Naxalism Junked, Concessions in Other Subjects Too, *The Times of India*, 2 August 2019, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/syllabus-row-at-du-article-on-naxalism-junked-concessions-in-other-subjects-too/articleshow/70489273.cms [accessed on 1 April 2021].

began. In her journey as an ABVP member from Edwina Place in 2013 (name changed, the college now has an ABVP unit) to now, Vindhya has perhaps seen one of the starkest rise in the organisational hierarchy in the recent past. She won the post of DUSU Secretary in 2018. Any fiery female ABVP member is often compared to her. She is not afraid to use violence. She has few but committed loyalists. She does not come from a Sangh or BJP family. The year she entered university, there were protests against the implementation of Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP). Across the university, all student organisations and teachers' associations were holding protests in different parts of the city every day. Teachers in Edwina Place also encouraged their students to be political. It was during these protests that she encountered ABVP.

Five years later, she won the position of DUSU secretary. Months after completing her term, she sat reminiscing her time in office. 'I wanted to go beyond the lame plantation drive that every Tom, Dick and Harry does in the office,' she said (she was referring to a common practice of tree plantation drives among leaders who plant saplings as a mark of their contribution as a position holder). Her time in office is regarded highly by both the DU and JNU ABVP units, even by those who dislike her. 'ABVP started the sanitary pads initiative' is a constant refrain that took place under her leadership. For this, she met with college principals, some unwilling to engage with her. 'I had a plan! I did not just dream it one night–I went from college to college.' She compiled lists: of colleges that had menstrual pads dispensing machines, those that worked, and to address the glitches in those that did not. She petitioned to the central ministry (in charge of women and child), UN Women, and NGOs. She took office in September. By December, ABVP were already leading a campaign against taxation on menstrual pads by collecting signatures, organising debates, mobilising college units, and writing to ministries. She collaborated with the release of a Bollywood film 'Padman' (2018), a movie about menstrual pads. The actor of the film opened the 'marathon' organised by the ABVP (under the aegis of DUSU). 'When I first spoke about this issue in the organisation, *they* (her peers in the organisation) said that I am behaving like a communist,' she recalled. From her statement, I infer that her speaking openly about these issues was not perhaps common in the ABVP. Women from the left are considered as outspoken, beyond traditional femininity and this is perhaps why Vindhya was considered a 'communist', for speaking about this issue of access to sanitary napkins.

'A DUSU office bearer,' she said, 'engaged in hooliganism, had too much power, always travelled in big cars and had many followers.' There was an image of an entourage that engages in violence, and this makes them unlikeable among the teachers of the university. She wanted to change the perception of a DUSU office bearer. 'I wanted to show that we have credibility beyond the money and power we need to fight elections,' she said. During my fieldwork, the entourage of the male candidates always surrounded them. Women, on the other hand, could be found alone and not necessarily always among their supporters. While Vindhya was trying to change the image of the 'DUSU office bearer', she was most known for resorting to violence and undermining authorities as a *karyakarta*. Among the ABVP, this made her 'bold', a quality of aspiration among some women *karyakartas*.

What does it mean when members have achieved the position of an office bearer in DUSU? From Vindhya's narrative, it emerges that the time in office is important for two reasons. First, it is to further cement one's position as a strong ABVP member and begin making inroads in BJYM and BJP (in Vindhya's case, she moved directly to the BJP). Second, it is the opportune time to execute one's own vision as a position holder. As Vindhya's narrative suggests, one has to be active and visible in their time in office to use that work as leverage later on. Past position holders have spoken proudly of their time in office. Among my interlocutors, it has primarily been women. They have noted their time in office as an opportunity they got to do 'something for the students' now that they had the resources and power to do it. They looked at their election manifesto (their own goals and not of the organisation) to guide them through the year. As Pranay had mentioned, he wanted to have the power to make a real difference. As a prominent ABVP *karyakarta* perhaps the university authorities would listen to him, but his access and ability to demand action would increase, he believed, if he won a position in DUSU. Bureaucracy was seen as a major hurdle. They had to constantly engage the state and show their followers that they are making attempts to mediate on their behalf. Hence, position holders would regularly update their followers with photos of themselves flanked by other ABVP members presenting memos to university authorities and ministry officials (national and state government). If the developments were part of their manifesto, this aspect was highlighted prominently to demonstrate that the candidate (and thereby, the ABVP) continued to advocate for students.

Among some *karyakartas* across DU and JNU, DUSU is irrelevant. The lack of guarantee of a clear political path makes the resources spent in the process seem wasteful. 'It is not like once you fight DUSU, BJP will immediately give you a ticket?', Akansha, a 24-year-old Brahmin *karyakarta* from DU noted. She gave the example of an ABVP national executive committee member (in his 40s) who desperately wants to move to the BJP. She noted, 'He is not a student nor is he in academia. There are rumours that he wants a ticket (to stand for elections from the BJP) and that is why he is still in the ABVP.' This is where the idea of 'genuinely' working for the organisation and 'using' the organisation for one's political goals emerges–those with 'merit' are 'genuinely' working for good (most commonly Brahmin students, similar to the idea of 'selfish' and 'genuine' *karyakartas* discussed in the previous chapter). In opposition are DUSU candidates, mainly Rajputs, Gujjars, Jats, and Ahirs, who have political ambitions. There is an overwhelming sense of disappointment among *karyakartas*. The weight of disappointment comes from the realisation that resources required to fight elections are not rooted in just being a 'good *karyakarta*': there are invisiblised symbolic and cultural capital, and networks that are crucial for this.

b) Future in JNU-ABVP

In DUSU, elections are heavily dependent on access to capital and caste. Many *karyakartas* voiced concerns about its legitimacy. 'Now the elections have become about *hawabaazi* (showing off one's position). Earlier, those who worked hard for the organisation fought the election–the genuine cases,' Sohini reasoned. For 'genuine' elections, she thinks of the campus across the city, at JNU, where ABVP members are comparatively fewer in number and ideology reigns supreme when it comes to fighting elections. In the past eight years, JNUSU has had one ABVP member for the post of joint secretary, Saurabh Sharma in 2015-2016.[323] Thunlai has noted in her time the gradual but steady increase in the ABVP vote-share during elections. All prominent members of the JNU *ikai* make it to important positions in the ABVP at the state or national level, especially those who have stood for elections. In fact, ABVP's JNU *ikai* has come a long way from failing to attract women and increasing in membership: ABVP's national general secretary (*rashtriya mahamantri*) was Nidhi Tripathi, a PhD student

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[323] He is now back in his alma mater, being guaranteed an academic position. It is amid opposition from other faculty members who claim is appointment is based on his proximity to the ruling dispensation. His contributions as a JNUSU member have been mentioned in the protest in the next chapter.

from JNU. She was re-elected in 2021 for the third time in a row. Another member, Velentina Brahma is part of ABVP's central working committee (*kendriya karyasamiti*). And lastly, Lalit Pandey is the convener of ABVP's Central Universities Working Initiative (*kendriya vishwavidyala karya*). The list only begins here (also see appendix).

c) Future Prospects: *Tayyari* does not end with DUSU

Vindhya worked for two years to make her presence felt in the BJYM and now is a spokesperson for the UP-BJP. She diligently engages with her followers on social media. Like politicians across the spectrum, she too uploads pictures on every festival with her wishes and her name at the bottom of the image. The messages hold her credentials as a DU and ABVP member. For two years before her appointment in the BJP, her messages only had the symbol of the lotus as a signifier to indicate the party she belonged to. Before UP elections in 2021, she actively travelled across Uttar Pradesh, meeting with BJP functionaries of the state–a repeat of *tayyari*, but now at the level of the state. Anjali Rana is now the BJYM's young women's chief in Delhi and uploads similar pictures on her social media. One aspect is for certain: participation in DUSU elections and an apprenticeship in the ABVP has prepared these young people about the consistent efforts needed to make inroads in the party. For all of the members who wish to stand for ABVP in DU (and many in JNU), the aim is to enter the BJP. The regular path is continuing with the ABVP for a year or two after elections and then a slow path inside BJYM and a hope for the BJP–an aspiration for a place in the set BJP hierarchy. The process to make inroads in the extremely competitive space of BJYM is similar to the preparation it took to become prominent in the ABVP: first, there needs to be a strong social media presence. Secondly, there needs to be persistent lobbying, in these cases with the BJP and BJYM members. Thirdly, there needs to be consistent participation in the agendas set by the party. Participation includes holding rallies, participating in protests by bringing a mass of people, conducting public meetings, and social media promotion. Aspiring members upload pictures with senior BJP leaders as a sign to indicate proximity with the corridors of power.

To illustrate, Pranay had been 'apprenticing' with a BJYM member and is consistent in his participation on all BJP-led agendas in the Delhi state. He has been repeatedly involved in the violence between members of the Aam Aadmi Party and BJP-affiliates. Pranay in the beginning of the pandemic-related lockdown in 2020 put posters in his area announcing the step as

'momentous' and repeating words by the Prime Minister Modi as words to live by. He then began to inspire his followers on social media to use the period of the lockdown in pursuit of aspirational goals. What would follow were pictures of him running along the banks of the Yamuna, casually reading a book, doing yoga and helping in his home: all accompanied with thanking the Prime Minister for his 'bold' steps in defeating COVID, the steps being taken by the BJP government, and how India was doing extremely well on the world stage. The widespread exodus of migrant labourers and the critiques of Indian government's handling of the pandemic found no mention on his social media. Instead, there were media reports on how well India was doing. When the Prime Minister announced the '*thali bajao*' (banging of utensils) campaign to honour frontline workers from balconies, Pranay uploaded videos of himself whole-heartedly participating in the event. Following days carried edited videos of him banging utensils in his home at the tune of patriotic music. When the lockdown was lifted, he and his entourage spread across Delhi holding banners with Modi's new campaign: '*Jab tak dawaii nahi, tab tak dhilai nahi*' (until there is no cure, there should be no ease in prevention measures). This campaign was to encourage citizens to continue following COVID-restrictions. Pranay's team uploaded pictures of him holding the banners prominently displaying Modi's face, a symbol of the lotus, and the BJP colour schema (saffron and green) in different locations in Delhi, all thanking the Prime Minister of his handling of the pandemic, thanking the BJYM member he is unofficially apprenticing under and introducing the campaign. Now Pranay is responsible for bringing numbers to the BJYM-led campaigns: be it a counter-rally protesting AAP policies in Delhi or holding public meetings against the farmers protesting on Delhi border. This pattern continues to this day and this is the template being followed by all members of the ABVP who aspire for a BJP future. These informal strategies allow the student politicians to get a foot in the door to larger politics and help the BJYM members to make their claim to the BJP. Now, Pranay is a spokesperson and a recognisable member from his village-neighbourhood in Delhi-BJP.

'Intermediate Classes', 'Dominant OBCs', and Creation of the Political Class in DUSU[324]

    a)   The case of Delhi

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[324] Thank you to Vishal Singh Deo for sharing his insights and discussions on this aspect.

One finding that has come forth in this research is the dominant representation of particular castes in the DUSU elections.[325] While ABVP as an organisation has a heterogenous representation of castes (in my experience though, I did not find a single Dalit member), the competition for DUSU invites certain castes, and there are patterns to their participation. Mainly, these are castes that would be classified as Other Backward Castes or OBCs. This is in based on the post-Mandal mobilisation and representation of OBCs across India (Narayan, 2021; Kumar, 2013). These castes are in possession of significant land capital in north India, and especially around the National Capital Region. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, castes that have historically been associated with land wealth around the Delhi region (Jats, Gujjars, Ahirs and now, Rajputs as well) are identified (in the *samikaran* caste math) as the most willing to spend the resources to fight university elections. Sanjay Kumar (2013) uses the schema of class to demonstrate the similarity of resources available to these castes. Though specific castes play a crucial role each year to determine how students aspire for a political career, I will also rely on the aspect of class to highlight the networks and resources being mobilised to fight elections. I use the classification of Intermediate classes (ICs), which are '…including low-ranking government officials, nurture webs of useful social connections primarily based on ascribed criteria (such as caste, gender and class) and maintained through face-to-face contact' (Jeffrey, 2000: p. 1018). I will be using Barbara Harris-White's classification of 'Intermediate classes' (Harris-White, 1997) as a way to group these particular *karyakartas* from the ABVP who belong to the above-mentioned castes and have political aspirations. Further, I will borrow the term 'dominant OBC' from Satendra Kumar's analyses of village and panchayat politics in UP (2019) to denote the relative higher power and influence these castes hold, as compared to other castes categorised as OBCs.

Craig Jeffrey (2010) has eloquently described how Jats in western UP are able to mobilise land capital and 'rent economy' (Jeffrey, Jeffery & Jeffery, 2004) to gain symbolic and cultural capital through connections and holding power in the lower bureaucracy, investing in education, making investments in politics etc. My study extends this finding on Jats and shows that particular castes around Delhi are using student politics as a way to convert land wealth to 'nurturing political networks' (Jeffrey, 2000: p. 1013). It also echoes Kumar's finding that Jats and Gujjars have been the 'most aggressive ticket seekers' and 'the most determined of political

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[325] Here, I am not considering the connections between caste and ABVP electoral candidates in JNU. The representation in JNU-ABVP is overwhelmingly Brahmin or other dominant caste students.

climbers despite their modest population' (Kumar, 2013: p. 43; also, Priyam, 2015: p. 101). This trend is reflected prominently in how state elections are fought in Delhi and also, points to the way contemporary caste mobilisation is occurring in India and the strategies used by elite rural castes using traditional land wealth into accruing more political power.

OBCs in UP are 2% of the population but possess majority of the land in the state (Jeffrey, 2000: p. 1015). Similar to the political economy in UP, in the Delhi region, there are 49 villages spread across eight districts.[326] [327] In a 1992 survey, a commission constituted by the Delhi government found that OBCs constituted 48% of Delhi's population from the time (latest exact figures were not available).[328] Many of these regions are demographically heterogenous but do have a dominant caste group that represent them. For example, the area of Najafgarh in Delhi's south-west falls under *Dilli dehat prant* (Delhi rural region) of the ABVP. This area sees a significant representation from the Jat community. Areas adjoining east Delhi and bordering UP are dominated by Gujjar-dominated villages. Predicting someone's caste affiliation from their neighbourhood seemed to be a skill that many of my interlocutors from Delhi possessed.[329] There have been demographic and regional shifts in Delhi's profile in the recent years, but the dominance of OBCs in Delhi, especially in some neighbourhoods and urban villages, remains.[330] In this region, the local police and bureaucracy is dominated by these castes.

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[326]http://obc.delhigovt.nic.in/wps/wcm/connect/c949ff804349b0f8aae8bb28c2355f02/rulal+villages.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&lmod=2064701466

[327] Kumar (2013: p. 39) finds that due to an economic-affiliation, Jats-Baniyas-Brahmins have been able to hold dominance over the city's politics.

[328] http://delhiplanning.nic.in/sites/default/files/Welfare%20of%20SC%20ST%20OBC_1.pdf

[329] Adding to the knowledge from my interlocutors, these traditional neighbourhoods/areas are identified with the dominant caste presence (not exclusively): Mahipalpur, Mehrauli, Badarpur, Delhi Cantonment, Badali and Najafgarh, Mandawali, Ghonda, Yamuna Vihar, Karawal Nagar, Matiala, Najafgarh and Bijwasan, Chhatarpur, Tughlakabad, Okhla, Ghonda. Babarpur, Rithala, Rajouri Garden, Model Town, Bawana, Hastsal, Palam, Nangloi Jat, Mahipalpur and Narela, Bawana, Mundka, Kirari, Vikaspuri, and Uttam Nagar.

[330] Kumar (2013) delineates community-wise influencing voting patterns in Delhi. These communities are Brahmins, Punjabi-Khatris (mainly voting for the BJP), Rajputs, Baniya-Vaishya, Gujjars, Jats, OBCs (he does not classify Gujjars among them), Dalits, Sikhs, and Muslims.

Where does the wealth come from? While landholding castes have been dominant in local village economies, some areas, especially in the plains (Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, UP and Madhya Pradesh) gained tremendously after the government began to focus on agricultural production. Jeffrey (2000) suggests that in the 1960s, the Indira Gandhi government, under pressure from the World Bank began to focus on agricultural yield and profits, and moved away from the earlier model of 'industrialisation' championed by India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru (Jeffrey, 2000: p. 1015). Jeffrey further suggests that this led to capital inflow among intermediate and backward castes in the states wherein he focuses on UP. Jeffrey (2010) in his study among young Jat men in the neighbouring state of UP found that Jat families made different kinds of symbolic and material investments to attain social mobility (what Harris-White (1997) refers to as 'networks'). Dowry is also a way for capital flow and maintaining wealth within the caste group. Further, with urbanisation occurring at a fast pace and subsequent creation of 'urban villages' being declared as census towns. In 2011, the number of urbanised villages in Delhi were 135 and census towns were 110.[331] Urbanisation of rural areas has also helped with influx of large capital. In areas around Delhi, rapid urbanisation has led to conversion of agricultural landholdings into real estate, a production of 'rent-economy' that provides with ready capital. This land wealth has also been capitalised during recent land acquisitions across the NCR region for government's infrastructural initiatives.[332] This is also a major source of income for these groups. My interlocutors spoke of borrowing the cars within their kinship networks and this is illustrative of large capital possessed by dominant members in these caste groups.

I see aspiring for political careers as part of the larger strategy of social mobility away from agriculture what Craig Jeffrey & Jens Lerche (2000) refer to as 'off-farm employment'. Kumar (2019) also notes, 'In the second phase land reforms and the Green Revolution, along with the policy of positive discrimination, brought prosperity to the middle castes such as Yadavs, Jats, Kurmis and Gujjars, and prepared them to challenge Congress domination' (Kumar, 2019: p. 4). With increasing capital, they also began to assert themselves politically, thereby also being able to formulate a certain kind of landed class. Kumar (2013) also notes from Delhi,

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[331]http://obc.delhigovt.nic.in/wps/wcm/connect/ff6f07004054dd5abf20ffa1527a7156/Chapter+2+.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&lmod=-1210802974&CACHEID=ff6f07004054dd5abf20ffa1527a7156.

[332] Thank you to Vishal Singh Deo for pointing to the significance of this development.

'… Jats and the Gujjars seem to have more political interests than many of the other communities. Political research in current times reveals that the rise of the two communities in the political arena has been happening for a while now; the booming property market has left many of them with surplus cash which acts as an aiding agent in making their political ambitions possible. The spatial concentration of the community in about 15-odd constituencies and their political awareness regarding their voting rights make them discernible. The recent Gujjar agitations for OBC status have also resulted in further consolidation of this voting behaviour… Party insiders say that it is a sign of how money power and the time at their disposal make the prosperous Jats and Gujjars important players in the political arena, even in areas where their presence may not be too significant in terms of numbers.' (Kumar, 2013: p. 44).

Different parties attempted to further their caste interests in the following decades, thus providing a model for a caste interests-electoral representation.[333] I will illustrate this with an example of Ananya's family's involvement in politics. Ananya, as described earlier, is a young woman from a Gujjar family. She was the first girl from her village and community to stand for and win the DUSU elections. She came into the ABVP in her Bachelors and was given support because of her father's links in the Sangh. Her father comes from a dominant Gujjar family in the region and he began politicking at a young age. He has been involved with the RSS but is recognised as a BJP member. Some interlocutors credited her smooth transition into the ABVP to her father's veteran status as a BJP member who has strong holds over his ancestral region in the National Capital Territory (areas around Delhi). He has fought multiple municipal elections from north Delhi, winning several times. He has multiple NGOs and initiatives that he maintains, all named under BJP ideologues (another way to negotiate tax authorities and informal flow of capital).[334] Ananya's endeavours into politics were financially supported by her father because he has managed to convert his land wealth into a steady flow

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[333] To provide an example, rich Jats united under Chaudhary Charan Singh, a former Congress member who managed to unite peasantry in western UP (Jeffrey 2000:1016). For these farmers, simple, austere living of the hard working, rural peasantry was contrasted with the elite, unconnected lifestyles of the urban rich. This is still the case. Many of my interlocutors proudly claimed that their families farmed lands and that they themselves had helped on the fields.

[334] This is also an overwhelming finding among interlocutors in the RSS, Samiti, and the ABVP: those wealthy and middle-class members aimed to or had some or the other initiative that was 'working for the society' in the form of NGOs. NGOs are not taxed and are beyond government scrutiny (at least those in the good books of the present government). All the *karyakartas* who come from traditionally dominant OBC and wealthy Brahmins have a foundation/NGO in their name. This also gives them an identity, apart from being an aspiring politician.

of capital. This capital he has used to network, attain higher social mobility and achieve a stable political position in his local context. Ananya has used the foundation built by her father to receive an 'elite Delhi University education', as she refers to it. Using this social capital, she is able to mobilise the political resources from her father's networks to make her own case for candidacy to the ABVP. After her victory, she used the DUSU networks to make her way into the BJP. During this time, her brother was also being groomed to fight DUSU elections using the resources of his elder sister and father. Further, Ananya's marriage was arranged to the son of another powerful BJP member in the state (from the same caste), thereby expanding on the existing resources of the family. 'We have been able to come out of the village and modernise,' was how Ananya explained the need for politics. 'Modernise' here would mean that this family has successfully used politics as a route to generate 'off-farm employment' (borrowing from Jeffrey & Lerche, 2000) for themselves through a careful mobilisation of land wealth, cultural and symbolic capital. Ananya's journey is not unique and reflects many others coming from dominant OBCs who have been able to capitalise on student politics, existing capital to create political influence to further cement power, a loop of influence and power that seems to feed into itself.

b) The Impact of DUSU's Political Class on the Organisation and the Movement

'For any party, the decision about its choice of candidate is decided by caste; considerations of disposition, aptitude and skill come later.'
- Kumar (2013: p. 36)

'Informalisation' is a concept I am using to indicate the networks of kinship and friendships that are activated and come of use during the mobilisation and socialisation for the work of the movement. These are not formalised relationships. What I mean by that is that these networks are not contractually articulated. Further, as mentioned earlier, *peechhe ki setting* is a way to mobilise networks that allow for transactions to occur. This finding adds to the literature on the 'anthropology of democracy' (Paley, 2002).[335] As mentioned earlier, the *samikaran* math is

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[335] A deviation from the larger Delhi state politics is that although the Aam Aadmi Party is a formidable force in the electoral politics of Delhi, its student unit (Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Samiti (CYSS)), does not enjoy the same level of popularity or influence. This could perhaps be because of the longer presence of ABVP, NSUI and even the Left student parties on campus.

heavily dependent on caste.[336] The candidates are chosen based on how they can mobilise the caste vote. Kumar (2013) in his extensive study of elections in Delhi finds that class is a more crucial factor for voting among residents of Delhi than caste. DUSU elections are representative of the migration patterns, class character and spatial extent of the city and in this I find that caste plays an equally crucial role among candidates and voters alike. Special focus on campaigning is given to colleges in particular areas affiliated with the candidates' caste identity. Although Delhi University sees a diverse student population from across India, most colleges are dominated by those who have Delhi and the neighbouring districts as their domicile. Since the university is spread across Delhi, it is also the time caste associations and kinship networks would be activated in support of the candidate, especially of those whose ancestral roots are near Delhi. What does this mean for the movement and student politics in Delhi University? One implication is that certain landed castes around the national capital region (apart from those who come from rich families in other parts of Delhi) can be the only ones who aspire for contesting DUSU. Thus, university elections, much like other elections in the country, are dominated by those from powerful castes and also have the ability to mobilise capital. Further, political parties are also looking for young candidates from these communities (Kumar, 2013: p. 47) to consolidate the caste vote in the city. DUSU elections, especially the candidates from constituencies around Delhi, could provide them with a ready cadre.

In the recent years, there has been an increasing representation of students from *purab* (meaning eastern, Hindi speaking states like eastern part of UP, Bihar). Due to their political presence and the overall changing profile of Delhi, candidates from the region are also being considered for a ticket. To illustrate the changing trends away from traditional OBCs from Delhi, in 2019, Shakti Singh, a Rajput from an influential political family in Bihar was chosen to stand for vice-president from ABVP. With increasing number of migrants from the region, his selection was widely regarded as a new exercise, to mark the changing demography of Delhi. This was also around the same time that the Delhi government marked a popular festival

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[336] The reason I feel that caste becomes such an important factor in DUSU elections, and the same intensity is not reflected in Delhi state elections is because of geography. Kumar points out that communities become stronger vote banks and can influence voting patterns in certain areas due to their numerical strength (he gives the example of Rajputs and Vaishyas, even though powerful communities, are not as strong a vote-bank as the Punjabi-Khatri community in Delhi). This he points out is due to the concentration of the latter in certain defined areas as opposed to the former communities that are spread across the state). Since DUSU is spread across Delhi and does not have limitations of neighbourhood-community influencing it, caste can be the more unifying factor here.

from the region 'Chhatt Puja' as an official holiday in the state, to attract the *poorabiya* (eastern) vote.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Brahmin *karyakartas* do not aspire for a place in the DUSU panel. For them, the mobility upwards in the hierarchy is articulated in the language of 'merit' and 'hard work'. Members from other non-traditional Sangh castes (OBCs, intermediate classes) have found a way to make inroads in the Sangh structure (via ABVP, BJYM and the BJP) through aspirations for DUSU. As demonstrated in chapter 2, though the *Sangh Parivar* consists of heterogenous demographics, the power to make decisions lies with upper-caste men (specifically Brahmin) in the RSS. Through the full-time *Pracharaks* of the RSS heading and advising the different affiliates, the RSS is able to maintain a caste hegemony. It seems to echo Kanshi Ram's theorisation of power in India: that the hegemonic ideas were determined by Brahmins (Narayan, 2014). Kumar (2013: p. 37) also points out that the chief strategists and ideologues of all political parties are Brahmins. And it seems, the dominant caste (especially, Brahmin) *karyakartas* are aware of this. This is also one of the ways I see a limit to the aspiration of those who aspire for DUSU in the Sangh structure as well as the Hindu nationalist movement.

Rajni Kothari noted two decades after independence, 'It is not politics that gets caste-ridden; it is caste that gets politicized (sic) (Kothari, 1970: p. 225)'. But the way I understand it, caste was always political–it is just being adapted to an electoral democracy. There is no question that this is a trend that is reflected in the way electoral politics functions in India today. A question that arises for me through this is: is this the form of the caste-based separate electorates that were envisioned in the 1930s? Superficially, it might appear similar–that caste-based representation allows for concerns to be voiced from different demographics. But the similarity ends here, in my understanding. If we are to go by the trend in DUSU, it seems that only certain castes (and by extension, classes) can aspire for political power in the present moment, leaving out a majority of the Dalit-Bahujan student population.[337] The parties currently holding power in the campus, ABVP and NSUI, historically have not demonstrated any wish to rectify social

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[337] In contrast to DUSU, JNUSU and different parties on JNU campus have a far more diverse representation (caste, region, gender, tribe and religion). This is also because JNU has had a better system of implementing affirmative action (not just in admission but also hostels, stipends for students) and is able to incorporate a more diverse student body.

inequalities by providing opportunities to under-represented communities. In fact, the logic seems to reward those with power, in the form of the loop mentioned before. Perhaps, the future might see a solidifying of capital and hegemonic ideals even further, creating even sharper inequalities than today (since the ways to alleviate inequalities are being constantly attacked and ended).[338]

The Role of the ABVP and its Sangh Family in Student Elections: How the RSS gets Involved (or does not get involved) and the Politics of Disavowal in Mediating Student Elections

'We can deliberate here all we want but unless RSS gives the green light, no one can fight DUSU, MCD or even, MLA.'
–Sohini, 25-year-old female *karyakarta*, DU

'Once you declare that you are doing tayyari*, ABVP* Pramukh *(state and national heads) will begin monitoring you. What you do in your day to day, who you spend time with, eat with– they would know everything.'*
–Jeevika, north campus girls' coordinator

In the following section, I will demonstrate how student elections and the *karykartas*' investments are ultimately under the purview of the *Sangh Parivar* and, the elections' impact on the Hindu nationalist movement. Here, we come back to the strategy of disavowal to see it operationalised during student elections.

When Vani was chosen to stand for elections in JNU, she saw it as an *aadesh* (directive) and followed directions. Unlike DU, money plays no factor in the JNUSU elections. Similarly, Thunlai was chosen to contest elections the year she joined, in 2015 as the vice-president of JNUSU. She was chosen for two reasons: first, since she was from the natural sciences, there was a possibility she could garner the votes from science schools. The 'Left' parties, she said, disparage Science students, and refer to them as 'lab rats'. ABVP wanted to consolidate that

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[338] Further, it should be noted that there are Muslim OBCs as well with similar resources. But they too find no representation in DUSU. It is only Hindu OBCs.

vote as well. Secondly, her parents have roots in the northeast of India.[339] According to both Vani and Thunlai, the decision came from 'up', implying that higher echelons at the state and national level made these decisions.

In DU, organisational state secretary is at the helm of decision-making along with the zonal chief, *prant Pramukh*, ex-DUSU presidents, constituting a team of eight-nine. Delhi region for ABVP is divided into regions (*vibhag*) and these are overseen by the full-timers (*purnkaliks*). These regions are: North campus, South campus, Kalkaji campus, East campus, Rohini *Vibhag*, *Dilli dehat* (Delhi colleges in rural areas). These regions have one *Sangathan Mantri* (organising secretary). The secretaries work with *Vibhag* coordinators and college units to determine members who are active and can fight elections. If 16 candidates are doing *tayyari*, then to bring it down to four ticket holders is the job of the ABVP high echelons. Within the ABVP, past candidates say that the competition is fierce. *Karyakartas* begin preparing, and creating networks approximately three years before they intend to stand for elections. While, ABVP *karyakartas* during this time campaign for their panel, repeating ballot numbers to students in their own campuses, departments, and colleges, ABVP state level and campus level leaders hold meetings each day of election campaigning to assess the progress of the day and chart plans for the next day.

Officially, during elections, ABVP *karyakartas* are joined by local *Sangh Parivar* members, using their own affiliate networks to promote the candidates of the ABVP. During the time of the state or national-level elections, *karyakartas* also choose to become *vistaraks* (full-time volunteers). This is a system that is prevalent across the *Sangh Parivar* where members, for the duration of an event, choose to volunteer full-time to the organisation.

At first, Pranay vehemently asserted that RSS had no role to play in the elections. His logic was that the Sangh machinery was 'well-oiled' and that all of Sangh's *aayam* (initiatives) were independent–a stand maintained by all Sangh affiliates (echoed also by Anderson & Damle, 1987). Sohini completely contradicted him, asserting that RSS-BJP played a very influential role in the organisation. But they both agree that while a BJP person can use their influence to 'suggest' a name, the decision would be taken by ABVP *Sangathan Mantri* (Organising

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[339] Thunlai is from a dominant tribe in Assam. As illustrated in the previous chapter, she did not relate to the northeast 'oppression' narrative that the non-ABVP student parties presented to her.

Secretary, along with more influential RSS-affiliated members). For example, Anil, Ananya's younger brother, was preparing to fight DUSU in 2019. His sister had fought and won DUSU in 2016-2017. Their father is a councillor in Delhi Municipal board, reportedly a very influential man in BJP's Delhi unit. *Karyakartas* assumed that his 'ticket' was guaranteed. He did not receive a ticket that year, despite his connections and position in the organisation. Speculations were rife that it was an inter-party rivalry, and it was access to the RSS that determined the 'cut'. Similarly, despite having solved most of the *samikaran* math, Pranay lost the election to a NSUI candidate. 'We were all in shock,' his friend declared, showing a folder on his phone with screenshots of hundreds of posts on social media that expressed disbelief at his loss. He was the most senior among the people in his own panel and competing NSUI's. The seniority was supposed to lay claim to the goodwill he had among students across the university. 'The margin by which I lost is 6000 votes–that is unprecedented in DUSU history,' he exclaimed. At first, he hinted that the loss was suspicious, but did not further elaborate.[340] In later meetings, Pranay unpacked the suspicions he had, revealing a bitter competition within the organisation. His loss was seen by many of my interlocutors as evidence that there is 'politics' being played at a 'higher level'. The 'higher level' is the state and national level leaders of the ABVP. He had mentioned in his earlier meetings about the culture of being in the good books of ABVP echelons through sycophancy and his inability to do the same. It was this insufficient *chaaploosi* (sycophancy) within his own party that he claims cost him his seat.

The role of the larger *Sangh Parivar* in the university elections is undeniable. Various affiliates are involved in nominations to election campaigning. For JNU, the stakes are for making the ABVP (and with it, its ideology) more prominent. In DU, it is to hold power in an influential university. In both cases, lines between prominent affiliates become blurred and power hierarchies within the *Parivar* are activated. Affiliates and RSS claim complete independence from each other's affairs (Anderson and Damle, 1987). But how true is this? As shown in chapter 2, here too, there is a clear hierarchy between RSS (the mediator of the Sangh family)

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[340] It seemed from conversations with other *karyakartas* as well that the seats are pre-decided in DUSU elections. This is another parallel network operating in Delhi University through '*babas*' (wise men; here, men having networking power). Reportedly, these men work in tandem with student politicians, student party leaders, and even, university machinery to broker and sway the elections. Interestingly, they work with all parties. Arranging crowds, negotiating material goods for 'political sociability' are just some of the functions performed by these individuals. These networks were mentioned several times by senior and more connected ABVP members. For others, these networks did not exist, and younger members had absolutely no idea of their existence. These phantom networks were difficult to trace and are extremely masculine spaces.

and other affiliates that have come after it. It has been particularly hard to ascertain the specific role of the RSS members in the functioning of its affiliates. We do know that RSS *Pracharaks* or RSS members occupy the highest reverential positions in each affiliate. In what specific ways does this translate to the day-to-day functioning, and in this case, its presence in influential student politics in university campuses? As illustrated by the quote above, nothing is finalised without the go-ahead of the RSS influence. Pranay and Sohini's contrasting assertions point to a significant strategy of the RSS – one of convenient disavowal.

As was shown in a previous chapter on the history of the ABVP, RSS has had to adapt to the political conditions placed upon it to continue operating. Many affiliates, including ABVP, were born out of this need. This necessity arose so that organisation's work continued while RSS navigated legality and illegality in its relation to the Indian nation state. What does this disavowal in its affiliates' functioning point to? It shows in large organisations like the *Sangh Parivar*, there are official and unofficial structures that hold power. To give an example: when the BJP took power in 2014, RSS and its high functionaries consistently claimed that the BJP was separate from them, that the organisation has no dreams of power and that it would continue to work in the interest of the nation.[341] In fact, it offered its cadre to work for others in the political spectrum because it claimed that it had only national interests at heart.[342] To go back to the point made earlier about informalisation strategies, does this disavowal signify a larger trend in politics in India? Informal networks are crucial to execute electoral claims and these networks are not always officially invoked. RSS holding power over BJP points to the tangible influence it has on it. This power is never officially declared. We can only ascertain that the strings go beyond what we see on the Indian political stage. There is a need to assert

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[341] DNA Web Desk. (2014) It's Not Our Job to Chant "NaMo NaMo": RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat, *DNA*, 11 March 2014, https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-it-s-not-our-job-to-chant-namo-namo-rss-chief-mohan-bhagwat-1968499 [accessed on 9 April 2021]; N.A. (2014) Why RSS Will Loan its Committed Cadre to BJP if the Party Forms a Govt, *Firstpost*, 2 April 2014, https://www.firstpost.com/politics/why-rss-will-loan-its-committed-cadre-to-bjp-if-the-party-forms-a-govt-1462201.html [accessed on 9 April 2021].

[342] Srivastava, P. (2014) RSS ends fifteen years of electoral disengagement to lead nationwide campaign for saffron resurgence, *Mail Online India*, 4 April 2014, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2597377/RSS-ends-fifteen-years-electoral-disengagement-lead-nationwide-campaign-saffron-resurgence.html [accessed on 9 April 2021].

itself as a 'cultural' organisation and this works alongside its strategy for disavowal.[343] Mathur (2008) has unequivocally asserted that it is this claim that we should take seriously if we are to examine the predominance of the RSS in today's socio-political landscape and its role in the Hindu nationalist movement in India.

Socialisation into Hierarchy, Relationships within the Organisation, and Articulating Aspirations

An aspect that emerges when *karyakartas* become candidates is the tussle for hierarchy. Let us go back to the example of Jeevika (the north campus girls' coordinator) admonishing Barkha and Rita (ABVP members from a non-DUSU college) to focus more on ABVP work and not invest all their time at the beck and call of an aspiring candidate. Her act signalled two aspects: first, that the aspiring candidate is himself in a precarious position and will not help Barkha and Rita gain leverage in the organisation. Second: the tension between ABVP post holders and DUSU aspiring candidates. Jeevika's scolding was also done to reassert her position as an ABVP position holder, to reclaim her own position in the hierarchy. Her reaching out to Barkha and Rita's parents is to manifest it–of being within the ABVP and restore the 'natural' order of hierarchy (as she claimed). This admonishment later led to a series of meetings between *bhaiyas* and *didis* of the ABVP to mediate between the two factions: one against the 'girls coordinator' (led by Barkha and Rita) and one in her favour. The faction emerged due to the parallel power structures that exist: between the candidate and ABVP position holders, whereby the last word always goes to the highest position holder in the university: the state secretary.

One of the crucial aspects that emerges from the journeys of student politicians aspiring for a political career is the relevance of socialisation into hierarchy of the ABVP and the Sangh structure. The knowledge gained from this socialisation allows these students to articulate their own aspiration within the set structure, be it caste or Sangh's organisational structure. Thus,

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[343] Mohan, A. (2014) RSS Steps in to Work for Modi's Victory and its Own Survival, *The Business Standard*, 25 April 2014, https://www.business-standard.com/article/politics/rss-moves-in-to-ensure-modis-victory-and-its-own-survival-114030400394_1.html [accessed on 9 April 2021].

the activities to realise their own aspirations for symbolic or material goals find realisation in the set structure of the *Sangh Parivar*. This case is most stark for DUSU candidates who aspired to do *tayyari* and are now continuing their efforts to make their mark in the already laid out next step of Hindu nationalist student politicians: a place in the BJYM and BJP.

A sense of betrayal sours the relationship between the *karyakartas* and the DUSU candidate when the candidate does not acknowledge their victory to their entourage and supporters. Members of the entourage expect certain favours when they align themselves with the candidate. Pranay mentored a fellow Gujjar *karyakarta* through a successful election campaign and winning a DUSU seat in 2019. This *karyakarta* had been Pranay's right-hand man during the latter's *tayyari*, being available at his beck and call. Sohini noted that she helped Ananya's election campaign, since they both belonged to the same undergraduate college. At the time of selection for ABVP posts, Sohini claimed that Ananya should have promoted her name because of the help she gave her to win DUSU. Some DUSU office bearers gain a higher position in the key decision making of the organisation at the state level. Their accessibility to the ABVP and Sangh echelons increases, increasing their own circle of influence that can be leveraged once the term is over. It is the knowledge and access to these networks that members are constantly working towards. To ascertain the particular path available to them and the limits to those aspirations takes time, resources and many a times, disappointments.

Conclusion: Risk, Rewards, and Hierarchical Aspirations

'The headlines at the end of the elections will not take into account how hard you worked throughout the year- they will only say the margin by which you lost. I need to work hard and spend the money. If I lose, it won't matter that I worked for seven years before. All that would matter is that I lost.'

–Pranay

'If my goal is to climb Everest, I can do it in any way: by flirting with a pilot who can then help me. Or I can begin by training and beginning a climb from the bottom. Both ways ensure the goal is achieved and none is better than the other. But one is moral and other is not. This is the path of elections and genuine work.'

–Anamika

Nazar, whose friends have fought and won DUSU, gave an interesting analogy for the passion for DUSU elections. Nazar noted that DUSU is '*kam mehnat, zyada cheezen*' (less hard work, more rewards). DUSU, she says, is intense hard work for a brief time and then 'life is set' (life is comfortable). She gives an example of a bureaucrat who works under a politician. 'The bureaucrat, who has spent years studying for the UPSC, is still under the thumb of the politician. Then why study so hard in classes when you can get so far in life with DUSU?' she reasoned. Her reasoning was that once a student has won a DUSU election, the corridors of power within the BJP (and now the government) open very easily for them. But as this chapter has shown, to be vying for a place within the structure is to be in a constant state of insecurity. Surely, DUSU opens doors that would be hard for a common *karyakarta*. But resources invested in DUSU process do not guarantee a comfortable political career ahead.

In this chapter, I attest to Michelutti's finding that elections need mobilisation between formal election time periods to remain relevant. I detailed the everyday lives, motivations and processes of self-fashioning of those ABVP members who choose to contest for student union elections in DU and JNU. The discussion showed how an individual *karyakarta* makes different calculations, analyses risks and rewards, and takes stock of their social and cultural capital to make a case for a more stable place within the ABVP and larger Sangh structure much before they are chosen to stand for elections by the parent organisation. Then, I showed how high-level leaders in the Sangh, BJP and ABVP are intimately involved in the functioning of ABVP units. In the end, impact of involvement in the election process on the lives of *karyakartas* within the organisation was shown. Through this I have highlighted how certain castes rely on informalisation techniques and existing land wealth to further gain more power and influence.

Badri Narayan (2021) on his study on the changing nature of the Sangh and the RSS writes that elections are based on 'emotive issues' first and foremost, adding that religion and caste are effective 'planks' for election mobilisation (Narayan, 2021: p. 94). I can attest to this finding from my study on student elections on democratic electoral politics and mobilisation. While the election might seem like it is on a smaller scale, I show that it is representative of elections on a larger, national scale. It was evident from the manifestoes and the speeches of the student politicians that the issues that were articulated were neutral sounding–infrastructure in the university, student concerns, security and safety, curriculum etc. But the real drivers of vote

were affective mobilisers such as caste, regionalism, student party's affiliation with a larger ideology (gender was not a concern in both campuses).

There are some common factors among those who are chosen to contest the elections in both campuses. First, the individuals who contest have to have an impressive record of working for their college and zonal unit. Such a gradual rising through the ranks is considered respectable among fellow *karyakartas*: respectability acquired through '*Parishad ka kaam*' (work for the ABVP, similar to the idea of 'genuine' work). For the candidate, working in college and zonal units ensures support base. Secondly, some of those who fight elections and are able to use their positions to mobilise more influence find themselves rewarded in the larger ABVP and BJP structure. Thirdly, all the students seemed to be acutely aware of their never-ending precarious position within the structure.

Section 6.3 of the Lyngdoh Commission report specifically deals with student politics and political parties. A related section 6.6 deals with the election expenses and on financial accountability. These are perhaps the two most starkly interpreted sections of the recommendations, as has been shown in the chapter. Most repeated grievance by student politicians against the Lyngdoh recommendations was not attendance or exam arrears, it was the limit of rupees 5000 as election expenditure. Now here, if I take the 'unofficial' figures that my respondents provided me with, each candidate was spending a conservative average of 30-40 lakh (30-40 thousand euros) in their election cycle (this is the case when the ticket has not been guaranteed).

Why would these students spend so much money if they did not see any rewards for it later? That is the role that political parties play in university elections. They provide these students a political aspiration that attempts to justify large amount of time, money, and energy that is spent in university elections. And this is where I see an individual aspirational strategy among the student politicians, highlighting the case for the ABVP. Importantly, these practices also point to informalisation strategies that are replete in elections in India. These strategies become crucial vehicles for individuals to make claims in the electoral process without technically falling short through rules but allow for only those with networks and resources to be able to partake in the election process. Networks of kinship and informal connections become the backbone on which the skeleton of electoral democracy is upheld. Further, as has been

demonstrated, DUSU's electoral trends are representative of electoral trends in the country where certain castes are able to mobilise land wealth into capital for participating in elections and attaining political power. This is a trend among dominant OBCs around Delhi and has been observed in other states as well. This is in line with the pattern of generating 'off-farm employment' among these castes and accrue social and cultural capital through their participation in local politics and bureaucracy.

There is clearly a larger indication towards personal motivation from ABVP student leaders in DU. There is an analysis of risk and rewards that is done by young *karyakartas* before they decide to even suggest their names to their respective *didis* and *bhaiyas* (mainly *bhaiyas*). Lobbying within the organisation is crucial to the success of the candidate. Seeking mentorships within the organisation is not then limited to ABVP–it extends to the political career after college when the *karyakartas* aspire for a stronger position in the BJYM/BJP. Being a candidate is a state of always being precarious in the journey for power. Politics is seen as a power that is beyond the control of the *karyakarta*–that a *karyakarta* can give their best, a comfortable position would still evade them. 'My destiny is in the hands of someone else' is a refrain that was often heard among those who had BJP aspirations. A successful transition to the BJP is not assumed natural if one comes from the ABVP. *DUSU ladna* is a possible strategy that might yield results. Despite all the efforts, there are many people vying for a ticket from the party and hence, a ticket is not guaranteed. Even if a ticket is given, an election victory is not guaranteed.

What emerged prominently from those in Delhi University who were willing to invest time and capital to fight DUSU was a deeper understanding that this is a strategy for upward mobility. It is a negotiation to make their space in the Brahmin-Baniya dominated Sangh echelons in the north of India. There is no attempt to radically alter this caste hegemony. There is an attempt however, to negotiate one's place in the existing structure. In JNU, the organisational hierarchy is intact and traditional caste hegemony remains. In both cases, there is an aspiration for material and symbolic gain. A successful socialisation in the organisation entails understanding the hierarchy of power in place. This is the way I see a manifestation of the idea of 'hierarchical aspirations'–that the caste structure and the RSS supremacy in the Sangh structure is not being radically challenged. What students are doing is making their claims to stake their place within

the hierarchy and aspiring for a stable place in it. The aspiration is not for something new; it is a political aspiration under traditional hegemonic structures.

This effort, translating into an easy access into the organisation, cannot be guaranteed. Finding mentors, if coming from non-BJP families, is crucial for success within the organisation. What has emerged prominently though is that support by BJP-members is crucial in gaining a foothold in the BJP-affiliate organisations, and thus, supremacy of those with Sangh-BJP connections again establishes the hegemony of those with pre-existing connections. And thus, the traditional hegemony is retained.

Political aspiration as a form of corruption of an honest movement is a view held by many *karyakartas* who do not get involved in union politics. '*Sangathan galat nahi hai, usme galat log aa gaye hai,*' (the *Sangathan* (ABVP) is not wrong, it now has some 'wrong' people), Sohini observed. *Karyakartas* who lay claim to 'merit' and 'hard work' (as opposed to DUSU candidates) signal towards the *Sangathan* being overrun by those who want to 'use' the organisation- often being labelled as 'opportunists' and 'selfish'. These members echo the same sentiment as some traditional RSS members who decry the increased influence of the BJP and electoral politics into the movement. But in the JNU campus, this political aspiration is seen as a necessity to struggle for the ideology. In JNU, the membership pales in comparison to the DU unit. But the members are far more ideologically aligned to the larger Sangh ideology. They see their unit as an 'alternative' to the political choices provided on the campus.[344] Yes, they fight their elections on campus issues as well (as will be shown in the next chapter). But as has been indicative of the past five years, the most influential agenda is a struggle against the influence of ideologies from the 'Left' (*vaampanthi vichaardhara*; communist ideology). In JNU, standing for elections forever marks the activist as a Hindu nationalist. The activists are socialised into the ideology and through elections, strategise to make a place for themselves within the structure. For JNU ABVP, the struggle for JNUSU is both an individual political aspiration for the BJP and, ideological assertions and personal beliefs.

In both cases, activists are aware of the precarity of their situation. Large investments of time,

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[344] I find the use of the word 'alternative' is similar to the way it is used by the German far-right party, Alternativ für Deutschland (AfD). AfD in a similar vein claim being a 'minority' and an 'alternative' to options present in the established political landscape.

capital, and energy in DUSU do not automatically lead to a safe position in the parent organisation (here, the aspiration is for a position in the BJP). In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how protests and violence become a crucial site for socialisation into the ideology. I will show how students use violence and protests to fashion themselves as Hindu nationalists. Building on affective connections and the need to assert its relevance as a student party, protests become an important vehicle in which ABVP straddles its role as a Hindu nationalist student party. Events as an anthropological concept tell us that they have a way of re-igniting community bonds, and as the next chapter will show, violent events possess that power multi-fold.

Chapter 5:

Spectacular Violence, Spectacular Rewards?
Self-fashioning, Socialisation, and the Importance of Protests for the ABVP

Introduction

Student parties protest because protests are a reliable strategy for mobilising and organising the student body in the university. Protests typically comprise of groups of students coming together around an issue. In many cases, protests and counter-protests are held to declare ideological positions on issues in different forms: demonstrations, clashes, attacks on social media and sometimes, physical violence. Students raise slogans and agendas. They employ the use of social media and cadre-networks to raise support for the issues. Different groups mobilise students and lay claim to the campus space (through protest sites, walls, graffiti art, seminars etc.) through their initiatives. Protests become one of the ways student parties *do* politics.

As has been shown in chapter 2, university-students' led protests are not new. They have followed different strategies and have had different aims. India has had a rich history of student protests and student-led intervention on issues of national importance that began in the university spaces (Altbach, 1989; Shah, 2004; Pathania, 2018). Ideologically aligned groups engaging on university campuses contribute to the vibrant student politics in India (Martelli & Parkar, 2018). For the ABVP, protests in the 1970s were a site of expressing their discontent with the ruling dispensation. Major actors of those protests were directly involved in the growth and influence of the BJP in the years to come and even hold influence today.

Since 2015, there have been recurring events in India that have brought intense scrutiny over university campuses, inviting national and international attention (Nayar, 2020).[345]

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[345] Here, I refer particularly to the institution-wide protests at Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in 2015, followed by the institutional death of Rohith Vemula, a PhD scholar at the Hyderabad Central University in January 2016; the 'February 9' incident at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi in 2016; the 'Ramjas clashes' in Delhi University in the following year, the Banaras Hindu University's female students protesting the hostel regulations in October 2017; attacks on students in Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia Milia Islamia, and JNU attacks 2020, among many more.

Interventions from outside the university campuses have called upon members of the student community to explicitly declare their ideological affiliations, polarising the campuses. These events have compelled academics and scholars to deliberate on the idea and purpose of the university (Pathak, 2016; Apoorvanand, 2018). Is a university only for receiving education or is it a place for cogitating on radical new visions of the society? Some of the biggest questions and concerns that the university and its members have been grappling with: what is nationalism; who has the nation's interests at heart; what can be spoken about and who can speak about it, and intense debates on tradition versus new ideas.[346] ABVP has been one of the organisations raising these questions and desiring specific answers.

This chapter is framed using ABVP's strategies of balancing and straddling: how it balances its role as a student organisation and as an important affiliate of the Hindu nationalist movement; how it balances interests of different kinds of cadres (including, violent and non-violent); and lastly, self-fashioning among members themselves, balancing socialisation and personal motivations. I document the way the ABVP mobilises on campus, especially in the light of BJP's reign since 2014. In this chapter, I am engaging with the protest strategies of the ABVP in the contemporary movement, the tools they are relying on for protest and, the aims of the specific tools. There is also an exploration of the spatiality of a protest site. I will focus on how ABVP's protesting strategies are impacting the Hindu nationalist movement on university campuses and the role of ABVP women in leading these strategies. The chapters before showed socialisation processes and subsequent self-fashioning through emotional connections and elections. In this chapter I show how protests are a crucial site for socialisation into the Hindu nationalist movement. Through socialisation, student activists understand their required role during the protests. What emerge are different motivations, both personal and ideological, for being involved in protest and violence for the movement (as mentioned in the previous chapter, being involved in a protest and specifically being violent has the potential of future rewards from within the movement).

a) <u>Gender, Violence, and Ideological Mobilisation</u>

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[346] Pathania (2018: p. 18) also sees the present events in universities as assertions from students of marginalized communities '…producing a counterculture to the existing dominant culture'.

Presence of women in ideological movements has produced scholarship that has consistently asked us to re-evaluate assumptions on how women participate in social movements, the roles they undertake, the impact on the larger feminist cause and, differential definitions of agency and self-identity. In the subcontinent itself, there is a massive diversity in how women have participated in public life, engaged with religious, ideological or political mobilisations (Omvedt, 1990; Butalia & Sarkar, 1995; Jeffery & Basu, 1999; Metcalfe, 1999; de Alwis, 2002; Ciotti, 2006; Sen, 2007; Pawar & Moon, 2014; Roychowdhury, 2020).[347] Ideological assertions have inevitably produced different forms of violent mobilisations. Hindutva's engagement with various forms of violence has been documented about extensively (Engineer, 1985, 1994, 2002; Basu et al. 1993; Patwardhan, 1993; Vachani, 2002; Sharma, 2004; Ghassem-Fachandi, 2010). Hindutva's women, like women in other ideological projects, have regularly articulated their ideological demands through the language of violence, what Urvashi Butalia and Tanika Sarkar (1995) have referred to as 'feminisation of violence' (Butalia & Sarkar, 1995: p. 6). Durga Vahini (Chariots of Hindu goddess Durga; an affiliate of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (Global Association of Hindus, VHP)) women have been actively propagating their ideology through street vigilantism and involvement in riots (Katju, 2003; Atreyee Sen (2019) calls such assertions 'urbanoid enactments'; Saluja, 2022). Shiv Sena women have been documented to be involved in the post-Babri Mosque (1992) demolition riots in Bombay (Bedi, 2006; Sen, 2006, 2007). Their unique ways of contribution (such as using the domestic sphere for mobilisation, religiosity as a space to recruit new members, conceptualising discourse in the name of 'honour' (Manjrekar, 2011) has been noted in the scholarship on women and Hindu nationalism. Sen (2006) has shown how Shiv Sena women (and here I also take into account other Hindutva women) carry out the ideological agenda and bring their own 'feminised' forms of violence to the fore: they are active in public spaces; in the same fight as men, they perform the role of 'myth-making', 'rumour-mongering' and 'image building' (Sen, 2006: p. 28).[348]

When it comes to active involvement in mobilisation and violence, the figure associated with the ABVP is typically of a Hindu male. In this chapter, I show how young, urban, educated

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[347] An important aspect across political spectrum has been the idea of *seva* or service as central to how women become political (Ciotti, 2006: p. 439). Manuella Ciotti (2006) argues that similarities in the way women across the ideological spectrum participate points to the gendered ways that they can participate in political life.

[348] Kathleen Blee's work on women of the Ku Klux Klan notes similar strategies. She argues that we should take these interventions seriously to hold women accountable for their role in violent movements (Blee, 1991).

women, an extremely significant demographic to the *Sangh Parivar* contribute to the movement. Unlike other Sangh sisters (Sarkar, 1995; Tyagi, 2020), ABVP women do not keep religiosity at the forefront of their motivations for being a part of the movement. By understanding how ABVP women mobilise for the movement, we can achieve an insight into how young, educated, urban and conservative women are furthering the cause of their ideology in the present historical moment. The involvement of ABVP women has allowed the Hindu nationalist movement to perform two functions: first, they are able to identify a new antagonist– the non-male enemies of the movement (women from the progressive, feminist, left and, anti-caste groups). Secondly and importantly, their active engagement in the protest site mediates the presence of Hindu nationalist men who increasingly need the presence of female bodies to assert themselves ideologically in the university space. This process that I refer to as 'gendering' is a strategy that is operationalised through the presence of ABVP women, where bodies at the protest site are gendered. This outward assumption by students participating in the protest is crucial to how the opposing sections are engaged.

b) <u>Goals and Strategies of Protests</u>

There is a combination of goals to each protest I illustrate in my ethnography. Protests are a means of gaining visibility on an issue on a university campus. Protests are used to gain influence on campus politics. A protest is also a pre-election strategy. Protests are a means to further the ideology and belief system that guides a student group. The degree of violence is directly dependent upon the emotional response to the issue and is highest in an ideologically driven project. Since these are also the protests that draw high emotional responses and have the highest impact to make members feel like they are part of the community, they are useful in unifying a cadre and different internal camps within the student party under one goal. These protests are also the types that invite collaboration between different units and an active intervention from the *Sangh Parivar* and the resource mobilisation that the Sangh Combine has to offer. Protest events are extremely useful not just for the student party, but also for the larger Hindu nationalist movement. The most violent protests have occurred when the Sangh affiliate has been in power (the JNU attacks, 2020 and the Ramjas clashes, 2017), bringing ideological interventions outside the confines of the university into the larger public debates.

The chapter is organised based on protest goals and increasing intensity of visible violence (both on the protest site and state violence that followed). The data comes from oral histories and participant observation, substantiated by news reports based on the case studies of seven protests (four in DU and three JNU; one is a description of participation in JNU attacks (2020) by a DU ABVP member). In the next section, I will describe the first type of protests—those that register dissent (mainly against university authorities) through three case studies: post-admission protests and admission irregularities (2019, DU); curriculum (2019, DU); and hostel admissions against dean of students' welfare (DSW) (2019, JNU). Next, I will illustrate the second type of protests: clashes with other student groups and assertion for dominance. These were university clashes that invited external responses such as the use of violence and state support. This would be done through the analysis of two events (T-tree day (2019) and Ramjas protests (2017), both in DU). Third, I will show the impact of the protest with the combination of all three that resulted in unprecedented ideological mobilisation and violence: the '9 February' incident (2016, JNU). Lastly, I will show how members rely on protest and violence to produce a specific kind of self-fashioning for their own presence in the organisation.

Registering Dissent against the University Administration: ABVP establishing itself as a Student Organisation

In this section, I will describe three different demonstrations that took place at the start of the academic year. Two protests were specifically done to highlight the deficiencies of the university administration (DU and JNU, both 2019) and another was a critique of the university-prescribed syllabi in certain courses (DU, 2019). These protests show how the ABVP balances and straddles its role as a Hindutva organisation on campus as well as a student organisation. What these demonstrations help us see are the foundational aspects of campus mobilisation among the ABVP that become starker and more significant as the nature of violence increases at the protest site. There are three findings that emerge from the ethnography of these protests. First is the explicit need to appear as a non-ideological students' organisation. This need arises for two reasons: ABVP needs to visibly protest university administration as there is an aim to make the student party appear neutral. Second, it needs to appear non-ideological to project itself independent from the larger Sangh structure and distance itself from

its current networks of state power, a tried and tested strategy of disavowal.[349] Second aspect we see are the informal friendships within the local state and university administration to utilise informalisation strategies behind the scenes. These strategies, as was illustrated in the previous chapter, allowed students to play around with legality and rules while fighting elections. Here, these informalisation strategies later allow violent students to evade institutional repercussions (as would be demonstrated in the later sections of the chapter). The third aspect borrows from the findings in chapter 3 and the established Sangh model—by paying attention to the concerns of the parents, ABVP members make initial contact and establish its prominence as a reliable student party in the university campus. Through the parents, they encourage initial socialisation of students into the organisation.

a) <u>'We Are Not the Student's Wing of the BJP! We Work for Students' Rights': ABVP's Post-admission Protests and Attempts to Establish Itself as Student Party (DU, 2019)</u>

During the second week of admissions in Delhi University (DU) in July 2019, the ABVP decided to protest DU Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Yogesh Tyagi and his administration. They were protesting issues related to the university's tedious admission process: conversion of mark sheets from state boards to national boards; quotas of extracurricular activities and their implementation for admission; confusion over forms and fees; inadequate hostels and related cases of exploitative privately owned Paying Guest accommodations (PGs); and, the lack of coherent explanations from individual college authorities.[350] The chaotic arrangement sent guardians and their wards flying from pillar to post. Students from different colleges, college societies, and political parties were attending to students and parents. They were assisting them in the admission process in a widely held practice called 'help desk'.[351] Among the students affiliated to student parties were ABVP members who would fight with college authorities to make their presence felt and gain legitimacy in the eyes of incoming students and their parents.

Two weeks into the admission process, ABVP had decided to hold the protest. The protest was organised after campus-level coordinators and college unit guardians of the ABVP made

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[349] Please refer to the discussion of need of non-ideological language in the section on 'strategy of disavowal' in chapter 2.

[350] While there were other student parties holding help desks, a protest such as the one being considered here was not held by other student parties.

[351] The 'help desk' as a site for socialisation and retaining memberships has been discussed in chapter 3.

rounds in their respective colleges and collected the complaints that their members had brought to their attention during the admission process. After collecting the complaints, it was decided that the protest would be held at the gates of DU administration office, opposite the busy Arts Faculty–a usual site for protests. [352] The time of the protest was decided at two in the afternoon, so that the *karyakartas* could attend the protest after tending to their 'help desk' duties. I accompanied four *karyakartas* (all Masters' students from different departments in the university) from a north-campus women's college (normally a five-minute walk) to the protest venue in a member's car. In the car ride, they were all visibly excited–to do sloganeering, 'do protest' and show 'ABVP in action'.

Upon reaching Arts Faculty, we saw a sight common before any kind of protest. There was heavy police deployment with Delhi Police's characteristic blue trucks standing on the opposite sides of the road. Groups of male and female police personnel were hanging out in groups haphazardly around the designated protest area. Yellow-coloured police barricades were placed before the gates and on the street to slow down the traffic on an arterial road that connects many university colleges. Life around Arts Faculty ('ArtsFac' as it is colloquially known) continued normally. On one side of the ArtsFac arch wall, two *chai* stalls continued to serve endless cups of hot tea on a hot day, along with fried *bread pakoras* (snacks coated with chickpea batter). Next to the stalls, a Mother Dairy (a store selling dairy products) served cool drinks and ice creams. On the other side of the arch wall, closer to the Campus Law Centre gate, students enjoyed noodles and pasta from a makeshift stall. People from all walks of life inhabited the ArtsFac gate and stood there watching as numbers grew among them.

ABVP *karyakartas* continued to filter in and found their groups of friends. When a higher ranked member arrived, some would move towards him and give him their salutations '*Bhaiya, namaste*' (respectful greetings). They would then fall back among their groups. These groups were mostly men, in white shirts and blue jeans (what is loosely considered the 'uniform' of student politicians in DU). There was only one female *karyakarta* there, Neha, who I had accompanied from the women's college. Neha had been an ABVP member for six years now. She was regarded highly among younger female *karyakartas* in DU and was already considered

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[352] One of the ways to the Vice Chancellor's office goes through this road, an approximately 10-minute walk from the Arts Faculty.

a veteran ABVP member.[353] She was conferring with the ABVP Delhi State chief, Gautam. Both politely responded to the '*namastes*' when lower-level cadre members went up to them to make their presence known.

Protests are an interesting site to notice power dynamics within the organisation. Right away one could see groups divided: along caste lines and those who will support the 'candidate' who is hopeful to fight DUSU elections; female *karyakartas* band together; and the higher level *karyakartas* stand with their own support base.[354] There is active bureaucratic troubleshooting happening at the same time, with students and parents recognising members from their college help desks and approaching them to solve doubts.[355] In a show of power, a higher-ranking member of the ABVP is approached and the said member would display enough confidence to solve the problem right away. The ABVP member would ask the parent and their ward about the college they belong to or the department they need help from. The higher-ranking member would then immediately summon either a student from the college, a college *karyakarta*, or make a phone call directly in the administration. Then they would explain the procedure, looking more at the parent than the student, assure the student that they are now in 'DU' and that their problem would be solved. In the end, the student and their parent would be told to contact the ABVP representative of the college and be given their mobile phone numbers 'in case of any problem in the future, whatsoever'. This is one of the ways in which ABVP, following in the footsteps of its parent organisation, takes a special interest in reaching out to the familial networks of the student.

As soon as the clock struck two, the scattered groups came together and shared last laughs before the protest officially began. The highest-level office bearer among them, Gautam, gave a loud call, raising his hand and voice at the same time. '*Arre bolo, bolo, bolo/Bharat Mata ki Jai*', from the group (Hail, Mother India). This was repeated until the group became more prominent and cohesive. Then another member gave a call for '*Vande*' and it was responded with '*Mataram*'. Both chants dominated the soundscape for approximately five minutes, where different members took the lead to chant the slogans. The police on the other side of the road

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[353] Neha's role as an older female *didi* has been elaborated in the chapter 3.

[354] The role of caste and kinship in ABVP has been discussed in the previous chapters.

[355] A description of how individual *karyakartas* perform their duties at the help desk is elaborated on in Anamika's section later in the chapter.

also took their positions, perhaps taking a cue from the sloganeering, and spread across the gate leading to the vice chancellor's office through the Science Faculty on the parallel road.[356]

Across the road, high-ranking members of the ABVP DU north campus stood while the crowd, consisting of 30-40 men and two women sat down facing them. Gautam began his speech by giving a loud call for '*Bharat Mata ki Jai*' (Glory to mother India) and '*Vande Mataram*'. His slogans received an enthusiastic response. Sitting directly under the afternoon sun, everyone in the protest looked serious. Gautam began,

> '*Vande Mataram*, friends. We are here today to protest the *nikammi* (inept) DU administration. They have done nothing to prepare for admissions this year. They are harassing parents and students who have travelled far and wide to come to India's best university. Parents and students are both confused–what does this administration want?'

He then carefully listed the points that his *karyakartas* had collected over the past week and shared them with the crowd, centring his argument for the protest in the reasoning of apathy on the part of the administration. He continued:

> 'Are parents and students fools? First, they come to Delhi from far and wide. They then have to look for accommodation for the days they will stay here because admission process does not get over in one day. Then, they run from point A to Z because no one in this lethargic administration knows the exact procedure! We in the ABVP demand that this administration wake up from their slumber and listen to us: make the procedure transparent, equalise the fees in all DU colleges, and create a proper system for students applying under EWS quota. If this administration does not listen, they will have to face the wrath of the ABVP.' [357]

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[356] There is a structure at the Science faculty gate that helps traffic become one way. On one side of the diversion, the students can stand and protest. On the other side, the police stand and observe. The chanting took place on one side and the police stood on the other side of the road. After some minutes, the crowd proceeded to the other side of the road and stood in their designated area. Two young men stood on the Arts Faculty side. I assumed they were part of the crowd with their similar clothing and style of speaking: wearing white shirts and blue jeans. As the crowd across the road was settling, they commented, '*Ye yuhin kare. Inhe padhna-likhna na hai. Inke yahi draame hai*' (They do this exactly. They don't want to read or write. This is how they pretend). They then laughed at the protesting ABVP *karyakartas* and left.

[357] 'EWS quota' is a form of affirmative action for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) who do not qualify for caste-based reservation and come from households that earn less than eight lakh rupees (approximately nine

A member from the back of the crowd facing him followed this ultimatum with, '*DU administration hosh mein aao*' (rise from your slumber, DU administration). The crowd joined in, echoing, '*hosh mein ao, hosh mein ao.*' Gautam resumed his speech and explained the various experiences of students that were brought to his notice by the *karyakartas* from different colleges. After he finished his speech, he invited campus-level leaders to address the audience: the full-time *vistarak* (a member who had devoted a part of their time, ranging from a few months to years, exclusively to work for the organisation), *Poornkalit* member (full-timer; term is used across the *Sangh Parivar*) who was in-charge of DU, the girls' coordinator of the north campus, the boys' coordinator of the north campus, and the district head (*nagar mahamantri*). The members came and spoke to the crowd about the indolent administration, stressing that the ABVP was the only organisation that worked for the students '365 days a year, 24 hours a day, seven days a week'. They warned the administration of consequences if the latter did not correct their ways. All the speeches were interspersed with slogans and began and ended with the call '*Vande Mataram*'. While individually campus-level leaders spoke, other leaders laughed and joked with the police officials present. Gautam then took the lead again and informed the crowd that the ABVP had prepared a memorandum of complaints that they would take to the VC office and get it signed. The crowd consisting of ABVP members was informed that the administration will be given limited time to correct their ways.

The gates outside which the ABVP members had assembled were shut. Sloganeering began again and the police constables took their position on the other side of the gate.[358] They clapped and put the slogan to music, laughing and chanting. After a few minutes of relatively calm chanting, as if on cue, intensity of the crowd changed. ABVP activists stood on the other side demanding to be let in. Some climbed the gates and rocked them. The mood of the protest became frenzied almost immediately. The gate climbers looked back at the crowds with determination and rage, chanting the slogans. Those that had not managed to find a pole of the

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thousand euros) per year. ABVP, along with its parent organisation, has been fighting for its implementation. See, Vishwanath (2020).

[358] A slogan especially crafted for the then-VC was then invoked: '*Taga, Taga, na kisika saga*' (Taga is not loyal to anyone). '*Taga*' is a shorthand to denote the surname 'Tyagi' in north India, supposedly a play on the Hindi word '*Tyag*' (sacrifice). The slogan translates to: Tyagi is not loyal to anyone. Dr Yogesh Tyagi replaced Dr Dinesh Singh as the 22nd Vice Chancellor of Delhi University. Tyagi was replaced by Dr Yogesh Singh in 2021.

gate to hold on to screamed slogans and pushed those in front of them to break open the gate.[359] As members of the crowd became more forceful, the police official, who minutes earlier was joking with Gautam and other ABVP leaders, emerged on the other side of the gate and attempted to negotiate with the protesters. After a few minutes of back and forth, three campus leaders, the highest in the DU ABVP hierarchy, went inside the gate with a piece of paper (presumably the 'memorandum'). The crowd celebrated as the gates shut behind the leaders that went inside and dispersed, unceremoniously.

As the crowd thinned, my interlocutors, having delivered their speeches, were engaging with their own band of followers. Manoj, the boys' coordinator of the north campus was in a deep conversation with a parent and a student. The parent was appreciative of their protest but cautioned Manoj, 'I hope you good kids do not have to do BJP's bidding. Politics is very dirty.' At this, Manoj confidently declared, 'Uncle, we are no one's slaves. We are not the student's wing of the BJP! We work for students' rights. We will fight everyone who comes in the way of that–whether he is from BJP or Congress.' And then with a dramatic flair, he looked onto the remaining crowd and chanted a slogan that was designed to indicate ABVP's presence in addressing student issues: '*Arre kaun lada hai?*' (Who has fought for you?). The dispersed crowd from both sides of the road loudly responded, 'ABVP! ABVP!' '*Aur kaun ladega?*' (who will continue fighting?), Manoj chanted again, to which the crowd responded even louder, 'ABVP!' The parent and his ward left, visibly impressed.

The description of this type of protest alludes to the different aspects of ABVP's strategies as a student party on campus. First, by protesting the administration on admission issues, it projects itself as an organisation that works for student-issues on campus. In this protest against the administration, the language is devoid of any overt ideological messaging. Secondly, by engaging with the administration and the police in an antagonistic manner, the ABVP projects a distance from the networks of power it currently possesses, furthering the strategy of disavowal (discussed in chapter 2 and 4). Through a thick description of the protest site though, we also see the networks being informally invoked: through casual encounters with the police and the connections with the administration. Thirdly, the interactions with parents or guardians

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[359] The gate climbers, who I later noticed were the same people always–almost as if this was their role during the protests. I was told by interlocutors that the 'gate-climbers' were people who wanted to be visible in the protest and were usually people who were thinking about fighting elections in the coming years. I often saw the friends of the gate-climbers being the butt of jokes among their friends about going 'over' (overdoing the action) during the protest.

of the students show us that the ABVP takes the kinship networks of the student they seek to invite in the organisation seriously. These foundational aspects would be further elaborated in the following protests.

i. A Students' Party Working for the Parents?

In this thesis, I have shown that aspiration is articulated within the system of the hierarchy in the ABVP, thereby retaining hierarchal structure and the status quo. The way ABVP members engage with the parents of the students during the admissions and help desk is indicative of its ideology. First, by addressing and catering to the parents, ABVP members indicate that they hold the familial hierarchies sacred. Second, resilient memberships result from kinship and familial ties, and this is a strategy that has been tried and tested across the *Sangh Parivar* (Sarkar, 1991; Vachani, 2022). This strategy of engaging the parents and even the police (this point will be elaborated later in the section) is a strategy of socialisation and retaining membership: that hierarchy is necessary for the movement. ABVP, as I have mentioned earlier, is an organisation that works for Hindu nationalism on campus. Its secondary role is as a student party in the university. The protest described above are important for the ABVP to establish itself as a student party, active in university affairs. This helps ABVP make claims during elections, reminiscent of the slogan that Manoj raised at the end of the protest in DU, that it has worked for students' benefit (as encapsulated in the slogan: '*Arre kaun lada hai*?' (Who has fought for you?)/'*Aur kaun ladega*?' (who will continue fighting?)), and legitimise its presence as a student party.

There are many new students who do not have pre-existing Sangh networks or connections in the university. For them, the extensive help desk network and early protests is crucial. For example, when a student enters a college, ABVP or NSUI help desk members stand at the gate and occupy prominent positions that are easily accessible. Further, due to the larger number of student members in DU, they are able to physically cover more ground. Due to the well-established networks across college and campus units, solutions and answers for queries about other colleges and courses are just a phone call away. Many members' cases demonstrate that ABVP members helped them during their initial days at the university. To many incoming students and their guardians, this proves to be an attractive factor, as it gives the impression that their ward has some resources available to them when they are in the university. During the help desk, after guiding an incoming student and their guardian through the maze of admissions, the ABVP members would ask for their phone numbers. They would also make

sure that the student and the parent took the number of the ABVP member. They would confidently assert to the parent that they would help the student, often using kinship terms to indicate the future of the relationship–a very successful strategy of making affective connections that was demonstrated in a previous chapter. After this, many guardians (especially who came from outside Delhi) would leave, looking visibly relieved and impressed. Thus, after making a strong impression on the parents, such protests became a site where their concerns were heard. This establishes the link between familial socialisation and ABVP as a student organisation. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, hierarchy is appreciated and retained. This is crucial because scholarship on Hindu nationalism has shown that familial connections are imperative to the success of staying within the *Sangh Parivar* and the degree of involvement in the movements (Sarkar, 1991; Vachani, 2022). Building on these foundations, the next protest would show how ABVP situates itself against other student organisations on campus.

b) 'The Nexus of the Communists and the Administration': How the ABVP Posits Itself as a Defender of Student Issues Against the JNUSU, the Administration and the 'Left' (JNU, 2019)

Speaking the language of 'common students' is a strategy that is very important in setting itself as a 'student party on campus'. Building on the trends from the previous section, here we will see how the strategy of 'common students' is crucial for its existence in a university campus. Further, by using this language here, the objective is to distinguish itself as a student party that is empty of ideology and set itself against another student party ('communists', implying that the latter is organised on the basis of ideological impulses). In this narrative, for the 'communists', their ideology is projected as paramount, whereas for the ABVP, it is the student issues and work. This section will also show how it is able to merge the 'ideologically-empty' narrative with its grievances against the ideology of the left.

'Friends, when these communists struggle on campus, they do it for their ideological goals, they do it for political gains. ABVP shows that we keep the student at the centre of our struggle. We know how to fight for student rights. We know that the campus issues take the most priority. But these communists want to fight the fight of Russia and China in this campus. They want to fool us. But now the students have understood their (communists) agenda. They come here to study, not fight. If we give them the right environment, they will study in the library, stay in their rooms, and make theirs a brighter future.'

On a hot summer afternoon, some students were beginning to assemble outside the School of Languages square. The square comprises of the School of Languages (SL), School of International Studies (SIS), various canteens, and the library just a minute away. The façades of the impressive buildings are covered by the graffiti from various student groups. The protest was supposed to begin in 15 minutes. Until then, recognisable ABVP members from the JNU campus filtered in and greeted each other. They quickly moved to finding their friends within the organisation and began discussing the forthcoming protest. Other students went going about their business, alone or in groups, adding to the vibrant campus life that JNU is known for. Two male students walked up to the SIS building and began inspecting a new poster. 'BASO has woken up, my god!,' one of them said, feigning shock (BASO is Bhagat Singh Ambedkar Students Organisation, a left organisation in JNU). 'This is all *naatak* (pretence), man,' his companion said, shaking his head. 'Elections are near. They will come out of their holes pretty soon,' he continued. Their criticisms of the poster were directed more towards a student group known for its radical politics than the poster itself. Their implication about the holes referred to the BASO members as rodents -- who hid until it was time for elections, and then became visible to ask for votes. Their conversation was broken by Mahesh, a 30-year-old, prominent Brahmin ABVP *karyakarta* from the School of Social Sciences (SSS) calling out to them: 'Shrivastav *ji*, Sharma *ji* (dominant-caste surnames (changed) of the male students who were engaging with the poster), please come here.' It turns out that those male students were prominent ABVP members of the JNU-unit: Mohan and Shibabhrata.

As I sat on the steps of the SIS building entrance, a female student walked with purpose and sat down next to me. She struck up a conversation immediately. 'Are you here for the protest?' she asked. I nodded and asked her what the protest was about. 'The university administration is not releasing the hostel list. Many students are suffering. Are you from Delhi?' she asked. I replied in the affirmative and she continued, 'So you would know how difficult it is to travel from NCR to JNU!' I agreed–it is true. In most cases, one would have to travel for at least 90 minutes and change multiple modes of transportation to arrive at the gates of the JNU campus. 'I am Antara. You are the researcher studying the ABVP, right?' she said holding out her hand. I introduced myself, detailing my topic and where I had come from. 'Are you with the ABVP?' I asked her. She confirmed, explaining how she had joined the organisation. Antara comes from a small-town in eastern Uttar Pradesh. She grew up in a lower middle-class Brahmin household.

She was from the Sanskrit centre and began to come to meetings because her senior in the course, Vani, was a prominent member of the national executive of the ABVP. She said,

> 'My plus point was that I met Vani *didi* as the first person in JNU. I was having trouble in my university accommodation. Didi helped me get a dorm. Slowly, I got to know her by spending time with her. I was saved from *these people*.'

Antara has been a steadfast member for six years now. By 'these people', Antara refers to the 'communists' or the political students who are not aligned with the ABVP. Contrasting this was her view of the ABVP. 'We don't trouble anyone and try to be friends. We genuinely try to solve the problem. We are a student party first... The truth is that once someone gets to know *them*, they will never join *them*. Their lies are baffling!' In her five-minute conversation with me, she described the grievances that the ABVP was going to raise in the protest against the left parties-led JNUSU and put forth the points raised about ABVP's brief stint in the union in 2015, when Saurabh Sharma was elected as the joint secretary.

> 'Among the four seats, it was the lowermost. Earlier, we only had WiFi in the centres or library. He worked so hard to get WiFi in our hostels. He worked hard to release funds for two new hostels. Look at the E-rickshaw running… I mean, he did a lot of things. *These people* got scared that now that work is getting done, we might get votes also. So, *they* all, five or six organisations now fight elections together.'

Her disdain for 'these people' came through in every second sentence she spoke. It was only broken when sloganeering began to mark the start of the protest. While getting up to go join her fellow *karyakartas*, she asked me to stay close while they marched through the university. Mahesh began sloganeering promptly at 2 PM. The slogans began with the traditional '*Bharat Mata ki jai*' and '*Vande Mataram*'. After the scattered crowd became slightly coherent and other voices joined him in leading the chants, the slogans became topical to the issues of the protest.

> *JNUSU sharam karo!* (JNUSU, have some shame!)
>
> *Hostel tumko dena hoga!* (You have to give us the hostel!)
>
> *Hum apna adhikaar maangte, nahi kisise bheek maangte!* (We ask for our rights, we are not asking for charity!)

Hostel, safety aur padhai, Parishad ki yahi ladai! (Hostel, safety, and studies–this is the fight of the ABVP!)

Hostel ki seat badhaani hogi! (You will have to increase hostel seats!)

Mahesh then called the protest to order. He began by announcing that the dream of a JNU student, to study in the historic institution, remains incomplete until they are given a space in the hostel. He attacked the JNUSU (dominated by the left students' organisations that year) for not fulfilling its mandate, accusing them of failing students who were yet to receive a place in the hostel. He then welcomed the crowd of approximately 70 students to walk with the ABVP students. They would walk to the office of the Dean of Students Welfare (DSW) to demand immediate action. He proclaimed that the ABVP would 'dig their heels in until the management gives them a hostel list'. The protest march thus began.

The march was steered with the same slogans led by ABVP members. They passed through different buildings on the campus, inviting varied reactions from students. Some students were enamoured by the protest and the slogans, while others looked on bemused. One student passed by me using profanities, accusing the ABVP of being hand in glove with the management. 'Who are they protesting?', he had muttered while passing by, directing the same accusations that Shibabhrata and Mohan had levelled against the other students' group. At the start of the march, there were ABVP members taking photographs and videos, and some were updating the social media pages of the JNU-ABVP unit to apprise their followers of the proceedings. Thunlai–the soft-spoken ABVP female *karyakarta*–took it upon herself to keep the march cohesive and walked in the middle of it. I had twisted my ankle a few days earlier and was trailing slightly behind in the march. She would come behind and walk with me a few steps to keep me company and ask about my foot. Once confirming that I was able to keep up, she rushed to the middle again and led slogans.

After 20 minutes of walking across the campus buildings, the students assembled outside the DSW office. As the march attendees slowly filtered in, prominent ABVP members huddled to organise the roster of speakers for the protest. Mahesh took his place outside the four room one-floor complex that forms the DSW office. A security guard stood outside the steel doors that were shut and only opened after permission from inside. Slogans were again invoked to bring the crowd of now 40 students to order. Mahesh began by outlining the discrepancy between the numbers of admissions to JNU (3500) to the seats available in the hostels (1500).

'Why haven't they released the hostel list till today? What is the nexus you have with the communists that all the rooms are open but there are no allotments?' he asked for effect. He accused the DSW and the JNU administration of willingly troubling students who 'had come on merit'. The 'prestige' of JNU, he asserted, did not align with the way its incoming students were treated. He also raised an issue of 'ragging' that had occurred in campus a day before, again, unbecoming of an institution of JNU's repute. For his audience, he then laid out the way ABVP had been struggling for students' accommodation in its brief tryst with the union, starkly similar to Antara's narrative earlier. He began:

> 'In 2015, ABVP had one seat in the JNUSU, just one seat that was of the joint secretary. With that seat we put pressure on the ministry, the government and the vice chancellor, and asked for two more hostels to be built. The hostels have now been cleared by the NGT. You must have seen one near Chandrabhaga, another near Shipra (both are hostel names). There has been a foundation stone ceremony for those hostels but they are yet to see their second brick. They take 100 days to do a task that needs one day. They take 1,00,000 days to do a task that requires 100 days. And this useless, communist JNUSU puts no pressure for it. There was a fund of 91 crore rupees (more than 100 thousand euros) allocated for it, but they sit on it and eat interest off of it.'

These were the themes that were repeatedly invoked by the speakers (all the speeches were in Hindi) that followed him in the protest outside DSW. The crowd of *karyakartas* attempted to find spaces below shady trees to continue participating in the protest. Bottles of water were passed around and some *karyakartas* complained of hunger. The speaker and prominent members continued, resolute in their attempt to make sure that the DSW came out of his office to address their concerns. Among the speakers were also new students who spoke of their ordeal and how despite 'merit rank', they had been unable to find a place in the hostel.

The theme of positing itself against the 'left' recurred in the slogans and the speeches during the protest. Aditi was the second speaker. She began, '*They* want their 1940s separate nations even today. They want to divide this country. ABVP wants one India, best India, diversity and unity.'[360] Mahesh too reminded the students that the administration and the communists were hand in glove to trouble the students so that *they* (the students) rely on *them* (JNUSU and JNU

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[360] Interestingly, this fact was mentioned during the protest for hostel accommodation.

administration) for 'their business to run'. By this, Mahesh implied that left-led student parties deliberately chose to not solve issues because their membership relied on students facing hardship on campus. His fellow *karyakarta* Shibabhrata noted,

> 'When the student is angry, the communists will come to them and say, "come, let's struggle together". What revolution will you do, leftists? You can't even guarantee a re-evaluation for 28 BA students.[361] Their ideology is fake! They have put so many tribal people in danger because of their ideology! The truth is that by bringing these political problems to campus, they want us to not focus on the problems of the students. They keep claiming that they are fighting our fight, but we can't see it.'

As is illustrative of the speeches Mahesh and the speakers that follow him repeatedly assert the non-ideological nature of their protest as opposed to the communists wanting to 'struggle' for non-student issues. The ABVP members use the language of 'common' or 'neutral' student issues. 'With the amount of people participating, these people will realise that this is not a political matter. This is a personal matter, and we will fight for it till our last breath,' Shibabhrata continued. Further, by repeatedly asserting on the 'useless' JNUSU and the brief stint of an ABVP member in the union, the ABVP unit also wanted to ascertain that when given union powers, it worked for the benefit of the students. Mohan claimed, '*You* (left student parties) were in power then, in 2016, in 2017, in 2018 as well. Why hasn't the work on the hostel begun? We should ask this question to the JNUSU representatives....'

After the protest, prominent members were invited inside the DSW office. This was after the dean himself emerged from his office and smiled at the members he knew. Despite the slogans and the speeches raised by the members, the dean engaged with them in a friendly manner. While some students raised slogans, he and some prominent members engaged in friendly banter, reminiscent of the police engagement with members in DU. Following from the protest template, a 'memorandum' was taken inside the DSW building by three members, while others stood around. The crowd began to gradually disperse. As the memorandum inside was being discussed, some members began planning a *satyagrah* following the protest–a hunger strike that would take place until the hostel list came out. The schedule for organising the 'hunger strike' did not give much time for the activists to relax. They bid each other goodbyes until

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[361] Here, Shibabhrata is referring to the demand for re-evaluation led by ABVP in the previous semester for Bachelors' students in the School of Languages.

they would reconvene outside the *satyagrah* site in a couple of hours. I followed Vani, Aditi, and Antara to the canteen to eat. The protest had left us all famished and there was a hunger strike that awaited my interlocutors.

i. Establishing itself as the 'real' and non-ideological students party in JNU

What emerges from this protest was ABVP's struggle in the JNU campus to position itself as the student's party. Similar to the previous protest, it needs to establish itself as separate from the administration to gain students' trust. We also see the foundational patterns from the previous protest: the structuring of the protest, the speeches of prominent members, and the informal connections with the university administration. In this protest, we see two more aspects: first, establishing itself as a student party for the 'common students'. ABVP lay out their credentials as having worked tirelessly for students in their time in the student union. Also, by raising the issue of hostels, like all other student parties, it follows the pattern of gaining new members in the initial days of the university.[362]

Second theme that emerges is the university as a battleground for antagonistic ideologies. We see in this protest Mahesh's combining of the 'nexus' of the administration and the JNUSU in keeping the hostels from being built. This puts ABVP at the forefront of positing itself as the organisation that truly works for student interests. Connected to this is to establish the JNUSU as incompetent and led by an opposite ideology. Thereby, they are establishing the connection between the issues raised by left-aligned student parties and non-engagement with 'real student issues', imperative to its existence as a Hindu nationalist force on campus. By also reiterating the ideological-bent of the majority of JNUSU members, he clearly puts ABVP's ideology in stark contrast–as one that puts students at the heart of its struggle. Other non-left parties do not invite any comment from them. Their focus is on the more numerically stronger left-parties that are influential in gaining following on the campus and find dominant representation in JNUSU. Further, by describing the issues raised by the non-ABVP parties as 'political', it tries to set a base for itself as a non-ideological student party that is driven by its concern for students. Building on these aspects, the next protest will show how this feature becomes central to the protest, and elaborate on how the antagonistic ideology of the 'left' is protested in the language of 'knowledge' and 'common students'.

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[362] These are further elaborated through introductory talks, help desks, impromptu get-togethers, and setting up cells navigating the university bureaucracy etc.

c) '*Galat Cheezein Nahi Padhenge*' (we will not study wrong facts): The Protest against Curriculum (DU, 2019)

The previous protests were overtly against the administration but also carried with them the aspects of how ABVP posits itself as a student party. The following protest was against the prescribed university syllabi. This protest is representative of the ideological aspects of the movement but articulated in the language of common students and universalist interests. There is an attempt to disengage from the epistemological roots of the organisation, of the grievances that the Hindu nationalist movement has had against the left movement.

On the day of the protest, I met Manoj, the north campus boys' coordinator while walking towards the Arts Faculty. He was running late. He walked fast, bellowing orders on the phone to organise different parts of the protest, greeting familiar faces, explaining to me the importance of this particular protest, all the while trying to locate the 'department of social science'. When a passing ABVP senior commented on his sunglasses as 'style *maarna*' (to project style, but in a way of making fun of him), he pulled his sunglasses down to reveal an intense bout of conjunctivitis. The Arts Faculty building houses the language departments: English, Sanskrit, Hindi and the Department of Germanic and Romance Studies. It was a hot August day and there were parallel protests organised against departments that had not complied with the directives of the ABVP to remove objectionable content in the course syllabi and add parts that they deemed better for 'national interest'.[363] While Manoj attempted to establish the location of the 'department of social sciences', I followed him into Arts Faculty, where already there was a large but scattered crowd present. There he ran into Jeevika, the 22-year-old Rajput female *karyakarta*, and the girls' coordinator of north campus. Although they are at the same post, Jeevika was younger in age and reputation in the organisation than Manoj. She reported the members who did not show up on time and requested Manoj to give them a dressing down later. Manoj pacified her patronisingly, gave greetings to the male *karyakartas* that surrounded her outside Hindi department, and asked her if she knew where Gautam, the state secretary of the organisation was.[364] 'He was just here,' she looked around, unsure. Manoj

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[363] The reasons for the protest are detailed later in the section.

[364] There is a particular manner of speaking that older, male *karyakartas* use when addressing younger, female *karyakartas* when the latter are angry or complaining about an issue. This is not the first time I have noticed this and instances like these demonstrate power dynamics. Succinctly, the interaction follows this pattern: the female *karyakartas* has been diligently doing her work and upon encountering the older, male *karyakarta*, reports to them their grievances that directly relate to the matter at hand (in this instance, it was *karyakartas* that did not show up

recognised a policeman near him, and while they exchanged pleasantries, he repeated his question. 'Gautam is upstairs, outside English,' the policeman informed Manoj. This indicated that the police personnel were aware of the various prominent activists of different student groups.

After racing up the steps, Manoj spotted Gautam from a distance. Gautam broke away from a conversation with a policeman, and after a brief *namaste* to me, he sternly asked Manoj why he was not at the 'social sciences building'. He was pointing to a *Whatsapp* message circulated on their group that held the details of campus level leaders and allocated departments to lead the protests. '*Arre bhaiya*, there is no social sciences building!' he replied, exasperated. Gautam was confused, referred to his message again. From 'social sciences' it turned to 'sociology' and they tried to find the crowd that was supposed to accompany Manoj to the protest. Gautam made a phone call to a *karyakarta*, an aspiring candidate, responsible for bringing the crowd to the 'social sciences' protest. '*Tum log ho kidher* (where are you guys)?' he asked. The *karyakarta* informed him that they were waiting at the Ramjas crossing for further directions. At this point, it was clear that the *karyakartas* did not have any member from 'sociology' or 'social sciences'. Manoj suddenly turned to me to confirm whether I had indeed studied sociology at Delhi University ('Or were you lying to us?' he had laughingly asked). My department, I informed him, was in the Delhi School of Economics complex. Both Gautam and Manoj exclaimed, and before I could say anything else, made calls for students to assemble outside 'Dschool', beside Hindu College. Manoj then asked me if I wanted to accompany him or 'stay and *watch* the English protest'.[365] [366] I decided to stay.

The police were hanging around the corridors outside, men and women in separate groups. The *karyakartas* had arranged themselves outside the Head of English Department's room. There was also a reporter from *Indian Express* with a camera. I sat on a parapet in the corridor beside

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on time or show up at all to the protest). The older, male *karyakarta* would nod, ask the female *karyakarta* to calm down (usually using phrases like '*shant ho jao*' (calm down) or asking them to take deep breaths) or telling her that he will do it, immediately moving on to their own questions and concerns. In my experiences of these interactions, the female *karyakartas* did not have their problems addressed.

[365] Shorthand for Delhi School of Economics, the institute houses the departments of Economics, Sociology, Geography, Commerce, and Agricultural Economics.

[366] There is clearly an element of performance during protests. This became apparent to me when I accompanied members before protests, and they would acquire a more boisterous form of expression. The word 'watch' here indicated a certain passiveness assumed from me as an audience. Or earlier, when the *karyakartas* expressed that they were excited to 'show' me how ABVP protested.

two policewomen constables who were sharing earphones and engaged intently on their phone. The police around them were huddled in different groups, casually chatting with each other. Gautam was speaking to a higher-ranked policeman and they both occasionally laughed, adding to the chatter already present in the corridor. Gautam spoke for the ABVP to the media–both friendly and unfriendly to the organisation–in English and Hindi. He is a law student and the Delhi State chief of the ABVP. From the Ahir caste, he is the son of a war martyr, and his mother has been a member of the BJP in their home state in north-west India. The protest outside English was about to begin. English was an important department, and it was signified by Gautam's presence there. Slogans were chanted to bring protests to order: '*Bolo bolo, Bharat Mata ki Jai*' (Speak, all hail mother of Bharat).

The chants of glory to Mother India brought the disparate groups to order in the corridor. What followed was more than 10 minutes of sloganeering by different people of the ABVP. Some of the slogans used for the occasion were: 'English HOD, come to your senses (crowd: come to your senses!; HOD is head of department); we will not study wrong curriculum (*galat pathyakram nahi padhenge.* Crowd: *Nahi padhenge*!); we will not tolerate Naxalism (*Naxalwaad nahi sahenge.* Crowd: *Nahi sahenge*!); '*VC tera ek agenda*' (crowd: propaganda, propaganda) (The sole aim of the VC is to spread propaganda), among many others. Then, the north campus full-time worker (*Purnkalik*) Rishi, a Brahmin man in his late 20s from Uttarakhand, came in front of the assembled ABVP members and addressed them about the protest. He began by raising slogans and then informed the audience that ABVP would not tolerate being taught '*galat cheezein*' (wrong things). While elaborating on what those exact expectations were from the English department, he was not very clear. He then opened the 'stage' (*manch*; make-shift spot to address the crowd) for Gautam. While Gautam made his way to the spot, breaking his conversation with the policeman, someone in the crowd shouted the slogan, '*Bolo Bharat Mata ki Jai*'. Gautam began his speech with the customary, '*Vande Mataram*, friends.' He began by laying the contours of the protest. According to Gautam, there had been a conflict in Delhi University over the syllabus taught in the university for a long time.[367] He then spoke of the real reason for the protest and repeated the point laid

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[367] Delhi University is structured according to the university and affiliated college system. Different colleges offer courses depending upon their capacity and teach subjects according to the syllabus decided at the university and department level. The masters' programmes and upwards are conducted directly by the departments. The department members reach the level of 'Professors' and, educators at the college level are usually assistant and associate professors. Increasingly, teaching at the college level falls on the shoulders of early-career researchers who are kept on short-term contractual appointments by the college. The corresponding department engages with

out by Rishi earlier: 'ABVP from the start of this conflict has had a clear stand: whatever are wrong things (*galat cheezein*) or one-sided view on subjects by department HODs, we are in opposition to that. We are also in opposition to their manner (*tareeka*) of doing things.'

What according to the ABVP were '*galat*' aspects of the curriculum and what issues did they have with the way departments functioned? ABVP raised an issue with the monopoly of professors at the departmental level that made key decisions regarding the curriculum and associating these professors as having a partisan view. He said,

> '... Friends, you will be shocked to learn what is taught and how it is decided to be taught. Only 12 teachers decide a syllabus that is taught by 400-500 teachers. Out of these, five are married couples. And they expect that this syllabus be taught in the entire Delhi University! ...One side, one idea, one sided-view–the ideology that they are trying to put in the syllabus to brainwash students, Vidyarthi Parishad will never let these attempts be successful.'

He then informed the crowd that the ABVP had persistently protested against both Executive Council and Academic Council, the key decision-making bodies in the university, comprising of professors, associate and assistant professors across the department. Against the protest for Academic Council, ABVP protested outside the VC office and 'when the need arose', he added, the *karyakartas* protested inside the hall where the meeting was taking place. When the Executive Council meeting began, he claimed that the ABVP protested through a 30-hour *satyagrah*. Not highlighted in this speech was the connection between the ABVP and its sister organisation among teachers at DU, the NDTF (the National Democratic Teachers' Front is a Sangh-affiliated teachers' body at DU. It posits itself in opposition to the Delhi University Teachers Union or DUTA).[368] With pressure from powerful bodies like the ABVP, NDTF, and university officials, the syllabus was sent back to the departments for review and to take into account the demands of the former. These simultaneous protests were organised to reapply the pressure from Sangh-affiliated bodies. Gautam informed the audience,

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individual departments in colleges on the question of syllabus and curriculum through Academic and Executive councils.

[368] Kaushal, R. (2019) DUTA Elections: Battle of Left vs Right, Draft NEP, Regularisation Dominate the Debate, *Newsclick.in*, 27 August 2019, https://www.newsclick.in/DUTA-Elections-Battle-Left-Right-Draft-NEP-Regularisation-Dominate-Debate [accessed on 1 June 2021].

'Today, for the first time in history, a single students organisation has simultaneously held protests across the five departments: English, Hindi, Sociology, Political Science, Journalism and History... Had it not been for the Vidyarthi Parishad, this potential calamity (*anhoni*) would have taken place with all the syllabi, and it would have fallen on the students.'

He named six (not five, as he said in his speech) departments that the *karyakartas* over the course of the fieldwork had indicated as proponents of the 'left' ideology. Gautam elaborated ABVP's demands, categorising them as '3Rs'. These were: representation, review, and rational debate. By 'representation', Gautam furthered ABVP's demand that students should have a say in what is taught to them, since they were the primary stakeholders in their education. Interestingly, one of the ways to include students in the syllabi drafting conversations was suggested through student union representatives, a body dominated by the ABVP in that year. The second 'R' was 'review'–demanding that any syllabus drafted be reviewed by an external committee and not remain in the domain of the professors of the department. Gautam elaborated:

'We have brought the second R: review. In the syllabus, they have referred to Ganesh *ji* and Vishnu *ji* as LGBT; they have removed all Dalit writers from the Hindi syllabus; they have removed Bhimrao Ambedkar from Dalit thinkers; teaching Maoism and social struggle in English–we don't know how much injustice these people of this specific ideology have done on us students.'[369]

Hearing this, someone in the crowd led the chants of 'Shame! Shame!', to which other audience members, some of whom were busy on their phones were alerted and chanted after. The third 'R' that Gautam elaborated on was 'rational debate'. For the ABVP, the current curriculum

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[369] In his speech, Gautam highlighted that it was a problem that 'Ganesh *ji* and Vishnu *ji'* were referred to as LGBT. This sentence should be taken in context with contrary comments by RSS Sanghsachalak Mohan Bhagwat that queer history has been a part of Indian history. Jennifer Ung Loh's work (2022) argues that the Hindutva movement has been appropriating sections of the queer movement, especially trans individuals. She writes,

'"Queer gender' can be acceptable and even revered in Hindu nationalist discourses (Bacchetta 1999), with trans (*hijra*) subjects posited as Hindu- and gender-normative, in ways that sustain conservative ideologies and more so that serve to limit acceptable ways of being for other trans identities. The Hindu right can thus promote themselves as progressive regarding (trans)gender rights and simultaneously reinforce essentialized gender norms and normative religious practices" (Loh, 2022: p. 241).

This disjuncture is not a mistake, but as I argue, part of the strategy of appealing to different groups by the movement.

was dominated by a particular ideology. Gautam specified that 'we' (referring to himself and the ABVP) were not against teaching a viewpoint. In fact, he said he welcomed it. 'But while you teach that, you have to also speak about the loss of lives in Bengal due to this ideology. (*Louder*) You have to tell that over 140-150 ABVP and RSS workers have been killed in Kerala by the naxalist (sic), communist government,' he told his audience.[370] He accused the professors of 'one-sided' ideology of playing with the minds of young people. He invoked an example of ABVP's discomfort with the syllabi in History curriculum of the university:

> 'The history of China'–the subject taught was the same yesterday, it remains the same today. But earlier it was written: 'The history of China: from 1849-1959'. These people changed it to '1849-1949'. What changed? The history of China was taught, but 10 years were lessened. It was done because of the killings in China between 1949-1959 by this communist ideology–this violent ideology that only believes in bloodshed due to which tens of thousands of people were killed. The way we are protesting now, 10000 protesting students like us were given two options: to either go back or be killed. You will not believe, this Mao-inspired thinking government, this communist government, gave them just these options.'

As Gautam closed the protest, he informed his audience that he alongside an ABVP delegation would give a memorandum to the HOD of the English department. The protest came to close to the sounds of the same slogans that were invoked at the start of the protest.

When the protest ended, I started to look around and it suddenly dawned on me the amount of police presence in this one department alone: no less than 100 police personnel in just one building. Once the protest disbanded, the police also started filtering out of the building. At the head of the mass of the policewomen was an urgent call for '*Chalo, Chalo*' (move move). I followed the policewomen who were asked to report by their superior at the Arts Faculty gate. Their movement indicated they had to be somewhere. Once we exited the building, some policewomen sprinted to be a part of an already formed circle that was receiving further orders from their superior. They had to move towards 'Law centre'. There were rumours of disturbance there, but no one was sure. There are two buildings where Law is taught in the north campus of Delhi University–the Faculty of Law (Law faculty) and the Campus Law Centre (CLC). CLC is right next to the Arts Faculty and the other building was 500 meters

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[370] Naxalism, Communism, Maoism (used interchangeably).

away in the opposite direction. The policewomen did not know which centre had the protest. A group of them turned towards their right, because they assumed that is where the protest was being held. '*Zyadatar toh wahin ladai hoti hai*' (Usually, that is where the fights are), they reasoned among each other, indicating the normalised frequency of violence in the university. They picked up pace and entered the Law centre, only to find that there were no protesters there. Then the policewomen recalled that it was perhaps the other side of the Arts faculty, the Law faculty building. As they were proceeding to the other building, cutting across Arts faculty, someone informed them the fight was in fact on a parallel road. In the meantime, I heard a passing ABVP member mention 'sociology' and '*tod-phod*' (breaking things) on the phone. I called Manoj (who had earlier left to find the 'social sciences' building in Delhi School of Economics) to confirm whether there was indeed violence taking place there. The call went unanswered. It was already 1 PM, and I had to meet Vindhya at the DUSU office. The policewomen around me scattered to find the source of the violence, some moving towards Law faculty, some moving towards Ramjas College, some resigning to the confusion and standing on the spot. I began to move towards the DUSU office, the site of my meeting with Vindhya, 100 meters away. It later emerged, through Facebook pages of AISA (All India Students Association) members, that the ABVP students had vandalised the office of the head of department of Sociology led by Vindhya and Manoj.

Building on the format of the two previous protests, this protest highlights two significant aspects of the ideological underpinnings of ABVP as a Hindu nationalist organisation on the university campus. First, unlike other protests, here the ideological components of the Hindu nationalist ideology become visible–through its disagreements with the elements of the proposed syllabi and protesting particular disciplinary departments. Secondly, we get to witness the everydayness of state (through the presence of police) in universities in India, especially Delhi. The following section will build on the learnings from the three protests above and demonstrate why ABVP protests the administration in these three ways.

d) <u>Why does the ABVP Protest on University Campuses?</u>

The sections above demonstrate the everydayness of protest in university campuses in India. What emerge are the prominent ways in which ABVP tries to balance and straddle its role as a Hindutva and a student organisation. There are some foundational strategies that help the organisation manage its dual position. These are: deploying the strategy of disavowal while protesting the administration and, relatedly, informalisation strategies when engaging with the

state and administration. Further, by relying on the idea of 'common students' (elaborated later in the chapter), and universalist ideas unrelated to its core beliefs, ABVP members are able to project ideological issues as issues of common interest.

i.   The Strategy of Disavowal at the University

Student parties invoke issues and protest against administration to gain legitimacy among fellow students. For example, in JNU, the DSW protest acquires additional significance for the following reasons. Although this is a way to engage students, I also see this in line with the strategy of disavowal that is followed across the *Sangh Parivar*. First, ABVP is a smaller party (in size and influence) in JNU compared to its counterpart unit in DU. When it raises issues for student's benefit, it posits itself as a voice of the marginalised (other student parties also do the same). It tries to impress upon the students it is attempting to speak for students even though it has less power and membership. Second, it positions itself as speaking truth to power and against the JNUSU. The JNUSU has never had an ABVP majority (in the past eight years, it has had only one member in the JNUSU). Hence, it sees itself as challenging the rule of the official student government and highlighting their lapses. Thirdly, by protesting the administration, it tries to project itself as a separate entity from the administration and even, the government in power. Since 2014, ABVP members specifically highlight to whoever is willing to listen that it is not the student wing of the BJP. While the left parties see the administration in connection with the government and accuses it of trying to take over the administrative and teaching positions (by employing loyalists), ABVP unit tries its best to distance itself from the administration through protests such as these. Through such a protest, it can distinguish itself from sources of power (the administration, the teaching community or the JNUSU) and show itself as actively engaging with student issues.

ii.   Informal Friendships with the Administration

During one of DU's 'Open House' days in early June 2019, a policeman came to ABVP's help desk in front of ArtsFac. He hugged and shook hands with the ABVP leaders present. He then asked them, 'Now that you guys have won, when will you give us sweets?' He was referring to the recent win of the BJP in India's general elections. The ABVP leaders, all men, laughed loudly with him, while taking him aside from the place where parents and their wards were interacting with other ABVP members (who were lower in the hierarchy). Similarly, in the protest against DU administration outside Arts Faculty, Gautam and other male senior campus-

level leaders were laughing and joking with the police just before the performative clash between ABVP members and the police constables at the Science faculty gate. Similar to this incident, in the protests against the curriculum and against university administration in DU and JNU, the links of familiarity seemed established. The ABVP leaders and the local level police (not constables) were often seen joking, talking, and catching up during protests. In the case studies described above, the relationship between ABVP leaders and the local administration (police, university administration etc.) becomes an interesting aspect to consider further. The police or the administration may outwardly come to blows with the leaders during the climax of the protest. To me as an outsider, this conflict seemed momentary and even, performative. These informal friendships could indicate deeper alliances or affiliations, leading to tangible material benefits accrued by those who benefit from such networks (in line with the aspect of 'informalisation' discussed in the previous chapter). This point is significant because it is such informal friendships that allow student parties to evade accountability for violence, vandalism etc. There might be official reports filed against them, but punitive action might never be taken, or if taken then scaled down so that no harm actually befalls those benefitting from the networks. This would be further illustrated in the next section on the second types of protests on campus.

iii.   Making the Ideology Absent and Present: The Importance of Protesting the Curriculum (DU) and Highlighting the Ideology of the JNUSU (JNU) for the ABVP

As mentioned earlier, through these protests, ABVP is balancing and straddling its two positions: a student body and a Hindu nationalist organisation. These protests demonstrate the way Hindutva is operationalised in university spaces in the everyday lives of students. First, ABVP makes a very conscious attempt to position itself diametrically opposite in the ideology and ideological issues raised by the left parties on campus. It upholds its merits in this way. Another important and increasingly relevant aspect is the engagement with academic disciplines. To demonstrate, in the curriculum protest in DU, although they were protesting outside the English department, the example invoked was from the syllabus of History. This is significant for two reasons: first, it indicates the importance of history as a discipline to the ABVP (and the larger Sangh project) and how history is taught in educational institutions. Scholarship has extensively shown how secular historiography has come in conflict with 'Hindutva historiography' (Thapar, 1989). Sarkar (2019) has also shown the centrality of history as a discipline to the Hindutva project. But why is this discipline so important?

Hindutva as an ideological project relies on its own version of history that does not come in conflict with its imagination of a Hindu identity and the geographical expanse of the imagined Hindu nation. Historical scholarship on the subcontinent consistently shows another version of the people and the land, and to silence that alternative history is crucial for any ideological project.

The second reason that the protest outside English is significant is because it highlights the current membership patterns and disciplinary affiliations. Even though the protest was outside the English department, there was nothing specific reserved for the critique of the English syllabi. In contrast was the focus on the partisan view of the history curriculum. Similarly, Manoj and Gautam's lack of knowledge about the 'department of Social Sciences' (among many other ABVP members) and not knowing the location of the university's Sociology department, signals that there are some disciplines unrepresented in the ABVP. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a correlation between department and affiliation to the ABVP in Delhi University.
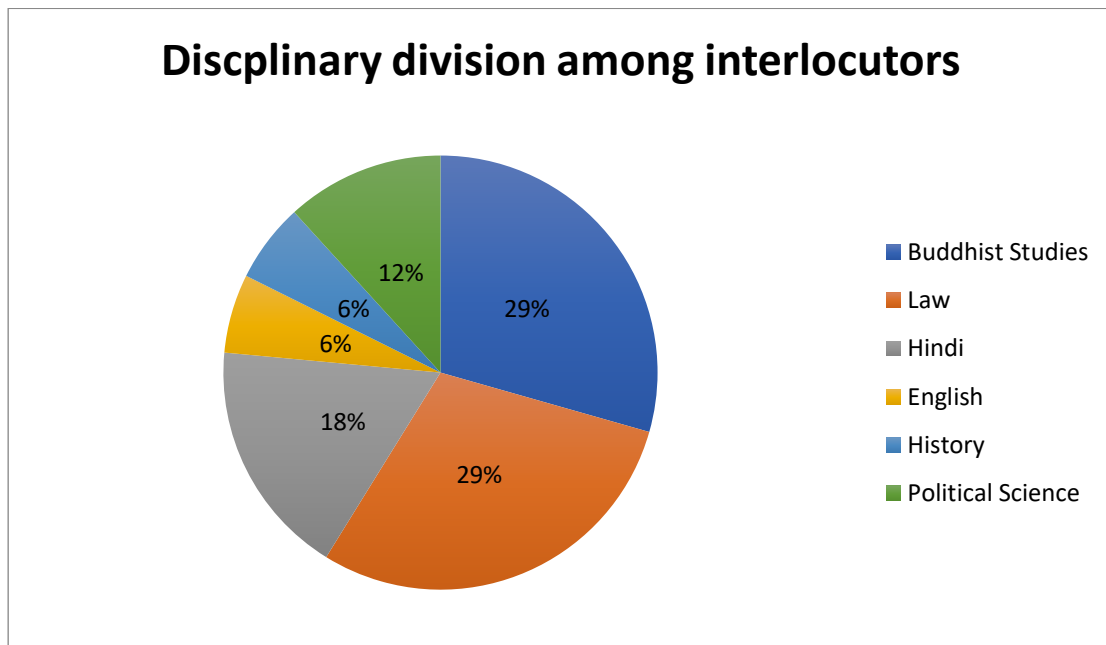
The question then arises: where is the critique of the syllabi emerging from? How have the students engaged with this 'one-sided' view in the classrooms? As shown from the protest held outside the English department, the main point of contention seemed to be the constitution of the syllabi drafting committee and the syllabi's conflict with the Sangh history. Similarly, considering the protesting students were unaware about Sociology department's location, where did the critique of the Sociology syllabus arise? These discrepancies demonstrate the

multi-layered reasoning for these protests. By demanding student representation in syllabi drafting committees, ABVP mobilises on 'student issues'. But as mentioned earlier, if there are no students from those departments who are part of the ABVP, could there be another reason for the protest? This is where its role as a Hindutva body on campus becomes prominent. Clearly, these departments are seen as speaking a narrative that is against the Hindu nationalist ideologies, and thus, such a protest allows for ABVP to register its dissent against the politics of such departments. The real reason lies in the conflict between narratives. It is illustrated in Gautam's comment at the end of the protest where he locates the conflict in the idea of '*galat cheez*' (wrong things) and '*theek cheez*' (right things):

> '... we will not be taught wrong (*galat nahi padhenge*). We are the 'e-generation'. You are mistaken if you think that you can teach us anything and get away with it. Earlier what you used to teach, we would study that. But now, even the curriculum will be debated. Whatever is being taught inside, we will discuss and deliberate over it. Until the proper thing is taught to us (*theek cheez*), we will continue to protest.'

Thus, as the NDTF carries on the protest through the Academic and Executive council meetings in the university, the ABVP provides support and leads the charge on campus. ABVP, as has been mentioned earlier, has historically protested subjects and issues that threaten the ideas propagated by Hindutva organisations. ABVP's specific role then becomes to lead the mantle in universities. Therefore, the agenda setting that is done by the RSS is carried out by the affiliates to reach another section of the population: university students. In this case, the disruptions around the curriculum are not just another protest. It is deeply rooted in the *modus operandi* of an ideological project. These grievances do not coincide with the reality of the syllabi being taught. In the above critique, the facts of the syllabi do not matter. What matters is the idea of unfairness, injustice and offense. Here, I invoke Paola Bacchetta's observation (1993: p. 190): 'The RSS ideologues are more concerned about evoking responses than with the facts… because the discourse is unclosed, constantly evolving through time, it easily accommodates contradictory statements and images.' This is in line with the discussion on facts and myth discussed in chapter 2 (also, Tyagi 2022). By invoking these aspects, the Sangh affiliates activate the 'specific economy of offense' that they have so successfully created over the decades (Viswanath, 2015).

Clashes: Ideological Assertions in a University Campus

Clashes are the second type of protests that I will discuss in this chapter. Building on the elements of earlier protests, I define clashes as a violent interaction between opposing student groups on the campus on an issue of ideological importance and to assert political dominance. During clashes, the site of the protest is largely on campus and there is active police deployment at the site of the clashes. Clashes occur when two groups come together to physically assert their dominance over an issue that is specific to the 'event' but also has larger ideological ramifications. Due to the fact that violence was limited inside the campus, I also see them as university 'clashes'. These are different from the ideologically motivated protests discussed in the next section due to the scale of the involvement of the state through the police. I show that clashes are important for the ideological assertion to the project of Hindu nationalism on campus and for the individual *karyakartas* of the ABVP. In both the cases I discuss how the fight was ideological: first is against those who question 'traditions' that are anti-feminist and upholding caste rituals. Second is asserting themselves against those who question the idea of the nation (against 'anti-national' discourses).

Three major aspects emerge in these types of campus interactions. First, these clashes are sites where we can see ABVP members balance individual motivations alongside the ideological demands of the movement. The data shows that protests are a site of socialisation into the movement. Through socialisation, student activists understand their required role during the protest and at the protest site. What emerge are different motivations, both personal and ideological, for being involved in protest and violence for the movement. Being involved in a protest and specifically being violent has the potential of future rewards from within the movement. As shown in the elections chapter, most students aspiring for DUSU need to hold an event or protest that would mobilise large numbers of students. This is done to demonstrate that they have influence and can mobilise votes. Further, evidenced from the material and symbolic rewards that *karyakartas* receive after their involvement in an impactful protest or clash, other members also try to implement the playbook for their own growth within the organisation.

Secondly, I show how ABVP women are intimately involved in asserting the cause of Hindu nationalism in the space of the university. The involvement of ABVP women has allowed the Hindu nationalist movement to perform two functions: first, they are able to identify a new antagonist: non-male enemies of the movement (women from progressive, feminist, left and anti-caste groups). Secondly and importantly, their active engagement in the protest site

mediates the presence of Hindu nationalist men who increasingly need the presence of female bodies to assert themselves ideologically in the university space. 'Gendering' is a strategy that is operationalised through the presence of ABVP women, where bodies at the protest site are identified and gendered. This strategy determines the different ways in which opposing sections are engaged.

Thirdly, borrowing from the need to posit the clashes as ideologically empty from Hindu nationalist motivations, in all these clashes, the reasoning used is 'neutral students'. Similar to the idea of a 'common student' described earlier, the 'neutral student' figure symbolically stands for non-ideological, embodying within itself the affective mobiliser for the ABVP *karyakartas*. The clashes also demonstrate the interactions between the ABVP and the local police and how the police acts during and after the clashes. To demonstrate, I will discuss two cases: the 'T-tree' event at an undergraduate college in DU (2019) and the Ramjas violence, DU (2017).

a) 'The Stone Thrower' and the Changing Definitions of 'Goons' in the Crowd: The 'T-tree' Protests (DU, 2019)

While waiting around the help desk, two friends of an ABVP member were speaking amongst themselves. A young woman had just passed them by, walking in step with an excited student and nervous parents. As she passed, one of the students turned to the other, lowering his voice and said, 'She is the one who threw the stone!' The girl widened her eyes. 'Her?' she inquired. 'Yes, she's the one who threw stones,' her friend confirmed. They both turned to their friend in the ABVP, who was the young woman's batch mate in the college but evidently lower in the hierarchy of the college ABVP unit. He affirmed, adding, 'There was blood.'

Anamika is a 20-year-old Brahmin woman who comes from a BJP and Sangh family.[371] She is a student at a Delhi University college. The incident when the young woman, Anamika, allegedly threw stones was the incident of the 'T-tree *Pooja*' (prayer), a college 'tradition' that began in 1953. Every year on 14 February, the boys hostel conducts a ritual where a previously crowned 'Mr Fresher' (newly entered first year resident of the college hostel) leads a prayer.

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[371] Although she never explicitly spoke about her Sangh connections, her clout indicated that her father was an important member in the BJP. My understanding is also that she comes from political lineage since her family has connections with members from across the party divide as she displayed prominent politicians from other political parties on her social media in relatively relaxed settings and referred to them using kinship terms.

The hope for the prayer is that those involved find a partner and 'lose their virginity' in the next six months. Two famous personalities are chosen by a vote in the boys' hostel. Prayers are addressed to the posters of these personalities. The female personality is called '*Damdami Mata*' (Damdami mother) and the song (*arati*) of the prayer is sung to her. College students recount that there was an addition of using condoms as balloons to promote 'sex education'. Over time, the condom balloons have found a place in the ritual as well. After the formal prayer, the members of the boys' hostel burst these balloons that are previously filled with water. Those who receive the meagre water shower are considered 'blessed'.

A few days before the T-tree celebration in 2019, a group of women objected to the ritual. Referring to themselves as the 'Progressive' Front, they opposed the misogynist and sexist practices in the tradition: the voting of the female body that would represent '*Damdami Mata'*, the use of the phrase '36-24-36' in the prayer's song and, the expression of desire for a perfect female body. There were students at the college who wanted the tradition to go on and those who wanted it gone. Matters were discussed in the college 'Parliament' (the electorally-selected, student run parliament of the college) and the two opposite sides stood firm on their point. Deliberations brought into discussion the objected lyrics but to no avail. There were students who believed that a Brahmanical tradition that upheld sexism needed to be gone. On the other side were students who asked the former to learn to take a joke and respect the tradition of the college.

Anamika was part of the college students who were proud of this tradition and wanted it to continue because of its value as a college ritual. As the students of the 'Progressive' front grew in number and gained support from outside the college, the college students who were batting for the tradition became insistent on holding the celebration as well. A day before the event, a fight broke out between the two groups at the site of the tree. There was violence between the students, men and women. The Progressive students found numerical support from Pinjra Tod (break the cage; a progressive Feminist group in Delhi) and the Students Federation of India (SFI; student affiliate to the Communist Party of India). On the other side were the defenders of the tradition. Among them was Anamika. She had single-handedly involved her connections in the ABVP from outside her college. Her seniors rushed to her aid and found her physically fighting women who did not agree with her. 'I was bleeding and crying,' she recalled. Manoj, the senior who rounded up the ABVP members to go fight, remembered reaching the college

and immediately 'getting to work'. During the 'T-tree protests', Anamika is remembered as the only girl defending the tradition. In the three-days of this fight, she said she received threats from as far as West Bengal and intimidation in her PG. 'My clutcher (hair tie) fell down when the leftists pulled my hair!' she said in the same breath that she claimed she saw a young student almost die in the protests. As the college students who were not partisan now remember it, it was a fight between 'leftist women' and 'ABVP men' led by Anamika. There were claims of sexual harassment from both sides.

This clash is indicative of how ABVP operates and engages with other student groups at a college unit level, especially how conservative students fight for their ideological claim on university campuses, spaces that are assumed as progressive and radical. Anamika's involvement in the clash shows how women (her biography is described later in the chapter) make their place in the larger male-dominated movement. Anamika is also representative of the new, urban, university-educated Hindu nationalist woman. She is different from her other Sangh sisters in her privilege, and she is able to be violent in a different public space than them. The T-tree case is also important to illustrate how the local college ABVP unit manages to involve the campus-wide unit in a university clash. Building on these learnings, the next section will describe how this clash is replicated on a larger scale and is able to resonate beyond the confines of the university.

b) <u>Ramjas Clashes: Protecting the University from the 'Anti-Nationals' (DU, 2017)</u>

'Wherever there would be anti-national feeling, ABVP will protest against it- no matter how bad a name we get because of it.'

–Pranay on Ramjas clashes (DU)

'Cultures of protest' was a seminar that was organised by the department of English at Ramjas College in February 2016. The seminar was to be held across two days and sought to explore different modes of resistance and dissent. The seminar was divided into different panels. One of the panels, titled 'Unveiling the State: Regions in Conflict' had three speakers: documentary film-maker Sanjay Kak, associate professor Dr. Bimol Akoijam from JNU, and doctoral student Umar Khalid. Khalid was one of the students from JNU whose name was booked under a 'sedition' charge by the Delhi Police (under the central Home Ministry) based on the '9 Feb'

incident at JNU in 2016.[372] The ABVP and the Ramjas college union (headed by the ABVP) expressed their displeasure at Khalid's invitation. The English department teachers were informed by the ABVP that they would protest the seminar and the department acknowledged their right to protest. The department was advised by the police to cancel Khalid's invite, to which the department obliged.[373]

On the first day, after having obliged the protesting ABVP, the seminar began. Underneath the seminar hall, large crowds of students began clashing and fighting with each other. The police were present inside Ramjas, separating the clashing students and doing a poor job of maintaining order. There was a lot of confusion. Reports of the seminar room being locked from outside were abound. Videos from the clashes inside showed ABVP members, not all from Ramjas, threatening students in the opposing crowd.[374] The crowd was seen screaming slogans of '*Azaadi*' and '*Sharam Karo*' (freedom; have some shame).[375] Among the ABVP, female *karyakartas* were standing at the side lines and male *karyakartas* were screaming and fighting. Male *karyakartas* (many of whom are part of this study) were hurling abuses, asking the students on the opposite side to come towards them and that they would 'give them *Azaadi*' (in a way of threat). There were shouts of '*Bharat Mata ki Jai*', countering the slogans from the opposite end. The slogan '*Desh ke gadaron ko, chappal maro saalo ko*' (traitors of the nation should be beaten with footwear) was raised as six police personnel tried to control Yoginder, a then-DUSU member from ABVP, who went towards the students to beat them. The police finally became active, running after those in the crowd who were looking to hit students. The crowd dispersed to the sound of claps from the students who were opposing the ABVP. The seminar re-started after some time. Simultaneously, some students began playing music on a loudspeaker below the seminar hall.

As the panel with Kak and Akoijam continued, there were stones pelted inside the seminar room from below. Videos of the incident show bewildered students and teachers ducking as

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[372] '9 Feb' incident would be elaborated in the next section of the chapter.

[373] NDTV. (2017) Violence on the Ramjas Campus: No Room for Free, Peaceful Political Debate?, *NDTV*, 22 February 2017, https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/left-right-centre/violence-on-the-ramjas-campus-no-room-for-free-peaceful-political-debate-450105 [accessed on 18 July 2021].

[374] Many of my interlocutors, who were part of the crowd, did not belong to Ramjas.

[375] '*Azaadi*' is a slogan that has become the pet-peeve of the Hindu nationalists, especially after the events of '9 Feb' in JNU 2016.

stones broke the window glass. There were screams inside the room to get down and get away from the windows. Traumatised students wrote messages on social media about the stone pelting while being trapped inside the seminar hall. Dr Mukul Manglik, a professor at Ramjas, stood to inform aghast students that the police had directed them to stop the seminar because they would not be able to control the violence that might follow. Students on video were seen asking legitimate questions about why the police were unable to control the ABVP. Dr Manglik told them, 'I never thought I would be saying this to you what I am saying today. But my instinct says that right now the priority is your physical safety.' The police refused to guarantee protection to the students and asked the seminar attendees to gather in one room. The students were reportedly locked inside the college premises until 4PM in the evening. The attendees began demanding the reasoning for their imprisonment. After heated negotiations, the police then opened the door and created a passage for the students to leave the building and 'run', to empty the campus premises. Questions of police's inability to provide protection were being raised, as students were being ushered out forcefully and asked to leave campus.[376] According to Dr. Debraj Mukherjee, a faculty member at the Ramjas English department, 'This was the scale of the violence that followed after the cancellation. Imagine what would have happened if we had not (cancelled the invite to Khalid).' [377]

After this terrifying episode, students organised to hold a march in support of the seminar, against the forced cancellation of the invite to Umar Khalid and the events from the day before. The march was also to go register complaints at Maurice Nagar, the nearest police station. There was heavy police presence, along with police buses. As students were beginning to mobilise outside the college, clashes began between the ABVP and the seminar supporters (Bhani, 2017). The police were already present, and similar to the day before, did not manage to stop the violence. Students from nearby campuses rushed to the aid of their friends. There were reports of physical violence, spitting, stone pelting, and verbal abuse. Journalists reported having their cameras broken and intimidation. A student from the side protesting ABVP was hit in the head with a stone resulting in heavy bleeding. Both sides claimed that they retaliated

[376] Gambhir, R. (2017) A Simple Guide To How A Protest At Delhi's Ramjas College Turned To Death Threats, Assault, *ScoopWhoop*, 23 Feb 23 2017, https://www.scoopwhoop.com/from-death-threats-to-assault-a-simple-guide-to-the-protests-at-delhis-ramjas-colleges/ [accessed on 18 July 2021].

[377] NDTV. (2017) Violence on the Ramjas Campus: No Room for Free, Peaceful Political Debate?, *NDTV*, 22 February 2017, https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/left-right-centre/violence-on-the-ramjas-campus-no-room-for-free-peaceful-political-debate-450105 [accessed on 18 July 2021].

to the violence but were not the initiators. Ashish, the president of the Ramjas student union and an ABVP *karyakarta*, surrounded by six men, told a TV crew in agitation, 'We are not goons! They threw slippers and spat at us!' The other side made similar claims. There were reports of injuries among 20 students. Pictures of a professor of English from Delhi University having been severely beaten made rounds on social media.

A year and a half after the Ramjas incident, I met Pranay in a coffee shop 10 minutes away from the site of the clashes. He came in with his entourage of four men, all in their early twenties. His entourage began by saying that 'Ramjas was successful under Pranay'. His friend Sohini had told me that Ramjas had been Pranay's 'area'. It was his alma mater. This meant that he knew the administration staff in the college, had influence over the college union, and had a significant say in the functioning of the ABVP unit in the college. Some ABVP members claim he was instrumental in starting the protest. Pranay nodded knowingly. During Ramjas clashes, he was not associated with the college in any capacity but had his connections there. Pranay had already passed out two years before the incident happened and was doing his *tayyari* to fight DUSU elections. It was his protégé, Aashish, who was the head of the college unit of the ABVP and the college union. Pranay claimed he was in college on 'personal business' when he encountered students complaining about a then-doctoral student Umar Khalid presenting in a seminar. He asserted that it was the 'neutral students' who had come to their union representative and demanded that the invitation to Khalid be cancelled. He said:

> '*They* (referring to the 'left') always begin their programmes in the name of culture but end up raising anti-national slogans. ABVP was highlighted (in a negative way) because it was the only organisation that spoke against it. Wherever there would be anti-national feeling, ABVP will protest against it–no matter how bad a name we get because of it.'

'Both the neutral students and the student union opposed the event,' he emphasised, adding, 'there were more neutral students than ABVP *karyakartas*.' As mentioned earlier, the ABVP unit chief in the college was heading the union. Ananya was the DUSU vice-president at the time and was in the DUSU office with other members of the student union and ABVP members. She claimed that 'neutral' students wanted to speak up against 'anti-India things' and requested that the DUSU get involved. How did the DUSU office bearers receive this message? Through the Ramjas College's students' union. This, as I have previously mentioned, was under ABVP's leadership. I met Vindhya two years later at the DUSU office, the same spot where she first heard of the clashes at Ramjas. She had been a student of English and was in her last

year of undergraduate degree at DU. She was not from Ramjas College. Vindhya 'heard' about 'neutral students' protesting Umar Khalid's presence at the seminar.

i.   Narratives of violence

'They complained that ABVP beat them up. If your mother is being abused, will you wait for legal proceeding to exact revenge? It is natural that you will protest'

–Pranay, ex-Ramjas ABVP unit-head

The events of the two days become a homogeneous one during these narratives. The narrative is coherent: 'neutral students' complained to the student union head of Ramjas, and this is how the DUSU and Ramjas students' union got involved (both under ABVP). What is evidenced from the narratives of different participants of the event seems that the protest against the seminar in Ramjas and the clashes that followed were a spontaneous event. It was an emotional response to the 'anti-national' activities that were taking place in Delhi University, following from the *judaav* that they have developed as being part of the movement. Ananya claimed that the '*vaampanthi* teachers' (communist teachers) were proceeding with the seminar despite having no permission from the principal of the college. Ananya can be seen in videos from the clashes screaming and fighting. She looked angry, six-seven police personnel could not hold her back. For a few dramatic minutes, she climbed a police bus and raised slogans in honour of Mother India. A lone policeman climbed on the roof of the bus and tried to reason with her. She continued to shout slogans. 'We were beaten! Left people threw glass bottles at us!' she recalled a year and a half later. On the issue of Ramjas, she asserted that she 'thrashed' (not physically) Rajdeep Sardesai, a journalist with an English news channel. During the talk show, she tells Sardesai that the media is biased and brings up evidence that they were not the only ones 'doing violence'. 'This is where the media gets biased,' she tells Sardesai. She reiterates that the ABVP had no problem with the seminar. 'We have a problem with the speaker, Umar Khalid.' She told him that 'the leftists threw stones, dustbins', even raising that students were molested and spit on during the violence. 'This is the real face of AISA and SFI,' she asserted. According to Pranay, the next day, 'they' (students supporting the event) came in buses and looked the way they do in JNU: 'with *jholas* (cloth satchels) and long beards'. He stated that these students even had weapons. 'It has been reported in the newspapers,' he claimed. In videos of the incident, Pranay was running alongside other men, trying to catch hold of a

student. In another, he was pushing against the police personnel, screaming at someone on the other side of the crowd.

Vindhya, along with Ananya and others who were present in the DUSU office, reached Ramjas. She repeated Ananya's assertion: that the seminar was proceeding without the required permissions from the college principal. She claimed that she had heard that students from the English department at Ramjas College were protesting the seminar. 'Before we left the office,' she recollected, 'we did not know what we were getting into.' She then allegedly 'snuck' into the seminar. She recalled:

> 'What I see is communists talking about feminism, women empowerment and what not. I was like a sheep among wolves. I have an image of violence, so no one touched me but they asked the police to take me away. I was just attending. The people abused me, notable faces from AISA. Where does their feminism go then? I felt bad that day. If I said something back, they would say that this is what we are taught in the RSS *shakha*. I have never been to a *shakha*. The police tried to forcibly take me away. I showed them my ID but no.'

At the mention of 'Ramjas', Manoj was quick to open his phone and show me photos from a folder titled 'Ramjas'. These photos were of a wound on his hand. 'Our photos of getting beaten were not circulated. They called people from outside. We were just DU students,' echoing Pranay that students from JNU joined the march on the second day of the clashes. Manoj is a permanent fixture in protest sites in DU to physically assert his ideology. It was the case during Ramjas as well. Manoj was seen screaming to the students on the other side in the videos from the clashes. At some point, he raised a middle finger and hurled abuses at the crowd. 'These leftists think the middle finger is so radical. Even I showed it after they flipped me,', he said. His friends from school and outside the ABVP told him that they had heard 'ABVP came to Ramjas and thrashed students'. He painstakingly told them his version of the events, 'clarifying' the narrative painted by the media. He recalled that after the incident, the word 'goon' again gained traction and became synonymous with ABVP men of Delhi University. 'You have been talking to me for so many days, have I been a goon to you?' he asked me. It was not a question where he needed a response. My response was assumed no.

c) <u>Importance of Clashes to the Protest Landscape of the ABVP</u>

i. 'Neutral' students and the 'moral' responsibility for the nation: the narrative of participation in clashes

' We did it because neutral students wanted us to.'

–Vindhya, on ABVP's participation in Ramjas

Recalling the Ramjas incident, Amitabh, a 26-year-old male *karyakarta* from the Jat community and the head of ABVP north campus, asserted that what happened in Ramjas was an affective reaction, 'an instantaneous reaction of the students of Ramjas college.... They did not want the 9 February incident that happened in JNU to repeat in DU. They had anger and this is how they expressed it.' ABVP, he claimed, was merely there to support the students of Ramjas college, a point also repeated by Manoj. Manoj asserted that the atmosphere in Ramjas was 'charged' before the ABVP had even reached the campus. Like Ananya, Vindhya also saw the teachers holding the seminar and the students in support of it as communists, and those opposing it as 'neutral', being supported by the ABVP. We see this logic not only in the narratives of ABVP members in the Ramjas incident but also with the T-tree protests. According to those ABVP members who participated in the T-tree incident, it was the 'neutral' college students who wanted the 'tradition' to go on and the ABVP was merely offering their support to the students. As has been seen in the previous section on ABVP raising issues against university administration for 'apolitical' or 'neutral' students, there is a repeat of that intention– to fight for the cause of the 'neutral' student that drives clashes as well. This is not just restricted to DU, as I will show in the following section on ideologically motivated violent protests. In this context, 'neutral students' are the empty signifiers that can carry the ideological and emotional investments of the ideology without associating with Sangh affiliates, a way that disavowal as a strategy works. As I have argued in chapter 2, one of the successes of the Sangh and its affiliates has been to create an affective infrastructure that allows for a violent mobilisation against causes close to it, without making a direct connection to itself. The success lay in creating the networks and affective mobilisers that superficially seemed to be couched in the language of seemingly universalist ideas of pride, honour, pain, patriotism and kinship. In this schema, much like the idea of 'offense' in legality (Viswanath, 2015), the notion of the 'neutral students' is almost like a bogey that is invoked whenever the cause needs to be demonstrated as away from the influence of Hindutva.

ii. The role of the administration

'ABVP why so creepy? Delhi Police why so sleepy?'
–Slogan from the anti-ABVP coalition after Ramjas violence (2017)

There are two images from the Ramjas violence that epitomise the event. One of them is of a student who is holding his bleeding head, being supported by a friend as they walk away from the protest. Second is of Ananya alongside three men raising slogans on top of a police bus. The descriptions of police intervention during Ramjas are indicative of how the violence was allowed to continue unabated. The question has to be asked: why could the police not guarantee a seminar to continue in a local college under the threat of a student party? Clearly there are networks in place that are not made visible to a real common student. That is why perhaps, the students who asked 'why can't they protect us' during Ramjas were even asking that question. As mentioned in the last section, these informalised networks allow the student parties to enjoy a certain level of immunity from legal repercussions. The police might not register cases, might undertake a slow investigation, or be proactive in filing counter-cases (as was illustrative of Delhi Police after the JNU attacks in 2020). Also, since there is relative laxity in pursuing cases and punishment, police records are not as big a threat for seasoned student politicians. In fact, having police records is seen as a badge of honour among student politicians in the ABVP.[378]

iii.   Gendering violence as a protest strategy

*'This I have seen with my own eyes, how their girls attack (*tut padti*) our boys during protests and other things. After that they will say that we will put a sexual harassment case against you. That is so easy, because how will you prove that you did not do anything?'*
–Aditi, JNU ABVP unit

One of the strategies that has emerged in ABVP's protest landscape is the conscious gendering of protest structure and site to achieve protest aims, primarily against progressive and feminist groups. During my data collection, a trend that emerged was the specific roles performed according to the gender identities of ABVP members or *karyakartas*. What do I mean by gendering of a protest? Here, I define 'gendering' as assuming, identifying and then taking actions accordingly, based on 'female' and 'male' bodies in a protest space. This is a strategy that has emerged in the way that ABVP mobilises for protests. I find that when it comes to clashes, gendering is one of the most essential tools to claim space, assert dominance and take

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[378] It should be mentioned here that while these cases seem to not bring these students any harm, the same police have actively chased, detained, and arrested student leaders from other parties.

control of the narrative of the protest. The recognition of and assuming an opposite gender is crucial to manoeuvring the protest. The participation of women is used to consolidate the position of male protesters. First, it is the conscious deployment of female ABVP *karyakartas* to assert control of the protest to engage women in other student groups. This is done as a 'tit for tat' measure since traditionally ABVP has a more masculine image. Secondly, as is evident from Aditi's quote above, it is also a strategy to recognise women in other student groups as using tools to disparage or undermine male *karyakartas* of the ABVP. In this narrative, what emerges is the singling out and creating of 'the other women' as a threat to the protest of the ABVP and the reputation of ABVP men. The threat of 'sexual harassment' as a legal recourse hangs in the air like a bogeyman, used by 'other women' against ABVP men. Female ABVP *karyakartas* come to the rescue of their male counterparts, mainly to prevent them from being 'falsely' implicated in charges of sexual harassment. The body of the female *karyakartas* becomes the site through which ABVP men can protest and protect themselves.

During the 'T-tree protests', she is remembered as the only girl defending the tradition. Anamika threw stones, engaged women from the opposing side. There was hair pulling, slapping, kicking, hitting, and verbal abuse from both sides. Two years earlier, on the second day, in a pastel green *kurta*, Vindhya was seen leading the crowd outside Ramjas and charging at the mobilising students. The police surrounded her. She was reportedly spit on, punched, four men held her arms and legs and punched her abdomen. She said that the evidence of the violence was later given to the 'Crime branch'. She said that her parents were ridiculed for her participation in the incident, and she suffered alienation in her college department. In prime-time news debates, Vindhya was cast against AISA's member Shehla Rashid, a student from JNU, both women accusing each other of causing severe violence. In her recollection of the event, Vindhya sees herself as someone who was denied her right to protest and the right to attend the event through the intervention of the police. In the same breath, she asserted that she had an 'image of violence', a fact that was reiterated after Ramjas and continues to be a part of her personality description even today. Her name was repeated by those who were on the opposite side of the ABVP as being a perpetrator of violence. She claimed her actions were 'self-defence'. She had been doing her *tayyari* at the time of Ramjas and six months later, she was a candidate who got the chance to contest DUSU, much to the chagrin of those who had suffered at her hands during Ramjas. In the T-tree protest, Manoj appeared alongside other ABVP members to defend the stand taken by Anamika and other students. Manoj was there to intimidate and rely on physical strength to 'win' the protest. But it was a conundrum since most

of his opponents were women. ABVP members spoke of how 'women from the left' specifically sought ABVP men in protests to first engage them in physical violence and then press charges of sexual harassment. Thus, one of the strategies of ABVP men in recent years has been to hold their hands up so that there is proof. Now, Manoj's presence at the protest clash site with a heterogeneous composition (especially women from antagonist groups) relies on the female ABVP *karyakartas* to mediate his presence and action there.

Participation of Hindutva women in violence is not new, nor is their presence in the urban, public space (Sarkar, 1991; Pahuja, 2012; Sen, 2019; Katju, 2022; Saluja, 2022). The imagination of perceived violence in different affiliates may vary but being physically adept at defending the ideology has been one of Sangh women's core aims. What makes the ABVP case interesting and unique? First, unlike other Sangh affiliate organisations like the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, Durga Vahini etc., these women receive no training in engaging in threats of physical violence. Second, unlike the other affiliates, young women have to engage in physical confrontation in the public space, mainly in university, but other spaces in the urban landscape as well (for example, clashes with the police or other organisations). Thirdly, these women are fighting their antagonists alongside the male *karyakartas* of the organisation, unlike any other affiliate in the Sangh family. Lastly, these women are the primary mediators of violence in the university space between non-Hindutva women and ABVP members. Without their presence, the ABVP men would not have such a fluid access to this confrontation. Female *karyakartas* like Anamika, Ananya, Vindhya, and Barkha (introduced later in the chapter) are now essential to the protest landscape of university politics that is propagated by the ABVP.

As mentioned earlier, ABVP women become the primary mediators of confrontation between Hindutva men and their opposing activists on the university campus. What this process also does is a subsequent othering of the body of the female activists from opposing ideological groups. The body of the 'leftist' woman is projected as a threat to both, female and male activists of the ABVP. The 'leftist' woman causes physical and mental harm, as has been indicated from Anamika's narrative. The body of the 'leftist' woman carries within it the potential to cause harm to the body of the ABVP woman. For the ABVP male, the body of the 'leftist' woman is even more dangerous for it carries within it the potential to not only cause physical harm but a legal threat that puts the honour of the ABVP man as suspect. This issue

does not arise when ABVP men are engaging men from opposing ideologies.[379] It is only when non-male bodies are involved. In the larger Hindutva schema, the enemy is usually the non-Hindu male (for example, discourse of 'Love Jihad' (Gupta, 2002; Tyagi & Sen, 2020)). But here, the usual tropes of urban threat from 'unfriendly bodies' (Phadke, 2013) has to be completely re-articulated and conceptualised. Now, the threat needs to accommodate women and the threatened needs to accommodate men. This is why this strategy is crucial. It shows a changing strategy to engage the antagonists of Hindutva.

iv.   Short-term Pain for Long-term Results?

According to Ananya, it was ABVP that 'won' Ramjas–DUSU under her stopped Delhi university from becoming 'like JNU'- 'a den of anti-nationals'. Aashish was the president of Ramjas college ABVP-unit and the Ramjas student union when these clashes took place. He was a candidate from ABVP who contested DUSU in 2019. As shown from the chapter on elections, an event like Ramjas and his role in it would have led to his being selected by ABVP echelons for fighting DUSU elections. This event set him apart as an aspiring candidate to a member contesting DUSU. Vindhya, who was vying to contest DUSU in the coming term, also made her mark as a fiery *karyakarta*. Her juniors in the organisation remember her for her active role during the Ramjas protests, especially for directly engaging in a fight with a prominent left-affiliated student activist. Vindhya is now in UP BJP in a crucial position awarded to her before elections. Anamika faced repercussions for her involvement in the clash: intimidation and a threat of suspension. And there were rewards: she is a valued *karyakarta*, Anamika's seniors in the organisation know her well, and she was influential in the internal politics of her college as well. The violence of 'T-tree' is the incident that Anamika is known for: she threw stones and physically fought, and it resulted in her contribution to ABVP getting recognition in the college where it did not even have a functioning college unit.

In the narratives of ABVP students for why they mobilised against the other group, there is special care taken to mention the explicit binaries: communists versus RSS, wolves and sheep, feminist and anti-feminist, tradition versus progressive. The examples in this chapter so far

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[379] In this context, threat of sexual violence between men fighting with men or women fighting with other women, is not considered part of the conversation.

have shown how ideology is articulated, mobilised for and (violently) defended on university campuses. Electorally, an important fight for the Sangh and the BJP are different political parties. But inside the campuses and across the country, it is the progressive and radical ideology and the student groups representing them. These protests demonstrate how the ideology is articulated in the language of universality. Mother India, patriotism, tradition, anti-national are not just terms to identify the enemies of the student group–these are indicators of the enemies of the larger movement. In the next section, it is these ideas that are used as a base to create a narrative that has radically polarised JNU and the country outside, and brought unprecedented media attention to the lives of university students in this campus.

Protests that Invite Unprecedented Ideological Mobilisation and Violence

In this section, I will describe the '9 Feb' incident–an event that invited unprecedented ideological mobilisation and violence. Using the strategies outlined in the previous sections and building on more, this event was able to socialise and mobilise *karyakartas* and allies outside campus boundaries, apart from inviting direct state responses. The events directly engaged with those ideologies that conflicted with the beliefs that lie at the heart of Hindutva–the idea of a united Hindu nation. In this section, we will see how ideology was articulated on a university campus, how Sangh affiliate networks were mobilised against those who raised their voice, and lastly, how individual *karyakartas* were involved in the event.

a) '9 Feb': '*Azaadi*', '*Tukde-tukde* gang', and Contestations to the Idea of the Nation

JNU has a fairly diverse student body. Different ideologies flourish and find a home in the campus. On 9 February 2016, a group of students came together to critique the idea of capital punishment meted out by the state on the execution date and death anniversary of Afzal Guru. Afzal Guru (1969-2013) and Maqbool Butt (1949-1984, the founder of Kashmir's separatist group, Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF)) were to be remembered during the event. Afzal Guru had been executed by the state in a jail in Delhi after he was acquitted for a role in the Parliament Attacks in 2001.[380] The event was titled "The country without a post office"

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[380] The hanging of Afzal Guru acquired a new dimension after the arrest of Davinder Singh, a high-ranking police official who was allegedly colluding with 'militants' against the Indian state in exchange for money. Guru, in his

(the title comes from a poem by Agha Shahid Ali). The event was in solidarity with Kashmir's 'democratic right to self-determination'. It was to be a cultural evening with different people (students, poets, activists) participating. The event poster stated: 'We invite everyone to join us in protest, in rage–against the occupation and in solidarity with the valiant people of Kashmir'. The event was to be held at Sabarmati *Dhaba* (a local eating point in JNU campus) at 5PM.

An event of this kind was held every year but this year, at the behest of the ABVP, the JNU authorities withdrew permission of the event an hour before the event was supposed to begin (Marvel, 2016). Saurabh Sharma, the only JNUSU entrant from ABVP in 15 years, had invited news channels (Zee News, ANI) to the event. Students gathered together to raise slogans, sing songs, and hold posters. The ABVP students reached there, and the news teams were present as well. On prime-time news that night, it was these channels that ran the video footage that would later capture the imagination of a nation and deeply polarise the narrative.

Zee News (a television news channel) carried news segments about what they considered 'anti-national' sloganeering that was happening in JNU. Soon enough, other news channels followed suit. The conversation revolved around JNU hosting values that were unbecoming of patriotic and nationalist students. Prominently, BJP ministers in the central government and many individuals aligning to the Hindu nationalist dispensation gave calls for '#ShutDownJNU', a university funded by the central government (Bhushan, 2016; Hoot, 2016; NDTV, 2016). The issue became about JNU students being ungrateful to the nation and the state while living on subsidised education and resources and raising slogans that questioned the legitimacy of the state. The narrative framed the students as being the internal enemies of the idea of India (similar to Golwalkar's identification of 'internal enemies'). 'Anti-national', 'urban naxal', 'sedition' and slogans such as '*Azaadi*' (freedom) and '*tukde-tukde gang*' (gang that seeks to break up India) were phrases that were consistently raised in popular media. There were all kinds of accusations made towards the student community and the campus became the focal point of a nation.

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testimony to his lawyer had mentioned Singh's name as someone who had pressured him to perform tasks that were later used as evidence against him (Guru) in court. Goswami, D. (2020) What Afzal Guru Wrote About Davinder Singh and Parliament Attack Conspiracy | Read full text of letter, *Indiatoday.com* 14 January 2020, https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/davinder-singh-afzal-guru-parliament-attack-full-text-letter-1636861-2020-01-14 [accessed on 23 July 2021].

As news channels ran footage and stroked the passions of those who believed in a particular idea of nationalism, there were calls for suspension of students and even filing of criminal charges against them. Riding high on the wave of emotion, the Delhi Police (under the aegis of the Home Ministry), entered the campus and arrested JNUSU president Kanhaiya Kumar on 10 February 2016. He was arrested under the sections 124A (sedition) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) on 12 February. Kumar had not been a part of organising the event. Academics from across the world issued a statement in support of the university and condemning Kumar's arrest.[381] Students from universities across the world also organised various forms of protests in support of the university. Students whose faces were splashed across the screens as 'anti-national' had to go into hiding because of the vitriolic rhetoric against them. For example, Umar Khalid, a doctoral student, was branded as a 'terrorist', his family was threatened with rape, and acid attacks (Chatterjee, 2016). Soon after, on 18 February, before his hearing at the Patiala House court in Delhi, individuals dressed as lawyers attacked Kanhaiya Kumar. On 22 February, students whose names had been mentioned in the FIR re-appeared on campus and spent the night outside, waiting for their arrest (Roshan, 2016). Umar Khalid and Anirban Bhattacharya surrendered on 28 February. On 2 March, Kumar was released on bail with an undertaking that he would not participate in 'anti-national activities'. All the students involved were fined, suspended for one or two semesters, denied hostel facilities and access to JNU courses soon after.

Students, civil society groups, and members of the JNU community took out a march soon after Kumar's arrest. Those who disagreed with their politics attacked them (Iyengar, 2016). The incident and the repercussions that followed were by no means an isolated incident (George, 2016). Kanhaiya Kumar in his autobiography titled *From Bihar to Tihar* (2016) that was released shortly after his imprisonment, highlights the strategic targeting of campus leaders from all hues in the political spectrum, except the ABVP. He saw in this an effort by the ABVP to break the momentum on campus.[382] Members of the JNU community lamented the entry of

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[381] NA. (2016) JNU Events Signal Culture of Authoritarian Menace, *The Hindu*, 16 February 2016, https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/%E2%80%98JNU-events-signal-culture-of-authoritarian-menace%E2%80%99/article14084416.ece [accessed 23 July 2021].

[382] His insight is valuable especially in the light of the arrests of university activists across Delhi after the anti-CAA protests under the Northeast Delhi riots (2020). Pinjra Tod was a thorn in the side of ABVP members of DU (as is representative of just one of the examples of the 'T-tree' protests) and its founding members (Devangana Kalita and Natasha Narwal) were arrested during the pandemic and released very recently. Alongside, politically

the police forces in the campus (to arrest Kanhaiya Kumar) for the first time since the Emergency (1975-1977) (Marvel, 2016).

The campus was sharply polarised. There were some students in support of those who were impacted by the media glare and the arrests. There were some, in a smaller minority, in support of ABVP's actions (a complete reversal of how the narrative was framed outside the campus, as one ABVP member noted). JNU faculty organised a series of widely attended lectures on 'Nationalism' (Azad et al, 2016). During elections in the following academic year, non-ABVP parties either contested together or supported each other against the ABVP. There were constant mobilisations in support of dissent, free speech and debates on nationalism, inside and outside the university. For example, the human chain, 'we are JNU' campaign etc. Outside the university, civil society groups and students organised events to show solidarity to JNU-*ites*.

b) <u>ABVP's Role in Shaping the Narrative of the Event: Spectacular Forms of Ideological Socialisation</u>

i. An Opportunity to 'Record' and 'Expose'

Aditi was the first person I met from JNU's ABVP unit. She had been in the university for 10 years by then. Aditi came to JNU from a city in Uttar Pradesh in 2009 to do her bachelors in a Germanic language. Aditi was 29 years old when we first met. She was in her second year of her research in the Centre for Languages. She comes from a Brahmin family and as she describes it, her family 'is not with means'. Her parents were consistently told by other relatives to save money for their daughters' marriage instead of their education. Her family is from the Sangh: her father, her uncle, and her grandfather have all been part of the organisation. Her mother teaches in a Vidya Bharati school. She chose JNU over Delhi University. DU, to her and her father, seemed 'too fast'–meaning that she could not see herself being comfortable there due to the difference she saw in financial wealth. JNU was affordable and provided scholarship to students who came from families that earned less than a certain amount per year. As illustrated in the chapter on elections in JNU, she reflected that she was becoming an ABVP

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active students from Shaheen Bagh and anti-CAA protestors from Jamia Milia Islamia University were arrested and many continue to remain in jail. Further, the arrests of civil society activists and academics under the case of 'Bhima Koregaon' seem to be following this exact playbook.

'sympathiser' gradually, mainly through friends she made in the campus. In 2016, she was in her second year of MPhil. The '9 Feb' event was going to be held in the evening. She asserted that events like this had been happening for many years but it was different in 2016. She noted,

> 'One year ago, same incident had taken place in my hostel. Geelani was there. They have used the *Azaadi* slogans for a long time… In fact, we were also used to them... Earlier, they used to lock the mess (the venue of the event) from the inside. But they used to close the door, so we never got the entry inside. *Their* girls would stand in front so that men don't get to enter and they can easily say molestation etc.'

Thunlai had been in JNU only a few months when the incident took place in 2016. She said she received a message from someone that a group was observing 'Martyr's Day' on Afzal Guru's death. She was intrigued because until then she had only thought of him as a 'terrorist'. When she reached the location, she was uncomfortable. 'I feel like we can debate and discuss this but not celebrate. He was a terrorist,' she said. Thunlai said that as the group read poetry, the ABVP stood there and 'registered their dissent'. They followed the group into the march, which is when they reportedly heard 'the slogans'. 'It was after that we saw Kashmiri students make the slogans that you see in the videos. Then someone told me that this happened last year also. This is why ABVP protested,' she recalled.

There are some common aspects that emerge from ABVP members' narratives. First is that events such as these were not an anomaly in the institution. In fact, JNU students were aware of slogans such as '*Azaadi*', the discourse on Kashmiri separatism, and the presence of the armed forces in the region. Aditi noted that these events were held in the hostel mess and attendance was regulated. She further suggests that women were placed strategically (harking back to the strategy of 'gendering' that was mentioned earlier in the chapter) to regulate who could attend and protest the event. Women members ('their girls') would also allegedly use the bogey of sexual harassment against men from another ideology to restrict this access. But what was different in 2016? This is where the idea of building a narrative from the side of the ABVP begins to take shape. According to Aditi, the difference from the event in 2016 and the previous ones was its location: 'This time it was very radical. They had organised the event outside. This meant that we could record and have proof. Earlier, we could not. Media was there, they recorded it; guards were there, they recorded it; some common students recorded it.' According to her, an open location did not offer the regulatory possibilities that were deployed inside a

hostel mess (using women as shields, locking the mess, etc.). It seems from her narrative that the ABVP wanted to show 'proof' of what they considered were 'anti-national' activities on campus. This is the reason why they appealed to the JNU administration to cancel the event, invited media persons, recorded the event, and protested it as it was happening.

The reason why the event in 2016 is considered more 'radical' is due to the fact that it was now being done in the open. There are some hypotheses that I suggest about the connection between it being more 'radical' and being held in the 'open'. First, perhaps to the ABVP, the event being held and its attendees not being regulated indicated that the discourse of Kashmiri separatism or the conversations around it were becoming more common. Thereby, it directly attacks the idea of *Akhand Bharat* or an integrated nation. It also stands in opposition to the legacy of the RSS, BJP, and SP Mukherjee's movement for Kashmir's integration into the Indian nation (see chapter 2). The second hypothesis is that the fact that it is held in the open is a direct challenge to the Hindu nationalist assertions taking place outside the campus and its relating influence in universities. Therefore, while there are conversations outside in the political discourse that would like to conform the conversation to a certain kind of nationalism, this event and what it stood for is in complete opposition to that. The third suggestion takes into account the pre-existing discourse on campus, but the ABVP lacking the influence to oppose it. Here is Vani's assertion on the discourse of *Azaadi* on campus and its relevance to the ABVP:

> '… Palestine Liberation Day, I remember I was studying there under an umbrella like structure... There were some north-eastern students and some professors. Majority were north-eastern students. There was a banner they were holding called 'Palestine Liberation Day' and I thought it was some discussion they were holding. While I was passing, I heard them say that Palestine should be free. Sikkim was forcefully (annexed into Indian territory) … They said that we have been captured illegally also, we should also fight for our freedom. I was shocked. You cannot say things like this. So, it (events such as '9 Feb') used to happen. But this time, it just happened that it was recorded and it was exposed.'

I see this and the previous event being held out in the open as an opportunity for the ABVP and those who oppose the event's ideological standpoint to record the event, which then provides them the access to oppose it. I make this suggestion with my interlocutors' assertion that they got the opportunity to finally 'record' the event and have 'proof' about the 'anti-national

activities on campus', which became an opportunity to be 'expose'. And exposed they were! The entire campus came under extreme scrutiny. There were calls by those against the event to 'ShutDownJNU'–an effort to deplete JNU of its funding from the government due to its status as a publicly-funded university. News channels ran prime time debates on issues of nationalism.

There is another benefit that came for the ABVP through the 'proof'. Aditi claimed that earlier, due to the 'left-dominated' university culture, those from alternate views were consistently disparaged from expressing themselves. She said,

> 'I have seen how GSCash (anti-sexual harassment mechanism in the university) is put on a person. 'You are *jumping* too much, we will put GSCash on you' is a threat.[383] The 9 February video luckily was recorded. Otherwise, Saurabh Sharma would have had GSCash on him.'[384]

She said that had they not recorded the '9 Feb' incident and presented proof of it, members of their group would have had sexual harassment charges brought against them. This was a practice that was allegedly rampant in the university against the ABVP. This is similar to the 'gendering' strategy that ABVP now employs.

ii.   Nationalism as an Ideologically Free, Fundamental Duty

'After '9 Feb', the campus was polarised into those who loved the nation and those who were
anti-national.'
–Vani, ABVP-JNU member

Members of the JNU-ABVP sat on a hunger strike in May 2016, three months after the incident. The strike was against the fine imposed on one of the members after the incident. On 9 February, when the public transport buses were leaving campus, two JNU-ABVP members had

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[383] This is a literal translation from the Hindi word '*koodna*' or jumping. To explain it here would be if someone is being more assertive than they should be or, as a threat to someone to limit their assertion.

[384] Saurabh Sharma was the only ABVP member in the JNUSU in 2015-2016. He was deeply involved in the mobilisation against the '9 Feb' event, including inviting the press to the campus before the event. His legacy in the JNUSU is repeated to students by the ABVP even today.

reportedly stopped them. According to them, the buses had people who had 'indulged in anti-India activity' and that they should not be allowed to leave campus until a complaint was registered against them. One of the students was asked to pay 10,000 rupees for 'obstructing a government vehicle'. The group sat on a hunger strike to protest the fine. According to them, they were doing this in 'national interest' and they should not be made to suffer for it. As I have mentioned before in the elections chapter, the affective feeling of 'nationalism' is being considered as 'natural'. This is similar to the strategy of positing itself as a 'non-ideological' party for 'common students' or 'neutral students'. The socialisation into ABVP that Pranay described (in the previous chapter) is seen as being latent and acquires its more active form when one enters the Sangh habitus and develops *judaav*. The narrative that ABVP tried to project was indignation at the thought of such an event, unconnected to its ideology. Aditi described two instances where she and other ABVP members spoke to journalists and news channels to put forth their point of view. In both the instances, she asserted that the journalists tried to connect the lines between the nationalist ideology of the party in power, the Sangh and the ABVP. Aditi's stand in those conversations was that during the '9 Feb' incident, they were acting out of patriotism. This patriotism was projected as independent of the ideology of the *Sangh Parivar*. She recollected an interview with a journalist from *TIME* magazine,

> '... she wanted us to somehow say that we are 'watchdogs'. Now because we are researchers, we know what calling us 'watchdogs' means–it means that they can give an image as a soldier or a surveillance force, so that if nothing happens, they will go take law into their hands. So, we told her that we are not watchdogs. The Indian Constitution gives duties that anyone who threatens the sovereignty and integrity of India, we are going to raise our voice against it, we are going to bring it to the public forum, we are going to go to the police. So, if anything happens anywhere, you will find us there, resenting and dissenting. So, then the journalist said, 'It means that you will be watching everything.' I said, 'No, I will not be watching but how can I keep quiet when I do see something?'

I find this passage enlightening in the following ways. First, as the journalist tried to ascertain the connections between the *Sangh Parivar*, the ABVP and the Hindu nationalist ideology, the insistence among JNU-ABVP members was to show that their 'cause' was beyond the ideology–it was articulated in the language of the constitution of India. The event, according to Aditi, threatened 'the sovereignty and integrity' of the country and she considered it her duty

to speak against it. By eliminating the articulation through the Sangh discourse and putting it in the post-Independence secular-nationalist discourse, there is an effort to empty the action of its religious-nationalist sentiment. Secondly, by refusing the label 'watchdogs', ABVP wants to not only assert its own ideological independence. It seeks to normalise its ideological viewpoint into the larger discourse of patriotism, nationalism, and national integrity, as protected by the constitution. Thereby, also severing any influence of the Sangh that the journalist was attempting to clarify, Aditi made the issue about the 'public forum'. The success of the *Sangh Parivar* has been in creating an affective infrastructure to accommodate Hindu nationalist values as non-ideological. The issue then does not become about ideological differences in a university campus, as was hinted by Kumar in his autobiography, but about a propagation of a vision of Hindu nationalism. This harks back to attempts by ideological organisations to portray their values as universalist.

c) <u>Personal and Political: How the Event Changed the Lives of ABVP Members</u>

i. Within the university

'... I had friends across. I had friends who were neutral. At least, who used to call themselves neutral. But they were not actually, I realised after some time. They stopped talking to me after 9 February. I mean… They act like they don't know me. No 'hi hello', nothing; ignoring and moving on. And this happened to most of the ABVP students, especially the faces that became known publicly, through that video. I appeared in that video.'
–Antara, JNU-ABVP

While students from JNU (across the political spectrum) claim that they have 'friends across', their political socialisation allows them to retain their own beliefs and find silos within the campus. Most ABVP students I spoke to (and I will suggest that this applies to most students with set ideological leanings), had their closest friendships within their political groups. They were friendly with their hostel mates, classmates, and coexisting with members of the other ideology. There existed a diverse political culture of debate and discourse (Martelli & Parkar, 2018). An external intervention of this kind had never been seen.

Members of the ABVP seldom spoke about friendships, humiliation, and disappointments, relating to the event. It was also difficult to find how they individually negotiated the movement

on campus during the polarised atmosphere.[385] Antara's quote earlier demonstrates that within the university the campus was divided between anti-ABVP and pro-ABVP students. Antara explained that she was shunned by 'neutral' students (students without an affiliation to a political ideology, a word used for the 'common students' discussed earlier) and those that were from other political ideologies 'across' the spectrum. What surprised her were the 'neutral' friends–those who claimed no ideology–were aligning themselves against her. Antara's suggestion was that the 'neutral' students were not 'actually' neutral; ABVP students assert themselves, as the 'alternative' voice on campus and the default is the 'left' ideology. Hence, friends who she considered 'neutral' turning against her confirmed her suspicions. These acts of hostility in campus would have surely led to a wall about discussion or debate, adding to the rift between ideologies, a difference from the coexisting and culture of 'play' that exists in universities. Aditi noticed a similar change among her own class fellows. She said that conversations stopped and the earlier atmosphere of 'pulling each other's leg' and 'agree to disagree' all came to an abrupt halt after the event.[386]

But it was not just the 'neutral' acquaintances that moved away from the ABVP students. The general atmosphere in the university was sharply polarised. Aditi recalled her days after the event,

> 'I was outside the 24X7 lane (convenience shopping point in JNU campus) and there were a bunch of students who must have seen the video. All of a sudden, they say, '*Arre arre*, this is that ABVP girl who was sloganeering.' Can you imagine, that you are going alone, walking and they say this? Inside JNU the atmosphere was very hostile for us after 9 Feb. After that, our number was very less.'

What Aditi described is the everyday experience of being a visible part of how '9 Feb' was operationalised by the ABVP. Since she had been known to take part in it, she was recognisable on campus. Though she never expressed any regret about her participation in the event, these

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[385] Here, based on the trends of appointments within the ABVP that followed the event, election candidature, other posts given after '9 Feb' and the JNU attacks (discussed later), there are some concrete suggestions that can be made about the link between participation in the event and benefits that followed.

[386] In Ramjas, the impetus for ABVP members was the push from reportedly 'neutral' or common students. In JNU, the push was for a neutral or 'natural' ideology of 'nationalism'. In both cases, the relevance of language being articulated in 'neutrality' is significant.

experiences were new and unpleasant to her.[387] The relative anonymity of being a Hindu nationalist on campus was broken when the ABVP opened the doors of the university to the press. And the collateral was such experiences that the members had to face. She spoke about being very aware of the space around her and making sure she was always with her friends for the few months that followed. She was not worried about being physically threatened. She was unnerved each and every time someone accused her of bringing shame to JNU or 'being a Sanghi' or 'watchdogs' of the government. But this experience also shows that the event was successful in polarising the 'neutral' students against the ABVP. JNU-ABVP members had mentioned that Modi's victory in 2014 allowed for those who silently opposed the left politics on campus to emerge more visible. It seems that after '9 Feb', that number reduced again and there was less solidarity on campus. Thunlai remembered solemnly the time after '9 Feb' as a 'dilemma': 'What is the reason people can't see that 9 Feb was wrong? People blamed ABVP for bringing JNU a bad name. But they couldn't understand that it was not ABVP but those who were sloganeering who were wrong.'

ii.   Academic Concerns

Vani described an incident when she was attending a conference with a teacher from JNU who was sympathetic to the ABVP cause. The teacher would attend their events. When invited to give talks, she would always decline but offer tacit support. Before the conference, Vani and the teacher travelled together to another university in Delhi where the conference was to be held. Before entering the university, the teacher told Vani that they would have to sit separately, and she would meet her outside the university when the day was over to go back to JNU. Vani did not think much of it. 'I did find it weird that we were going to be in the same room, but I did not think too much about it,' she said. For the conference, she found a seat two rows behind the teacher. During the break, another conference attendee approached the teacher and asked her, 'Dr X, are you now with the ABVP? Someone said that you are really spending time with them.' The teacher replied, 'What? Are you crazy? Those goons? Absolutely not.' Vani was shocked and saddened to hear this. Later, the teacher accompanied Vani back to the campus and this matter was never discussed. To Vani, this was the teacher's attempt in negotiating a

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[387] By the time we had met, there were no such incidents taking place.

'left-dominated academia', where people like Vani are the 'marginalised voices'. Thunlai recalled the letter of the academics that was released in support of JNU after the incident,

> 'Noam Chomsky writes for them. They have a world-level academic network created of left academics. It is not that easy to break it also and at times, you have to accept that these are the places where they have power and be realistic that if we have to reach there we would have to work hard. You can't criticise them in air, you have to write and criticise. And for us, it will take time. We have just started, and they have had 40 years of writing behind them.'

Aditi also remembered her fears following the incident,

> 'I had taken a big risk. I still remember, it was the time of my life with most pressure. When I stood for 9 February, I had to put my entire career at stake, because I could not stand those slogans. And I thought that this time I have to support the right thing, the right cause. I went to the media. In JNU, ideologically, there are many supporters who support ABVP, but they never confessed their support or they never let anybody know because it might have hindrances in their appointment because academia is left dominated, politically.'

Among the ABVP students, the very few who spoke about it, there was a fear for their future as researchers and in academia. In this narrative, 'academia' was considered an institution influenced by 'the left' or anti-Hindu nationalist ideology. Having declared their views on nationalism, they were now afraid that they would lose out on opportunities that would have otherwise come their way had they remained silent about their politics. Vani described it thus: 'If you talk about dissenting voices, then we are the dissenting voices in academia.' They saw academia's rejection of them in the same way as the turning away of 'neutral' students and the larger political parties in JNU who united against ABVP. They described the existing academic culture in opposition to their beliefs and asserted that they would have to counter those beliefs in the system through writing.

iii. Within the Larger Sangh Structure: Rewards for Loyalty to the Ideology

If there were feelings of precarity that privately plagued the ABVP members in JNU, the Sangh support outside the campus actively made up for it. TV news channels portrayed the students

who had organised the '9 Feb' event in the most horrific ways: as those who threatened the soul of the country with their slogans. The ABVP members were given support from the university administration, from other ABVP units, different Sangh affiliates, and as police efforts would later show, from the state machinery. Mandakhini said that she came to JNU after '9 Feb' to 'increase our number in campus'. Thunlai said that people come to JNU with a 'mindset'. After the '9 Feb' incident, new students come 'prepared'. 'They tell us they saw the videos and ask us questions,' she said. She tells the new students during early weeks of orientation the 'real picture' of Kanhaiya Kumar and Umar Khalid, a 'seasoned politician' and 'radical Naxalite', respectively. 'We tell them that they are anti-Hindu,' she said. Thus, through the incident, the ABVP has been somewhat successful in establishing itself as the 'nationalist' and the sole defender of the Hindu values in the university campuses.

It is worth mentioning that JNU-ABVP students find themselves in comparatively less precarious position in the Sangh structure than the DU-ABVP unit. Saurabh Sharma, after completing his PhD, now has an Assistant Professor position in JNU.[388] Aditi got an opportunity to stand for JNUSU elections in 2019. She is now a warden of a hostel in JNU. Lalit Pandey is the head of central universities working committee for the ABVP. Nidhi Shukla stood for the 2017 JNUSU President elections and was the National Secretary of the ABVP (2019-2022). Anima Sonkar is the Social Media convener for the OBC Morcha in the BJP.[389] Thunlai is in the ABVP Delhi State committee. These are just some of the examples.

Socialisation through Protest and Violence: Individual Motivations and Rewards

Successful protests bring material and symbolic benefits to the organisers of the protests on both campuses. As has been illustrated throughout this chapter, this might mean an easier access to fight elections, being chosen to fight union elections, a post in the ABVP hierarchy and rewards that follow long after one has stopped being a student in a university campus, while remaining an ideological loyalist. As shown in the elections chapter, involvement in events of mobilisation has shown to result in material gains and symbolic benefits for themselves. Spectacular events for ideological mobilisation seemed to bring proportional

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[388] Express News Service. (2019) ABVP Man, Witness in JNU Sedition Case, Appointed Asst Professor, *The Indian Express*, 7 December 2019, https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/abvpman-witness-in-jnu-sedition-case-appointed-asst-professor-6154588/ [accessed on 25 July 2021].

[389] Her family is from the BJP and influential in the UP unit.

rewards. Guaranteeing rewards to those who have raised the ideological agenda in the campus, I see a trend that ABVP is able to retain those loyalists within the movement to absorb them within the set structure, thereby maintaining the RSS hierarchy on top and affiliates below. In different terms, organising and prominently featuring in impactful protests is like an incentive programme and a means to legitimise one's work as a *karyakarta* in front of the organisation (as was also illustrated in the previous chapter). There clearly are material perks of being part of such initiatives for individual members. By creating this sort of incentive programme, internal rivalries are also encouraged. This would take the form of hijacking protests, increasing visibility, stating one's role in the protests, and denying someone else's contribution. While the protest event brings together a group, unifying members for a cause, the events before and after represent an active engagement with the peers in the organisation. There have been numerous news reports of ABVP members being involved in violence against teachers across the country[390], breaking infrastructure and now through easy circulation of visual images, using physical intimidation and abuse.[391] These images themselves become useful for the members themselves to establish their position as someone willing to take a blow for the ideology, but can at the same time be dismissed as products of 'fake' visual artefacts.[392] I use three biographies and their relationship with the organisation and the ideology to understand the various reasons for the link between socialisation, membership, and violence. The first incident is the build-up and violence that happened at college level: the afore-mentioned T-tree clashes in DU. The second incident is one that involved a campus-level intervention and violence at Ramjas College. And the third incident was the inter-campus involvement between members of the organisation at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi. There are three reasons that primarily emerge for members' engaging in violence:

1. Defence of the ideology;

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[390] Ifthikar, F. (2016) ABVP Activists Threaten DU Law Faculty Dean in Presence of Cops, *DNA*, 18 December 2016, https://www.dnaindia.com/delhi/report-abvp-activists-threaten-du-law-faculty-dean-in-presence-of-cops-2283974 [accessed on 23 January 2023].

[391] Chowdhury, S.R. (2017) Chilling Effect: ABVP Threats have Prompted Delhi Colleges to Apply Unwritten Censorship Code, *Scroll. In*, 24 February 2017, https://scroll.in/article/830149/rss-affiliate-abvp-is-the-common-factor-in-most-incidents-of-campus-conflict-in-recent-months [accessed on 23 January 2023].

[392] In two incidents mentioned here, the 'fake' production of images to 'malign' members and show a false involvement was invoked by ABVP. In the case of JNU, ABVP national executive members cited instances from the past to show how social media circulation of images has brought mental and physical harassment on their members.

2. Knowledge of having support of the authorities; and,

3. Material and status benefits, alongside closeness with powerful members in the organisation.

a) <u>'The Stone Thrower'</u>

Anamika is an ABVP member from her high school years. Although she comes from a Brahmin Sangh family, where her uncle and father are both associated with the BJP, she secretly sought out the local ABVP leaders on her own to become a member. Her parents wanted her to solely focus on her studies but her attraction to the ideology compelled her to seek more. When she was 16 years old, she reached out to ABVP's national secretary. He responded to her and assured her of making her a part of the 'movement'. She was connected to a local BJYM leader. He in turn directly connected her to two ABVP members who lived close to her home.[393] They met outside her home, careful to keep in mind that her parents were not fully aboard with the idea of her joining. Anamika fondly recalls that the two ABVP seniors took her out for ice cream. She became a member that day by submitting her yearly membership fee of two rupees (less than two cents) and as a mark of initiation, she was given a booklet about the ABVP. She had been a member of the organisation for four years when we met.

Anamika said that her family 'originally' was from Sylhet, Bangladesh. It was her grandfather's father who moved to Silchar, Assam 'much before' the Partition of the subcontinent.[394] Her mother's family is from Tripura. Anamika spent her early years in Assam, hyper-aware of her identity as a Bengali there. Over time, she has understood the aggression towards immigrants in Assam but coming to dislike the rhetoric of 'all Bengalis in Assam are Bangladeshis'. She remembered hearing about the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), a radical organisation working towards an independent Assam. She understood that they wanted 'everyone out', regardless of their religious beliefs–Hindu or Muslim. She believes in the fight for those who came before 1971, the ones who do not have the documents, the Hindus.

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[393] This also demonstrates the relatively smooth networks between different Sangh affiliates across the country and the role that personal connections play in retaining interested members in the organisation.

[394] The focus on the temporal indication of 'much before' India's partition in 1947 is to stress on her connection to India, as opposed to the stigma carried by migrants who have crossed borders after the Partition, especially in the eastern states of India.

'But where will the Hindus go?' she asks. And the consistent stand of the Sangh: that India is the home for Hindus gives her a reason to believe that she has a place here.

Anamika spent her formative years in Kolkata, a city of the 'old left' as she refers to it, and the current turf wars between *Sangh Parivar* and the ruling West Bengal party, Trinamool Congress (TMC). When she moved to Kolkata at the age of nine, she saw her mother struggling with the language. She spoke Bengali but her dialect was different. 'They called us Bangladeshis, ignorant people. They did not understand that Bengali has different dialects,' she recounted, frustrated. The label 'Bangladeshi' had its effect. She seldom made friends and if she did, chose to 'rely' on herself in times of need.

She felt that in Bengal the communist ideology takes too much space in the public sphere. Perceiving the communist ideological approach to religion 'arbitrary', she felt it specifically targeted Hindus by 'distorting' historical facts. She felt an anger, an anger that is echoed by many members of the movement. She noted, almost exasperated,

> 'They condemn Hindu practices, calling it 'cultural marxism'. It is fine that you want to criticise Hinduism, it is a thousand years old. They disregard Brahmanical patriarchy, but they did not have the courage to talk about Islamic patriarchy. They would question the '*ghoonghat*' (head covering) but not the '*burqa*'. They would question the Gujarat riots but not the deaths of *karsevaks* in the train, not the 1984 riots….'

She read about the Mughals, 'googled' everything she did not understand and asked her parents. She grew attached to the 'values' from home: values such as 'patriotism' (as a desired, natural value) and sacrifice, respect for soldiers, respect for the Mother Nation, being a good citizen and to work for the 'disadvantaged'. These could be common values from nationalised schooling but coming from a Sangh home, as shown in chapter 3, meant that she had another structure to identify these values with. She has an 'emotional attachment' (*judaav*) to the ideology. Her association with ABVP is not restricted to her loyalty for the organisation– it is for the ideology, an ideology of 'Golwalkar, Savarkar, and Swami Vivekanand'. 'I wanted to be a part of something that more people can listen to me–to speak about my ideology and the ideology I adhere to.'[395]

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[395] Here, she is referring to key idealogues of the Hindu nationalist movement in India: Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (1906-1973), the second head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh; Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966), the author of *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu* (1923) and a key member of the Hindu Mahasabha; and,

She saw a rise in the visibility of the ideology after 2014, the year that marks a paradigmatic shift in the strength of the ideology. 2014 General Elections brought BJP's victory and the crowning of Narendra Modi as India's Prime Minister. This victory is significant because many ordinary members of the *Sangh Parivar* felt recognised and saw in the victory their own reward for being loyal to the ideology. She feels that people were always attracted to the Sangh because of its 'nationalist' ideology but a victory like Narendra Modi's helps people come out in the open (similar to the assertions made by ABVP-JNU members on their campus). But Modi does not impress her. The older leaders, the ones who struggled for the ideology when there were no rewards in sight, impress her: leaders like Lal Krishna Advani, Sushma Swaraj, and Atal Behari Vajpayee. Modi can never match Vajpayee, she believes, as Vajpayee prioritised ideology over electoral victory.

According to Anamika, the work of the ABVP in Kolkata was hampered because of the presence of 'TMC goons', conditions she likens to the dictatorship in North Korea. ABVP has risen into prominence in Kolkata before her eyes, a comparison that became starker when she saw how 'openly' ABVP could work in Delhi. But here the mobilising was not just for the ideology, they could focus on students. Even though she saw the efforts being made by ABVP members in Kolkata, the results were nothing compared to Delhi. After moving to Delhi, she joined the ABVP unit on her second day in college. She saw ABVP members protesting the principal. The issue being protested was about making the college autonomous from the centrally funded Delhi University. Impressed with their resolve, she decided to join the protest.

She is now the co-convener of the ABVP college unit. I first met her during 'help desk' season. She did her duties on the move, shouting instructions as she walked on with the parents inside the college. She was never stationary. First, she would make contact with a parent and their ward at the college gate. Then she would walk with them rapidly to the assigned classroom where admissions were taking place. On the way, the parents would also pick up their steps to match hers. She would exclusively address the parents, asking them where they were from, what their ward's percentage was, and their 'category'. In the meantime, parents would ask her about the college, hostels, and PGs that were good in her opinion. She would take them to the

Narendranath Dutt (1863-1902), also known as Swami Vivekanand, a revered monk who followed the Ramakrishna Mission, a Hindu reform movement from Bengal, India.

entrance of the class, waiting outside (the 'help desk' volunteers were not allowed inside admission rooms). Once she saw that they were settled inside the room, she marched her way to the college gate to start the process again in Delhi's 43-degree heat. She would only talk about the help desk with her exclusively male ABVP colleagues. When her ABVP seniors arrived on the college premises to check on the progress of the unit, she bombarded them with complaints about the college administration and the concerns that parents had shared with her. The seniors asked her to 'calm down' (patronisingly) while she listed her grievances (in fact, these grievances formed a part of the 'memorandum' described in the first protest). Sure enough, once the parents were done with admissions, they would seek her out and thank her, many times asking their ward to take '*didi*'s number' and asking *didi* to keep an eye out for their child as also shown in chapter 3, a tried and tested strategy that has helped retain Sangh memberships for decades.

What was her motivation for getting involved in the violence of the 'T-tree' clashes? Was it mere retaliation, as she claims or is there something more to the act of defending a tradition? In this particular case, she opposed these women because they were from 'the left'–disparate groups that came together against the defenders of tradition and inevitably became a 'right' versus 'left' debate, 'tradition' versus 'progressive' ideologies. She faced repercussions such as intimidation and a threat of suspension. But there were rewards: she was a valued *karyakarta*, her seniors in the organisation knew her well, and she now held sway in the internal politics of her college as well. The violence of T-tree '*pooja*' is the incident that Anamika is now known for. She threw stones and physically fought, and it resulted in her contribution to ABVP getting recognition in a college where it did not even have a fully working college unit. But her aim is not the ABVP- it is national politics, to work for the ideology: 'I will stay for the ideology, not for the organisation.'

b) ‘The (Hindu) Nationalist’

‘Earlier, ghee (clarified butter) was sold with the label as is. When people started mixing something in the ghee, it had to be differentiated with ‘desi ghee’ (indicative of purity). Ideally, everyone should be a nationalist if you are living in this country. But if there is a difference between nationalists and if it helps ‘you’ to differentiate us like that, then go ahead. I don’t like the idea of being a ‘Hindu nationalist’. We are just activists. But if you

compare us to other organisations, for examples the slogans raised at JNU, then we are definitely nationalists. Hence if you need to differentiate the ghee from 'desi ghee', then one definitely needs these labels.'[396]

–Manoj, 25-year-old Brahmin male *karyakarta*, DU

Manoj wears his ideology on his sleeve, as he likes to call it. It emerges in his speeches, the examples he chooses to give, the plays he chose to participate in and the poetry he chooses to read (most often aloud). By his own admission and my interviews with his ABVP seniors, he was the lone vocal and openly Hindu nationalist student at an elite DU college. He gradually found students who agreed with his views, but never openly. He recounted an incident with a teacher who admired his poetry. On learning about his political views, the teacher asked him why he as a 'good' boy associated with a 'dirty' ideology. 'I told him that you have described me as a 'good' boy in a 'dirty' ideology. Both are your words. I laughed and walked away,' he recalls. During his early college years, Manoj became more convinced of the ideology of his father and became active about his beliefs. He did not need to be a part of the ABVP to show the side he was on; he liked the feeling of being 'unique' for his ideology in his college. It was only later, after he graduated from his undergraduate college and joined his postgraduate course at the Faculty of Law that he officially became an ABVP member.

He comes from a family of Congress (Indian National Congress) members. 'I probably know the Congress better than some Congress people know themselves,' he offers. His father is the only member of his family who joined the RSS *shakha* as a child. His immediate family is a Sangh family: Brahmin, convinced that the Congress plays minority politics, and that there is an inherent bias among intellectuals against Hindus in this country. When he was growing up, he asked his father about the Gujarat riots in 2002. He must have been eight or nine years old. His father asked him a question in return: whose report had he heard? 'Entire families got burnt in Godhra and people could not tell their tales. No one went to the train victims,' he recounted, adding, 'that moved me. Before that I had questions, but after this I saw that even those channels that are now pro-BJP did not raise these issues.' And now he is on a path of course correction, making sure that the 'unheard' side is heard in every way possible.

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[396] Manoj's analogy explains his discomfort of being called a 'Hindu nationalist'. He believes that they are nationalist and that the word 'Hindu' is given by outsiders. In this way, he can present his ideology as free from religion and present it as a universalist project. Further, I wonder if we can use the dichotomy of pure and diluted clarified butter to also extend the prevalent practices of caste.

Manoj does not like the word 'goon' associated with the ABVP. The association of ABVP men (and now, women) with the word is prevalent and does not seem to be going away anytime soon. It is this image that makes men in ABVP careful when clashing with people in protests: that they would be unfairly judged. Men like Manoj say that they have to work harder to keep the image at bay. In late 2019, Manoj appeared in a video where is he was seen kicking and abusing a student who was standing by, watching an anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protest in DU. A member of the ABVP ran up from behind Manoj, trying to hold him back while he abused and kicked. Then, there was commotion–the person taking the video could be heard screaming as students ran in all directions. 'These ABVP goons are attacking students,' the voice panted, while warning students to run in the opposite direction. Manoj was the first 'senior' to respond to Anamika's call for support at the T-tree clashes. Two years before that, when the violence at Ramjas College broke out, Manoj went to the scene to make sure his side was heard. He said that the violence they faced did not surface as much as it did for the other side. 'We were beaten too!' he said, exasperated. And there is 'proof': videos and photos of the blood that was shed from the side of the ABVP. This 'proof' collected and retrieved at moment's notice, put in a folder called 'Ramjas'. Two days before the Delhi riots (2020), Manoj circulated a video of himself on WhatsApp, speaking to a news channel, threatening anti-CAA protestors.

What draws Manoj to violence? What does he gain from his physical presence in a fight between 'left' and 'right'? What gives him the confidence to make the first move? Clearly there is a knowledge that exists before making the move that physical intimidation and physical and verbal violent tools are available to him. A way to explain Manoj's insistence on using violence comes from a need to give his ideology the upper hand. It is not an ideology that he just came into. It defines his life entirely- from the friends he has, how he chooses to be political and even, the career choice he has made. It encompasses his family and what his father stands for, what he has stood for his entire life. A defence of the ideology is the defence for his way of life.

c) The 'Follower'

Anyone who knows her would know it was her: in the checked shirt with a long scarf covering her face, holding a steel rod and surrounded by *bhaiyas* who she knew would protect her. When the initial pictures from the attacks in a public university in India emerged (2020), Barkha was the only person whose involvement everyone was sure of. Her name became emblematic of the incident: the girl who was violent; the girl who threatened to beat other women (and possibly did); the girl who caused infrastructural damage to one of India's most prestigious universities, right in the heart of the capital. She was the girl who was willing to be violent for the Hindu nationalist ideology. The night her name did the rounds in the media, she uploaded a 'status' on WhatsApp, the messenger service, the only place where she was active after the incident. It was a video message from the Commonwealth Games medal recipient, Babita Phogat, who supported the 'retaliation' by 'nationalist' students against '*vampanthi*' (communist) 'anti-national' students. The next day, there was another message supporting the 'reaction', a tweet by an ABVP national executive member. She then went off-the radar on social media for the time being.

Two days before the Delhi riots in 2020, ABVP held its state conference (*Prant Adhiveshan*) in Delhi. In the conference, all high-ranking members of the ABVP in Delhi, members of the national executive and ABVP members in the city, came together for the routine meeting. The *Adhiveshan* is a celebratory affair: there is decoration, photo opportunities, new post holders chosen, and an address by the national chief. All the ABVP members uploaded photos and videos showing how they participated in the event. National executive members uploaded parts of their speeches. Campus-level post holders uploaded pictures with the chief guest and candid shots that showed them in event proceedings. Barkha uploaded pictures with different *bhaiyas* and *didis* who had 'supported' her. There were pictures of her beaming with other ABVP members. Then there was a picture of her with Manoj, calling him her 'backbone' and keeping her safe 'during the most difficult time of life' (sic) (perhaps referring to the backlash she received after her name became prominently known for the attacks in the university).

Barkha was 19. She was in her second year of undergraduate studies. She comes from a Brahmin family that supports the BJP. She did not know about the Sangh or what it stood for. She knows the BJP and believes in its positive impact on the country. She said that *bhaiyas* in ABVP are nice and protective. She trusted her seniors in the organisation. She swore by the characters of some '*senior bhaiyas*' whose image had been 'maligned' in the organisation. And

she was deeply interested in how power played out during university elections, even though she could not vote in it (her college is a non-DUSU college which means that it does not participate in university elections). In ABVP organised programmes, she was usually with a senior, following them around and following their commands.

Since she has moved away from family to go to college in Delhi, she has relied heavily on the network of her ABVP seniors to find her feet in the big city. She visits them at home, is beloved by their parents, and attends their family weddings. For her, ABVP is her family in Delhi. Her life is in the ABVP. When she volunteered to go across the city to threaten those who were bothering the project of her *bhaiya* and *didis'* organisation, she knew she was doing it because no harm would come to her. When the Delhi Police could not locate the attackers, Barkha was protected by the highest powers in the organisation, safely kept in Manoj *bhaiya'*s home until the storm blew over. She attends protests, all ABVP events, and has her own circle of influence now in her college and in the ABVP, and perhaps even the larger Sangh family.

Once Barkha decided that violence was a method, she was not doing it for the ideology but for the thrill of pleasing her seniors. Validation drew her to authority figures in the organisation and after seeing her efforts pay off, she became more vocal in the ABVP. She is different from Anamika and Manoj, for whom the ideology needs actions to be defended. She is not naïve to merely follow an authority figure and do what they say. She knew who to ally with and now, even after there being proof of her involvement in the violence, she is visible, not hiding, and with no police case registered against her.

d) Self-fashioning for Protest and Violence

'I wanted to be a part of something, that people listen to me–to speak about my ideology and the ideology I adhere to.'
–Anamika, 20-year-old, female ABVP member

In these three biographies, there are multiple reasons that emerge for being involved in the movement. What also emerge are the different ways in how young Hindu nationalists use violence for Hindu nationalist self-fashioning. Both Manoj and Anamika are driven by a need to speak about their ideology. Madhao Sadashiv Golwalkar (1906-1973) was the second

Sanghsanchalak of the RSS and one of the revered icons of Sangh thought. In his book, *Bunch of Thoughts* (Golwalkar, 1966), he writes that there are three 'internal threats' to the Hindu nationalist movement and its patriots: Christians, Muslims and Communists. For Anamika, upholding the Hindu nationalist fight for tradition takes precedence when she decides how she will fight the progressive group. As mentioned earlier, the fight is situated in the context of the historical Hindu nationalist movement as the enemy shared an alliance with the communist ideology (among many others who fought the ABVP during the clash). For Manoj, a Hindu nationalist, it is most natural to love your country. The position that the organisation and its networks have on contemporary politics has allowed him confidence to make the first move when fighting during protests. His desire emerges from giving his ideology an upper hand during these clashes and protests. For Barkha, she is fighting for the ideology of her *Bhaiya* and *Didis*, thereby showing how the movement retains connections and mobilises them for action.

There were not only rewards gained for the movement and the ABVP when these young *karyakartas* protest and fight other student groups on campus. There are material and symbolic rewards that come to the *karyakartas* for being involved in protests like these (for example, JNU members from '9 Feb' incident). The role that they played in a successful protest can be used to leverage later for lobbying for positions in the organisation. For example, Anamika was able to establish ABVP, hitherto a marginal force in her college, as a strong student party after the 'T-tree' incident. She was able to take absolute control of the unit and use this to gain influence at the campus-level politics of the ABVP. For Manoj, the ideology now represents him, his choices, his entire milieu. His constant availability for the organisation's initiatives also allows him access to the networks of power within the organisation and always a position at the campus-level to make crucial decisions. Similarly, after her involvement in the university attacks, Barkha has managed to accrue her own circle of influence in the organisation. She has proven that she can be violent for the ideology, thus pre-empting future gains.

Being a Hindu Nationalist Student Organisation and the Spatiality of Violence and Protest in the University[397]

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[397] Thank you to Dr. Atreyee Sen for the discussion on this aspect.

A recurring aspect in the chapter is how space is inhabited, occupied and used for the purposes of protest. In this section, I focus on space, and how the knowledge of space is used at the protest site. The patterns of usage are an indicator of socialisation of students into the protest culture of the university. There is a possibility of multiple bodies inhabiting these spaces–both the protesting and non-protesting students. The students, through their presence, marches, posters, graffities, slogans, inhabit the space in a variety of ways. There are designated areas and methods of control present in all universities, known to both the protestors and the administration, that seem to have an orchestrated way of protesting. These protests are essential to establishing the student party's claim that it indeed works for students. Everyone knows where to show up and do what they are supposed to. There is not a lot of room for surprises. To illustrate, let us go back to the first protest in DU against the university administration during admissions. The layout of the Arts Faculty, the self-organisation of the protestors, the presence and even, nonchalant occupation of the police personnel, is the way all student parties protest in that space. As I have pointed out earlier, it seems that all members of the site seem to be aware of the script that has to be followed: the light-hearted conversations between ABVP post-holders and the police, the cliques formed before the protest begins, the police personnel whiling time away on their phones until it is time to act, the rest of the public going about their own business. Then, the protest begins, follows a set pattern, with different members knowing what space they can occupy. As has been shown, the role of the police has been performative. The members who are designated to climb the gates are doing their duty, along with police who are pushing back and the shouters who are shouting their protest through slogans. The protest and the spatial organisation follow a rhythm, reaching a crescendo and then slowly peters down. There are passions running high, but somehow, since it has been a cyclical, repetitive process, the scope for violence is limited.

What do JNU attacks (2020), Jamia violence (2019), BHU women's protest (2017), AMU violence (2019), and even the protest by students at HCU before Rohith's death (2015) have in common, and what does space have to do with it? In all of these cases, the clashes were significant. What added to the shock of the violence was that these were spaces that were transgressed, and the students' sense of security was directly under threat. As shown before, there are designated spaces in the university that are allocated for protests. There is a public aspect to the protest sites that allows students to straddle their lives as students and as protesters. This demarcation allows them to have private lives and provides with a sense of safety. It is

different now since there has been a constant attack on the non-designated spaces, spaces that provide students with a sense of security so that they continue with their roles as students such as the classrooms, the libraries, their hostel rooms or dormitories. Police and violent students intruding these spaces and politicising their entire space, infusing it with a sense of intimidation, insecurity and threat has been the characteristic development in the past few years that makes the protesting landscape different from before (similar to the period during the Emergency). For example, one of the most shocking aspects of violence in Jamia Milia Islamia University (2019) and JNU attacks (2020) was the violence invading spaces such as the libraries and student hostels. Students no longer felt safe in spaces that were guaranteed by the university and their fellow political students.

What is the role of ABVP in this? As shown throughout the thesis, ABVP has been at the heart of many events that have transpired on university campuses across the country. As the events discussed above show, ABVP has mobilised in different ways in a diverse array of spaces. The question arises: what is a safe space for students in the ABVP discourse? How do they articulate a safe space and designated space for protest? The slogan then '*Hostel, safety aur padhai, Parishad ki yahi ladai*' (Hostel, safety and studies–this is the fight of the ABVP) indicates that sites of these activities (hostels for residence, a safe campus, libraries and classrooms) are considered safe spaces in the ABVP discourse. But when we see images of members attacking students and vandalising hostels on cold, winter nights in JNU, this discourse becomes meaningless and empty. The protest script is changing rapidly, the spatiality of the protest site is not limited to designated spaces, thereby creating possibilities for more and more state intervention and violence.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Hindu nationalist students protest and use violence for their self-fashioning. The chapter was framed using ABVP's strategy of balancing and straddling: how it balances its role as a student organisation and as an important affiliate of the Hindu nationalist movement; how it engages different kinds of cadres (both violent and non-violent); and lastly, the socialisation, motivations and self-fashioning of individual members. The ABVP uses three different ways to establish itself as a student Hindu nationalist organisation.[398] To register

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[398] A question that I have not been able to engage comprehensively with is the connection of ABVP's dominance and its situatedness in Delhi. Existing scholarship (albeit meagre) tells us that the success of the student party is

dissent and project itself as a student party (with an apolitical student agenda), it protests the administration. These kinds of protests seek to establish the ABVP as separate from the administration, especially in the present political climate where universities have powerful representation from *Sangh Parivar*. In both the units, they tirelessly relay the information about their work in the student union, to make a case for holding university office. If they are not in the union, they project the union as hegemonic and incompetent. They establish the connection between the issues raised by left-aligned student parties and non-engagement with 'real student issues'. By raising the issues of hostels and admissions, like all other student parties, ABVP follows the pattern of making early contact with students. By stressing on the 'useless' nature of the union in power, it establishes its case for fighting and vying for a seat in the union elections. In both universities, the ABVP needs to assert that there is no umbilical cord connection with anyone (administration or the Sangh family) and that it acts in the interest of the 'common students'. Yet, as seen in its critique of the university syllabus or the work of JNUSU, there is a direct link between Hindu nationalist ideological goals and their implementation at the university level. Informal friendships and networks within the local hierarchies (university administration, police) could indicate deeper alliances or affiliations, leading to tangible material benefits accrued by those who benefit from such networks. This point is significant because it is such informal friendships that allow student parties to evade accountability for violence, vandalism etc. The second and third type of protests are 'Clashes' and events that invite spectacular forms of ideological mobilisation, respectively. In these, the figure of the 'common' or 'neutral' student is usually upheld to not just raise issues against the administration, but also to justify violent interventions. As was evident from the narratives of the ABVP members during Ramjas and Anamika's intervention during the T-tree violence, the *raison d'être* were 'neutral' or 'common students' who identified with the ABVP and sought it for their concerns. Similarly, the articulation of nationalism as 'neutral' ideology allows ABVP to manufacture a '9 Feb'. The discourse is in the form of their 'cause' as beyond the ideology–

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reflected in the patterns of its parent party holding power in the state or the center. This, I find true for ABVP as well. ABVP's access to resources and rise in power has been exceptional during Modi's regime since 2014, holding the seat of power in Delhi. But what else could be the reasons for Delhi (and other states where ABVP is prominent student party)? One reason I can suggest, based on the historical trends of presently prominent ABVP units in other parts of the country is the history of the Sangh activity in the region. ABVP has found support and grown alongside other Sangh affiliates in the region. For example, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh etc. These states find prominence (and I have found this in my study as well) in organisational roles given to members, networks, and membership patterns.

in the language of the constitution of India. On a larger scale, for the ideology, '9 Feb' was a strategic event. Although for JNU students, events like these were common, through the power of 'record' and 'expose', the event could be contested by not just the ABVP in campus but by members who sympathised with the ideology outside the campus. In terms of spatiality and protest organisation, there is a set pattern that the protesters, administration and the police are aware of. This indicates the socialisation aspect of the students and as mentioned earlier, a public aspect to protest sites that allows for a straddling of roles as students and as protesters. This demarcation allows them and other members of the campus to have private lives and provides with a sense of safety. What has been changing in the protest landscape led by the ABVP is the constant attack on the non-designated spaces of protest such as the classrooms, the libraries, their hostel rooms or dormitories. Attacks on these spaces have hindered students' sense of security and safety.

ABVP needs to protest in all three ways to assert itself on campus. To balance and straddle its role as a student party and a Hindu nationalist organisation, it needs to employ all three kinds of protests to stay relevant on campus issues. It cannot merely be a campus party, because then, it would not stay relevant to its core ideology. It cannot also be completely and explicitly only ideological since it needs to speak to students' issues to remain an important stakeholder of campus politics. Protests demonstrate the way in which it retains its important and unique position within the *Sangh Parivar*: as a successful campus-based Hindu nationalist student party. While it balances its position as a student Hindu nationalist party, due to its status as a student affiliate, it cannot aspire to set larger agendas for the Hindu nationalist movement in India and thus, remain within the set hierarchy of the *Sangh Parivar*.

In the chapter, I have shown the complex motivations of individual students for participating in these protests, and their contextualisation within the structures of Hindu nationalism and its currents in India. There is also a connection between one's own aspiration within the organisation and material or status benefits that will be achieved through the violence. There is higher status of members who are seen being visibly violent among their peer group. Therefore, members use visual proof of one's involvement and injuries, a repetition of the specific ways in which they were hurt is repeated to build the 'legend' that is repeated when the situation demands to produce a desired self-fashioning. Physical violence often leads to material and symbolic benefits from within the organisation. The protest sites act as glue for more concrete socialisation in the organisation and the ideology. There are three reasons that

primarily emerge for members' partaking in violence: defence of the ideology, knowledge of having state/support of the authority and, material and status benefits, alongside closeness with powerful members in the organisation. The link between motivation to be part of the organisation, the ideology, and violence is not evident with the membership of every member. Not every member chooses to be violent for the organisation. What emerges paramount here is that members who can be violent in the ABVP are those that have previously existing connections that will enable safety from repercussions–the informal networks in the local hierarchy as mentioned earlier, such as having support of powerful seniors in the organisation or having support from the State. All the members here received a light admonishing from authorities, but their networks enjoy good relationships with the local police.

In this chapter, I have also shown how members are socialised into the organisation through protest and the role of Hindu nationalist women in violent mobilisations for the movement. A signifier of socialisation within the organisation is to understand one's role in the protest. Members perform specific roles in the set-up of the protest. They gender a space and identify their opponents. Gendering of the protest site and identifying of female and male bodies also emerges as a crucial strategy during protest clashes. Further, in the recent past, the image of the 'goon' as indicative of a male activist has also begun to change. Female *karyakartas* are essential to gendering and producing successful protests during clashes. This recognition comes at the backdrop of ABVP members asserting a masculine image and accompanying that are tendencies of violence, vandalism and vigilante behaviour. The 'goon' image was typically associated with male members, is now being appropriated by women too–women who do not hesitate to use physical violence and vandalism to assert themselves. They typically engage with opponent women in a protest site, while male members are assumed to be engaging with competing men. The script goes haywire when the opponents do not follow the same strategy of gendering the protest site.

Phadke et al (2011) have shown the positive impact on women's mobility through the presence of different bodies in the public space. The act of being present, as we have seen progressive women's movements across South Asia take up this idea, have allowed for increased mobility in the public sphere (Saeed, 2018; Kirmani, 2020; Phadke, 2020). Does the presence of ABVP women align with this finding? Further, does the presence of female Hindu nationalist bodies enable more mobility for other marginalised bodies in the public protest sphere? To understand this, I bring in a finding from Amrita Basu (1999: p. 10):

'The relationships between agency, activism, and empowerment are complicated and often contradictory. Women's agency may strengthen systems of gender segregation, and women's activism may heighten identification with their roles as mothers. Women's activism may also empower women from particular communities but at the cost of deepening religious and ethnic divisions amongst them.'

Many a times, when women participate in violence, we are left to deliberate whether the actions are agential, and perhaps, feminist. Borrowing from Basu's explanation, I propose that the presence of more female bodies does not automatically increase access for other marginalised bodies in the public space. ABVP women are quite clear that they are fighting for furthering the presence of Hindutva. Further, female *karyakartas*' presence is allowing for a male assertion that would not have been as possible had it not been for former's presence. Anamika fighting for the T-tree ritual is an act of defending tradition and honour, in line with her Hindu nationalist beliefs. In this case, the activists were very clear that their fight was for tradition and against a 'feminist' interpretation of the event. Similarly, Barkha's presence is allowing for a more emboldened presence of her male counterparts in the organisation in the protest space. These protests and these women are significant because they illustrate to us how conservative women do politics in universities or spaces that have historically been assumed to be progressive. Women who are protesting the Hindu nationalist ideology become the most formidable enemy of all the protesting ABVP members. These protests could take place just with women (with the absence of men). But without women, these protests would not be possible. For the larger Hindu nationalist cause, these women should be seen as making an equal claim on the ideology and the organisation. They are the new agents of Hindutva.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

I met Sharmila outside a rundown building that housed the ABVP Mumbai office. Sharmila was a *vistaarika* with the Mumbai University ABVP unit. She was living in a room designated for ABVP office bearers. The room was sparse, no more than five square meters. She was currently sharing the room with a member from Tripura who had come to the central office for work. Sharmila was 23-years old from the Nashik region of Maharashtra. She was asked by the '*Sangathan*' (meant to indicate the higher echelons of the ABVP) to move to Mumbai. Her purpose was to work in Mumbai University campus to 'increase the strength of the unit'. She spoke about her tenure goals as a *vistaarika* with determination. As we walked from the ABVP's Mumbai office to the national headquarters, she told me about her plans for the upcoming annual membership drive (usually conducted between June-August). Her parents were not entirely happy with her choice to put her studies on hold to work for the ABVP. But she seemed resolute: 'work for the nation is more important than *degree-shigree.*'

Sharmila's assertion about her education and determination for the group sounds strikingly similar to Neha's proclamation about her MPhil studies in an earlier chapter (chapter 3). This is one of the ways in which ABVP members indicate to their peer group and others that they are embedded in the organisation and portray a commitment to the goals of the movement. In other words, the members fashion themselves as 'genuine' ABVP *karyakartas*, keeping the idea of 'work for the nation' as their highest priority. This thesis showed different avenues of socialisation (family, kinship, friendships, romantic relationships, association with *Bhaiyas* and *Didis*, elections and hierarchical mobility, and violence) and the way members fashioned themselves as Hindu nationalists. Self-fashioning emerged as a marker of socialisation and articulating aspirational goals in the language of the movement, and as a way to establish oneself as a patriot through a connection to the nation (chapter 3). Self-fashioning is deployed for electoral goals, right from modulating physical attributes (straight hair, *saaf* look etc.) to steps towards the *samikaran* goals as student politicians (chapter 4). Protests and violence are also used for self-fashioning in multiple ways: to indicate one's commitment to the organisation (example, Manoj and Anamika) and one's affection for connections in the organisations; to

portray oneself as loyal to the organisation and the use of violence to invest in future goals (example, Vindhya's commitment to violence during protests, chapters 4 and 5).

In this thesis, I engaged with two questions: what are the ways in which young people are socialised and become members of the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement in India? What are the different networks, structures, and practices through which they participate and contribute to the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement? Answers to these questions were sought in two universities in New Delhi where the ABVP has been an active student organisation. I conducted my fieldwork in 2019 and 2021-2022. Through the fieldwork, I was able to map the networks, affective practices, sites of socialisation and individual motivations of university students as agents of Hindutva. Hierarchy and strategies of disavowal emerged as the organising principles of the RSS-ABVP. These concepts, as illustrated in the thesis, are imperative to the functioning of the organisation (chapters 2, 3 and 4). As described above, I answered the question about socialisation and networks through an examination of the role of emotional connections, political aspirations, and protests and violence (chapters 3, 4 and 5).

Relevance of the Study

This thesis investigates the everyday lives of university students in the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement. The findings from this study are situated at the intersection of Hindu nationalism, youth studies, student politics, gender studies, studies of right-wing and conservative movements, anthropology of democracy and friendships. Through this thesis, I add to a crucial piece of the puzzle: how do young, urban, educated women, an extremely significant demographic to the *Sangh Parivar*, contribute to the movement? As shown in the previous chapter, until recently, the 'goon' image was associated with the male members of the organisation. ABVP women are appropriating this image and also contributing to the movement in diverse ways (chapter 5). These women are care-givers, leading agendas, are leaders, and they are not afraid to be violent to achieve their goals (chapter 3, 4, and 5). They engage opposing women on the protest site and subsequently, also enable the presence of men in these clashes. The ABVP women are representative of how conservative, right-wing women work on university campuses and articulate conservative academic practices (chapter 3, 4, and 5).

Unlike many studies on right-wing members (especially in Europe, for example, Klandermans & Meyer, 2006; Kimmel, 2007; Shoshan, 2015), my respondents are privileged individuals–of class and caste, and with access to education. But as I show in the thesis, privilege within the ABVP too has many layers. This aspect comes across most prominently among those coming from the Sangh habitus (chapter 3) and those who are using the means of electoral process (the 'Intermediate Classes' in chapter 4) to gain social mobility (for example, the Brahmin members' logic of 'selfish' and 'genuine' *karyakartas* to distinguish themselves from those willing to achieve higher status by fighting elections). This thesis illuminates the political culture among the conservative middle-class and emerging middle-class groups in urban India. The chapter on elections (chapter 4) shows a slice of life of not just university politics but is also representative of democratic politics on the national stage. Elections are conducted on issues like safety, student concerns and, curriculum etc. But the affective mobilisers of the elections are based on regionalism, caste, and the student party's affiliation with the parent party. DUSU's electoral trends are representative of the larger electoral trends in the country where certain castes are able to mobilise land wealth into capital for participating in elections and attaining political power. This mirrors the pattern of generating 'off-farm' employment (Jeffrey & Lerche, 2000) among these castes and enables them to accrue social and cultural capital through their participation in local politics and bureaucracy (see also, Jeffrey, 2010).

Through a detailed look at the relationships within the organisation, this thesis also shows the important role of non-kinship relationships in socialisation and sustaining of movements (especially among women, chapter 3). Through these findings, this thesis adds to a gap in the scholarship on Hindu nationalism and right-wing movements, but also, to the emerging field of anthropology of friendships (chapter 3 and 4). I also show the different inter-group dynamics within the ABVP. This emerges most prominently in the way different members aspire for positions within the organisations, find avenues of socialisation, deploying of labels such as 'genuine', 'opportunist', 'selfish', candidate and merit (chapter 3 and 4). Further, formation of different cliques and how members gain from these associations (for example, Pranay and his protégé's journey to fight DUSU elections, chapter 4) is also illustrated in the thesis.

In the following section, I will discuss the main findings of the thesis.

a) Habitus and *Judaav*

In the thesis, I describe the values that are important to the Sangh habitus: faith, *seva*, kinship, Hindu symbols, respecting hierarchy (age, relative position). These values allow for a recognition with the symbols of the ideology. The habitus provides a script for 'feeling rules' of the movement. As mentioned, one of the key indicators of socialisation is the embodiment of values from a Sangh habitus–an engagement with the 'game' (Scheer, 2012) that emerges from practical engagement with praxis (especially emotional practices) of the habitus. Thus, for others, finding resonance with some values from their home and the values of the Sangh habitus allows students to make an initial claim into the movement. Instrumental for the socialisation of non-Sangh members are 'connections' within the organisation–friendships, romantic partnerships and most importantly, older *karyakartas*, the *Bhaiyas* and *Didis*, who introduce them to the important values of the organisation. *Judaav* is an emic term from the field that demonstrates the degree of socialisation among members. *Judaav* is an affective connection that members feel towards the organisation, the movement and its goals, and towards fellow peers. In the thesis I argue that *judaav* and affective connections have created the emotional infrastructure that give the movement its present success. Members differentiated their own attachment to the ideology from other groups through *judaav*–an affective, embodied connection to those values. Entry into privileged emotional practices and achieving the state of understanding (*samajh*) is an acceptance of the logic of the 'feeling rules' of the Sangh. Students use the language of the 'feeling rules' to fashion themselves as committed to the *Sangh Parivar* and its ideals. Members deploy values from the Sangh habitus to indicate an organic aspect to their connection to the organisation through 'deep stories'. What emerges from the analysis is that members who have kinship connections within the Sangh have the most flexibility in their capacity to aspire for mobility within the Sangh hierarchy. Members who come from the Sangh habitus achieved success much faster in the organisation than those who were new. This is indicative of the power of networks and symbolic capital that a member accrues through their proximity to the RSS (chapter 3 and 4).

b) <u>Hierarchy and Aspiration</u>

The findings of the research shed light on different aspects of socialisation within the Sangh and the larger strategies of the movement. One of the crucial learnings of the thesis is in relation to the nature of hierarchy. Through the larger Sangh structure and the individual narratives of the members, it becomes clear that there is a vertical hierarchal structure, with the RSS at the top (chapter 2). The RSS represents male and Brahmin, and other demographic groups fall neatly within this hierarchy. Age, kinship, caste, gender, language and Sangh habitus find ways of retention in this structure. Across the *Parivar*, there is value attached (of having higher wisdom) to a higher position in the hierarchy (chapters 3 and 4). Different affiliates also find a neat replication into this hierarchy and the hegemony of the Sangh is retained. *Seva* (and the idea of *dayitv*, discussed in the previous chapters) was one of the ways that RSS in its early years post-independence consolidated its role at the top. Hierarchy ensures a smooth functioning of this gargantuan structure. In the ABVP too, the hierarchical chain of command is clearly defined. Understanding the different forms of hierarchy based on gender, caste, age, kinship, organisational hierarchy (within ABVP, within the larger *Sangh Parivar*, and even, beyond) is a way of socialisation within the organisation and determines a *karyakarta*'s success in terms of what they want from the organisation (chapters 3 and 4).

For students, their understanding of aspiration was having an abstract idea of power to make a change (chapter 4). It also meant access to more resources. People's articulation of their dreams and aspiration is linked to their context. One of the indicators of socialisation into the movement is the knowledge of this hierarchical structure and adapting one's own position within it, what I refer to as 'aspiration to hierarchy'. Depending upon their position in the Sangh context, their articulation of aspiration was different. What this tells us about hierarchy and power is that institutions find ways of retaining privilege. Further, those engaging with this knowledge do not attempt to radically alter the status quo but attempt to find space within it. Who to be reverential to is a skill that one develops over time in the organisation. This emerged most prominently among the differences in aspiration among *karyakartas* who came from the Sangh habitus and those who came from ICs and aspired to negotiate the hierarchy through the electoral process (chapter 4). The former had more fluidity in navigating the Sangh structure and affiliates, whereas the latter articulated their aspiration more in terms of electoral mobility within the ABVP, BJYM and BJP structure. While the RSS reigns supreme, what the thesis

also shows is the increasing influence of the ABVP and BJP alumni in the structure–a characteristic of the present Hindu nationalist movement.

c) Strategy of Disavowal

Chapter 2 sheds light on the nature of relationships within the *Sangh Parivar* and its affiliates. Through this analysis, a recurring strategy of disavowal emerged. The strategy of disavowal showed how the RSS navigates legality through its affiliates. It has been through a convenient invocation of this strategy that RSS has been able to protect itself from legal repercussions and accommodate myriad groups and opinions within its mammoth structure. This has also been a useful strategy for electoral politics–conveniently appealing and disregarding views and opinions, according to the tide of the times. Further, as we saw in chapters 4 and 5, by relying on the signifier of the 'common' or 'neutral' students, ABVP could further its position as a student organisation, all the while upholding its ideological values in the university space.

d) Informalisation

Informalisation processes and strategies emerge as an important theme in the thesis (chapter 2, 4, and 5). Similar to the strategy of disavowal, informalisation strategies are used at the level of the Sangh and the ABVP. During the university elections, we saw that to evade legal and bureaucratic constraints that govern elections, election candidates rely on these strategies to evade repercussions but also to create 'political sociality'. These strategies are operationalised through caste and social networks. In the context of the Sangh, I use 'informalisation' to indicate the work done for the mobilisation and socialisation of the movement (chapter 2 and 4). As shown, these are shadow networks activated behind concepts and systems already in place. No one is contractually or formally expected to participate in these strategies. Informalisation emerges as a way to hide the labour, the person who performs the labour, and the networks that they are embedded in. Knowledge of informalised relationships and networks becomes one of the ways in which new members are socialised into the organisation and the movement.

e) <u>The Multiple Uses of *Seva*</u>

Scholarship on Hindu nationalism and, especially, women in the public sphere has shown us that women participate through public service initiatives. *Seva* also emerged as a recurring theme in this thesis (chapter 2, 3 and 4). *Seva* is a shifting signifier. It was the primary idiom through which RSS and its affiliates operated after its ban in 1949, one of the main ways to appear devoid of ideology. It was the plank through which it established itself as a 'cultural organisation' (chapter 2). 'The RSS, which is a right-wing voluntary Hindu organisation, has conventionally cultivated the image of an institution that pursues the social and cultural revival of Hinduism' (Narayan, 2019: p. 121). Thus, *seva* has been one of the ways the strategy of disavowal is implemented (chapter 2). It is a strategy of interpellating new members. It is one of the crucial ways of retaining diverse groups of people within the movement (chapter 3). *Seva* becomes a way of socialisation into the movement and into its language, a way of entry into the Sangh habitus. Conducting acts of *seva* acquires symbolic value among members. It is an indicator of aspiration among the students–of wanting to do *seva* and thus, a reason for aligning with the ABVP (chapter 3 and 4). It is also the plank with which aspiring candidates gain credence among fellow students, especially those who are not in the ABVP. They refer to this as '*Parishad ka kaam*' (work for the Parishad), further acquiring differential meanings to articulate 'work' for the 'nation', including violence. *Seva* is also indicative of the habitus of individual members and acts as an affective mobiliser to indicate *judaav*.

f) <u>The Individual in the Protest Crowd</u>

In order to retain a homogeneous and coherent narrative in line with the larger ideology, the individual experiences of events are lost. In this thesis, I locate the individual experiences in relation to violent events where members use personal experiences and emotions to express how they felt during or after the event. For example, Aditi's recollection about how she felt 'attacked' and humiliated outside '24X7' as the person who brought shame upon JNU or when she was questioned about her love for JNU (chapter 5). I see these instances as ways in which the 'individual' emerges in the narrative of the larger ideology. Further, in most cases, members remembered a linear and similar recollection of the 'event' that transpired. The individual engagement with the mobilisation for the event got lost, especially when we were speaking

about events that invited national attention (like JNU and Ramjas). The 'event' and how it is recollected are indicative of how members are socialised into the organisation. For some, events such as these were a crucial factor for re-committing to the organisation, and more importantly, to the ideology. For example, there were many students like Mandakhini, who came to JNU to study 'to increase their number' after the 9 February incident in JNU. And as shown through individual motivations for violence during protests, such events become catalysts for a stronger association with the organisation.

g) <u>Agency and Pragmatics</u>

Borrowing from the previous theme, this thesis was a study of individuals embedded in a movement that wrests its power from hierarchy and maintaining the status quo. This thesis tells the story of university students, especially young women (out of 30 interlocutors, 18 identified as 'women'), who are trying to make a claim on a patriarchal movement. Unlike the popular refrain associated with individuals in such movements, this thesis shows that they are hardly 'brainwashed'. They are constantly negotiating with the structures around them. As I have mentioned before, the value for hierarchy is an indicator of socialisation among ABVP members. We have to consider that this desire and negotiation with the hierarchy is located in the 'pragmatics' of wanting more symbolic and material privilege where participants are playing the 'game' of their social conditions. These young people are trying to come up with creative responses to the world they have inherited and actively engaging to aspire for better circumstances. Their methods and goals are exclusionary and as mentioned, do not seek to radically alter hegemonic structures.

h) '*Azaadi*': The Biggest Roadblock in the Road to *Akhand Bharat*

'When you say that the army is rapist in the name of 'Azaadi', it is not. When you say 'Azaadi', you are insulting those who fought against slavery under Mughals and British. The ones who are screaming for 'Azaadi' were slaves of the British, wrote articles in support of Hitler. They spied on Indian freedom fighters. How will they know the value of freedom? 'Azaadi' is not cheap. And the kind of freedom they want is against our constitution.'
–Vani, 31-year-old female ABVP member from JNU

The discourse of '*Azaadi*' has taken a life of its own since the '9 Feb' incident and has been associated with ABVP's assertion against it in the past years. As illustrated earlier in the thesis, the slogans of '*Azaadi*' were a regular feature on campus politics (chapter 5). They acquired heavier meaning when the state was involved. Further, the meaning of '*Azaadi*' becomes even more laden when it confronts an ideology that is rooted in a religious-territorial idea of a land. 'Nationalism' for ABVP members as a 'natural' and neutral ideological entity is a measure of socialisation into the Sangh habitus. To oppose and quash the idea of '*Azaadi*' on JNU campus is representative of the success of the *Akhand Bharat* ideology outside the campus.

Manoj in his speeches that address the ABVP students, recites a poem of his own creation, a counter to the call for '*Azaadi*'. He takes the onus of being the one giving '*mukti*' (release, another Hindi word substituted for *Azaadi* (freedom), perhaps also using the Hindi/Urdu binary). His poem goes, '*Tum mukti chahte ho, hum mukti denge*' (if you want freedom, we will give you freedom). The poem posits repercussions in the form of physical threats, as if the ones asking for *Azaadi* need to be obliged. I would like us to consider the aspect of '9 Feb' event being regarded by the ABVP as more radical. First, it brings out the ABVP and Hindu nationalist discomfort with the idea of Kashmiri separatism (not just an assertion of it). Through its mere existence, '*Azaadi*' sharply confronts the idea of *Akhand Bharat*. Secondly, it stands in opposition to the legacy of the *Sangh Parivar*'s movement for Kashmir's integration into the Indian nation and the abrogation of Article 370. Thus, while the government is prepared to turn a constitutional status of a state overnight, this idea and the event organised by students 'in solidarity with Kashmir' is not just a hurdle, it questions the foundations of it.

Questions that Remain and the Way Forward

In this section, I will articulate some of my own concerns with the study and suggest ways in which these concerns may be addressed by future research. First, in terms of the findings on hierarchies, I can only speculate (based on anecdotal experiences) that there is a link between socialisation and hierarchy outside of the Hindu nationalist schema. Relatedly, there is a link between one's networks and habitus and the capacity to aspire. Further studies among different groups that are organised based on the principle of power and hierarchy can shed light on how individuals contextualise and use the knowledge of relative power to make space for themselves and adjust to different contexts.

Secondly, the ethnography in this thesis was located in two universities in Delhi. Due to the nature of fieldwork (that required long-term ethnographic engagement in a particular site), I was unable to conduct fieldwork in other diverse sites. As shown, both units in JNU and DU are contributing to the movement differently. I am curious about the strength and influence of ABVP units in other parts of the country. Delhi becomes a particularly interesting case in the present moment because of its access to the BJP government in the centre. The most influential cadres are from Delhi. But how do ABVP units sustain themselves and function away from the power centres? This is a question that can be explored ethnographically to fill this knowledge gap. The locational context, caste composition and perhaps even, religious diversity claimed by my interlocutors, can be uncovered in such a project.

Thirdly, there are other student groups with their own political cultures and legacies. Are forms of hierarchies and relationalities similar in Dalit-Bahujan or Left student groups? Do they also have the same kind of intense parenting that ABVP receives from the RSS and BJP? Does symbolic and cultural capital accrued through kinship and networks reproduce itself in other parties? Case studies on other groups that come together based on ideas and have similar intra-university networks could help shed light on political socialisation as a phenomenon and young people's place in it.

Fourthly, while the findings about emotional practices are specific to the Hindu nationalist movement, the processes of *tayyari* or motivations for violence or protest are not limited to the ABVP. I suggest that this data can be extended to understand the BJP as well. Further, are these trends similar in the case of other electoral parties? Is this a phenomenon limited to south Asia? Studies exploring these aspects could shed light on electoral practices, how individuals are socialised into political culture and self-fashioning as career politicians.

Building on these gaps, I invite further engagement with the themes I worked on in this thesis: university students and the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement, emotional practices in social movements, anthropology of democracy, and violence as a political strategy.

Final Thoughts

ABVP books or publications are hard to find. To get these publications, one needs to go straight to a source: a high-ranking ABVP member. Even in that case, the source might be scarce because they might not have access to the publications themselves. After months of pestering, Dinesh Verma–the outgoing *purnkalik* of north campus in DU–finally handed me some thin books that were recently published by the ABVP. He asked me to come to the *karyalaya* to collect the books. I was asked to photocopy the books and return the originals to him. The Delhi *karyalaya* is located in a small, poorly-lit lane in between the north campus of Delhi university and a large sewage body. This area is nestled in the hub of photocopy and printing shops, food eateries, the neighbourhood police station and endless traffic. I went to the nearest photocopy shop, barely a few minutes away from the ABVP office. As I sat huddled in the tiny shop with three other people (this was pre-COVID times), two men were deliberating about the best battery for an old car. A lower-grade one, they decided eventually. While speaking, one of them picked up the stack that was waiting to be photocopied, among them my ABVP books. Half-laughing, half-angry, he asked me, 'what are you doing with this?' Without waiting for my answer, he continued, 'These are all idiotic things.' According to him, people who do not want to study and go into politics get into this 'nonsense'. 'One guy will fight elections and his entire village from Rohtak (a district in neighbouring Haryana) will come and jam these roads,' he said pointing to the road that was already full of traffic. 'They will get whiskey and *non-veg* all day and their wishes will be catered to (hinting at unrestrained gluttony). It's not just them– everyone does it. How do you think Ramleela Maidan gets filled?' he said to me. He advised me to invest time in studying and not in the 'quicksand of politics'.[399]

The anecdote above is to situate the organisation and its ideals in the context of its members and non-members–people who look at it with awe, disdain or indifference. In my fieldwork among ABVP members (and interactions with members of the BJYM, BJP, RSS, Durga Vahini, and the Samiti), I found participants who were extremely casteist, people who believed in the ethnicised idea of the Hindu nation, and used a very violent language against those they disliked. There were also members who lived some of the most austere lives, displayed kindness and found in the Sangh a place where they gained self-worth. Like any social group,

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[399] Ramleela Maidan (large ground) is a large ground used for large gatherings. In Delhi, it is used by political parties for their events.

there are different hues to people's personal politics. What does this specifically tell us about the Hindu nationalist movement? In my understanding, its power and influence lay in its ability to hold together the very diverse interests of its membership, moulding its language to suit the different viewpoints, and still retaining their own core hegemonic beliefs to reign supreme (as shown from the way different affiliates were conceptualised in chapter 2).

This thesis is about networks and socialisation in the present-day Hindu nationalist movement. It is about an organisation that mobilises young people for its ideological goals, often using violence to execute such goals and reward them for their part in this violence. It is about university students in the movement and their aspirations. At the heart of this thesis is a learning about hierarchies and resilient social institutions, and the ABVP members' engagement with them. It is for the knowledge and access to these networks that members constantly work towards and, to figure out the particular path available to them. Learning about the limits to those aspirations takes time, resources and many a times, disappointments.

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Brief Information About the Main Interlocuters in the Study (selected)

Name	Age-range	Gender (self-identified)	Caste	Geographical affiliation	Educational level
Aditi	27-32	Female	Brahmin	North India	PhD
Anamika	18-23	Female	Brahmin	East India	Bachelors
Ananya	25-30	Female	Gujjar	North India	Masters
Anil	22-27	Male	Gujjar	North India	Masters
Bani	25-30	Female	OBC	North India	PhD (pursuing)
Barkha	18-23	Female	Brahmin	North India	Bachelors
Chaitanya	25-30	Male	Brahmin	NA	PhD (pursuing)
Gautam	25-30	Male	Yadav	West India	Masters
Jeevika	22-27	Female	Rajput	North India	Masters
Manoj	22-27	Male	Brahmin	North India	Masters
Neha	25-30	Female	Brahmin	North India	MPhil
Pradnya	27-32	Female	Brahmin	North India	PhD
Pranay	25-30	Male	Gujjar	North India	Masters
Rita	18-23	Female	Brahmin	North India	Bachelors
Samriddhi	25-30	Female	Brahmin	North India	PhD
Sangeeta	22-27	Female	Bhumihaar	Central India	Masters
Soham	35-40	Male	Brahmin/ Bhumihaar	North India	PhD
Sohini	22-27	Female	Bhumihaar	North India	Masters
Sonam	30-35	Female	Brahmin	North India	PhD
Thunlai	25-30	Female	Details not mentioned to preserve anonymity		PhD (pursuing)
Vani	27-32	Female	Brahmin	North India	PhD (pursuing)

| Vindhya | 22-27 | Female | Gujjar | North India | Masters |
| Vyom | 22-27 | Male | Brahmin | North India | Masters |

ABVP National Structure

National Office Bearers

National President → National Vice-Presidents

National General Secretary → National Secretaries

National Organising Secretary → National Joint Organising Secretaries (Zones)

Central Office
- Treasurer
- Joint Treasurer
- Central Secretariat, Secretary
- Central Office Secretary
- Central Joint Office Secretary

Organisational Structure

Structure of the *ikai*:
¬ President (*ikai mantri*)
¬ Secretary (*mantri*)
¬ Executive Committee
¬ College *Pramukh* (mentor, an ABVP member, former college student)

Karyakarta

↓

College unit (*ikai*)

↓

City (*Nagar*)/Campus

↓

District (*zila*)

↓

State (*Prant*)

↓

National

Campus level:
¬ College units
¬ Campus convener
  ¬ Full-timer (*Poornkalit*)
  ¬ Coordinator (Boys, Girls)
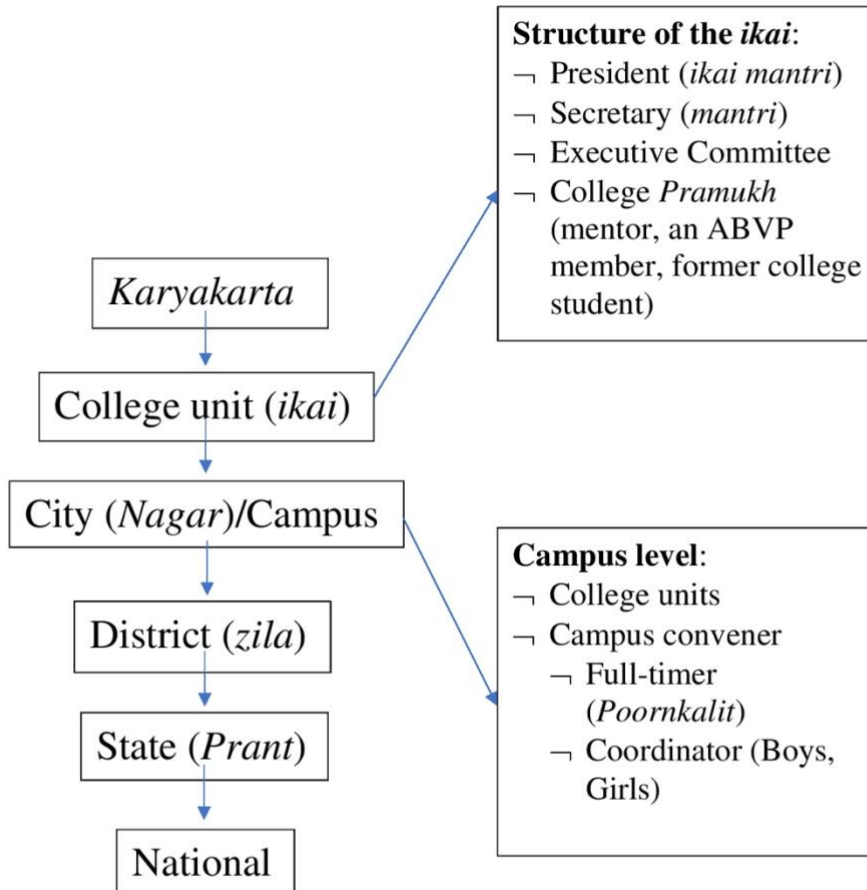
Membership Growth in the ABVP

Year	Number of Members	Full-time workers	Units	Source
1949	N.A.	N.A.	20	Yuganthar 1970
1970	125000	N.A.	70-80	Yuganthar 1970
1974	160000	24	790	Anderson & Damle 1987
1977	170000	80	950	Anderson & Damle 1987
1982	250000	125	1110	Anderson & Damle 1987
2001	952450	NA	1591	Chhatrashakti (July 2001)
2003	1.1 million	NA	NA	Parth M.N.
2013	2.2 million	NA	NA	Parth M.N
2014	2.9 million	NA	9800*	Parth M.N.
2018	2.8 million	NA	6549	ABVP (2019)
2020	3 million	NA	NA	Arun Anand

ABVP Alumni in prominent positions (selected)

Sr.no.	Name	Post & Party
1.	Arun Jaitley (1952-2019)	Finance Minister, BJP (2014-2019)
2.	Amit Shah	Dy. CM (Gujarat), Home Minister (2014-present), BJP
3.	JP Nadda	BJP Chief
4.	Anurag Thakur	BJYM Chief, BJP Cabinet
5.	Nupur Sharma	Spokesperson, BJP
6.	Tejaswi Surya	BJYM Chief
7.	M. Venkiah Naidu	Vice President of India
8.	Rajat Sharma	Journalist and Editor, founder of IndiaTV, a news channel
9.	Prabhu Chawla	Journalist with Hindi news channel, AajTak
10.	Ravi Shankar Prasad	Minister of Communications; appeared in court for Ram Janmbhoomi
11.	Sushil Modi	Dy. CM, Bihar
12.	Sudhanshu Mittal	DUSU ABVP head (1983); BJP Spokesperson
13.	Dharmendra Pradhan	Cabinet Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas and Steel
14.	Narendra Tomar	Minister of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj
15.	DV Sadananad Gowda	Union minister for Chemicals and Fertilisers
16.	Prahlad Joshi	Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Minister of Mines, and Minister of Coal
17.	Mahendra Nath Pandey	Minister for Skill development and Entrepreneurship
18.	Giriraj Singh	Minister of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries
19.	Om Birla	Speaker of Lok Sabha

20.	Monica Arora	Lawyer, SC; founder: GIA (Group of Intellectuals and Academicians); author of a book on Delhi Riots, 2020
21.	Mahesh Sharma	Has held various portfolios in the Modi government, including ministries of Culture, Tourism, Environment, Forest, and Climate Change
22.	Ram Bahadur Rai	Journalist; member IGNCA
23.	G.N. Govindacharya	RSS *Pracharak*, member BJP
24.	Vijay Goel	Senior BJP leader
25.	Pragya Singh Thakur (Sadhvi Pragya)	BJP Member of Parliament, accused in Malegaon blasts case

SEIL Activities from 1966 (Desai, 1991)

Year	Activity under SEIL
1966	Exchanges begin
1967	My Home India (MHI) launched
1977	National integration conference (Guwahati)
1979	Students from NE in Thane for a rural camp
1982	Interaction with tribe leaders from NE in Bombay
	'Poorvanchal yatra': tour of students in NE
1983-1984	Visit of NE to 'south and northern' parts of India
1984	Exchanges in Bombay and Guwahati
	The annual tour for students in NE
1985	Students taken to Andaman islands
1986	Conference: Samvad
1987	Conference: Adhyayan
1989	Conference: On the Spot
1990	Conference to celebrate NE called 'Utsav Poorvanchal'
1991	Integration '91
2006	Golden jubilee celebrations

ABVP's *Aayam* (Initiatives)

	Name of the *aayam*	Purpose of the *aayam*
1.	Students for Development (SFD)	Environmental initiatives
2.	PharmaVision	Students of Pharmaceutical studies (the current President of the ABVP began this initiative)
3.	MediVision	Students of medical sciences
4.	AgriVision	Students of agricultural sciences
5.	Shodh	Research scholars
6.	Rashtriya Kala Manch	To promote theatre and performing arts
7.	Mission Aarogya	Conceptualised during the pandemic for providing social services. E.g.: Temperature checks, providing clothes, food, medicines during the lockdown
8.	*Basti ki Paathshala* (School in Slums)	Began during lockdown by JNU students to conduct free coaching classes to the children residing in slums near campus
9.	WOSY	For international students in campuses in India
10.	*Bhasha Samagam* (Language centre)	A language learning initiative of the ABVP
11.	*Ritumati Abhiyaan* (Ritumati initiative)	To promote and informational campaign on menstrual hygiene
12.	SEIL	To make connections with the 'northeastern' states
13.	Students for Seva (SFS, Students for Service)	Modelled on NGOs inspired initiatives
14.	Think India	An initiative to bring together 'nationalist' students from India's best universities

Election Trends in the ABVP

Table 1: Trends in constitution of ABVP DUSU Panel (2010-2020)

Year	Name	Post	Caste	Gender
2010	Jitender Choudhary	President	Jat*	Male
	Priya Dabas	Vice President	Jat	Female
	Neetu Dabas	Secretary	Jat	Female
	NA	Joint Secretary	NA	Male
2011	Neha Singh	President	NA	Female
	Vikas Choudhary	Vice-president	Jat*	Male
	Vikas Yadav	Secretary	Ahir*	Male
	Deepak Bansal	Joint secretary	Baniya	Male
2012	Ankit Dhananjay Chaudhary	President	Jat*	Male
	Gaurav Chaudhary	Vice-president	Jat*	Male
	Ritu Rana	Secretary	Jat*	Female
	Vishu Basoya	Joint secretary	Gujjar	Male
2013	Aman Awana	President	Gujjar	Male
	Utkarsh Chaudhary	Vice-President	Jat*	Male
	Anshu Lakra	Secretary	Jat*	Female
	Raju Rawat	Joint secretary	Pahari(mountain states) Rajput, UC	Male
2014	Mohit Nagar	President	Gujjar	Male

	Parvesh Malik	Vice-President	Jat	Male
	Kanika Shekhawat	General Secretary	Rajput	Female
	Ashutosh Mathur	Joint Secretary	Kayastha(scribe caste)	Male
2015	Satender Awana	President	Gujjar	Male
	Sunny Dedha	Vice-President	Gujjar	Male
	Anjali Rana	Secretary	Jat	Female
	Chhatrapal Yadav	Joint secretary	Yadav (Ahir)	Male
2016	Amit Tanwar	President	Gujjar	Male
	Priyanka Chhawri	Vice-President	Gujjar	Female
	Ankit Singh Sangwan	Secretary	Jat	Male
	Vishal Yadav	Joint secretary	Yadav	Male
2017	Rajat Choudhary	President	Jat	Male
	Paarth Yadav	Vice-President	Yadav	Male
	Mahamedhaa Nagar	Secretary	Gujjar	Female
	Uma Shankar	Joint secretary	Gujjar	Male
2018	Ankiv Basoya	President	Gujjar	Male
	Shakti Singh	Vice-President	Rajput	Male
	Sudhir Dedha	Secretary	Gujjar	Male
	Jyoti Chaudhary	Joint secretary	Jat	Female
	Akshit Dahiya	President	Jat	Male

2019 & 2020	Pradeep Tanwar	Vice-President	Gujjar	Male
	Yogit Rathi	Secretary	Jat	Male
	Shivangi Kharnwal	Joint secretary	Gujjar	Female

Table 2: Where do those who do '*tayyari*' go?

	Name	Caste	Office held	Now
1.	Sudhir Dedha	Gujjar	Ramjas college ABVP head; did tayyari for DUSU in 2018	BJP member from Sonia Vihar
2.	Mahamedhaa Nagar	Gujjar	DUSU secretary 2018	BJP Spokesperson, Western UP
3.	Anjali Rana	Jat	DUSU vice-president 2015	BJYM Mahila Morcha vice-president
4.	Shakti Singh	Rajput	DUSU President and vice-President 2019	With the BJP
5.	Nidhi Shukla	Brahmin	Contested President at JNU	National General Secretary, ABVP (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)
6.	Velentina Brahma	Bodo tribe	Contested Vice-President JNUSU	Part of the National Executive of ABVP
7.	Saurabh Kumar Sharma	Brahmin*	Joint secretary, JNUSU	Assistant Professor, JNU

	8.	Shruti Agnihotri	Brahmin	Vice-President, JNUSU	Assistant Professor, JNU
	9.	Ankit Singh Sangwan	Jat	Secretary, DUSU	With the BJP, working in western UP
	10.	Chhatrapal Yadav	Yadav	Joint secretary, DUSU	With the BJYM
	11.	Ashutosh Mathur	Kayasth	Joint secretary, DUSU	With the ABVP state executive

Table 3: JNU ABVP JNUSU Panel trends (mainly Brahmin students)

Year	Name	Post	Gender
2019	Manish Jangid	President	Male
	Shruti Agnihotiri	Vice-President	Female
	Sabareesh P.A.	General Secretary	Male
	Sumanta Kumar Sahu	Joint secretary	Male
2018	Lalit Pandey	President	Male
	Geetasri Boruah	Vice President	Female
	Ganesh Gurjar	General Secretary	Male
	Venkat Choubey	Joint Secretary	Male
2017	Nidhi Tripathi	President	Female
	Durgesh	Vice-President	Male
	Nikunj	General Secretary	Male
	Pankaj	Joint Secretary	Male
2016	Jahnawi Ojha	President	Female
	Ravi Ranjan Chaudhary	Vice President	Male

Year	Name	Position	Gender
	Vijay Kumar	General Secretary	Male
	Om Prakash	Joint Secretary	Male
2015	Gaurav Jha	President	Male
	Velentina Brahma	Vice President	Female
	Devendra Singh Rajput	General Secretary	Male
	Saurabh Kumar Sharma	Joint Secretary	Male

ABVP Election Manifestoes (2015-2020)

Table 1: Manifestoes of past ABVP DUSU aspirants (2015-2020)

Year	Category	Agenda/Promises
2019-2020		This year, the ABVP coined the 5P Programme and divided its manifesto into respective goals. The 5Ps are: *Parisar* (Campus), *Pathyakram* (Course), *Pravesh* (Admission), *Pareeksha* (Examination), and *Parinam* (Result). There was a special focus on 'nation' through a recounting of ABVP's stand against Article 370 of the constitution and upholding the government's decision to do away with the same.
	Sports	1. University stadium, polo grounds and other sports ground should be [accessible] before all students. 2. Diet rates for sports students should be increased in line with the price index. Attendance relaxation should be given to sports personnel and ECA students. 3. 'High-class' sports equipment should be provided to students. 4. Demand special assistance for sports personnel and ECA students. 5. Open gyms in all colleges.
	Campus living	1. ABVP initiated a campaign for "*Paryavaran Yukt-Nasha Mukt*" (a campus that is environmentally sound and without substance abuse). 2. *Parisar:* ABVP demands a plastic-free, smoke-free, and safe and secure campus. 3. Sanitation issues in colleges: Good and clean toilets for students in all colleges. ABVP also demands water coolers at every 200 metres at Chhatra Marg (main arterial road in Delhi University north campus). 4. To stop the exploitation of students 'who belong to outside of Delhi', coordination committee of private

		made. Room rent control action should be executed most effectively. 5. Dedicated to struggle towards bettering hostel facilities in South Campus.
	Health	1. Demand more beds at the university medical center. 2. A university health center card should be issued for all students.
	Facilities and infrastructure	1. New colleges with state-of-the-art infrastructure. 2. New hostels should be opened by the university. 3. Try to get the Central and Arts Library fully digitised. 4. Photocopy, scanner and printer shop in all colleges. 5. Free Wi-Fi services in every department and college of the university.
	Gender	1. Free education for [the] transgender [community]. 2. Formation of gender sensitization and complaints committee under DUSU to instil inclusivity for the LGBTQ+ community in DU. 3. To make 'girl' students more self-confident by organising self-defence training camps in various colleges and university campus. 4. Patrolling of PCR vans around colleges and especially around girls' hostels should be increased. 5. CCTV cameras should be installed in colleges and departments. 6. Launch an app (specific purpose of the app not outlined).
	Disabled students	1. Facilities for 'differently-abled' students in all departments and colleges.
	Affirmative action	1. Work for the increment in the scholarships for SC/ST/OBC and demand to link scholarship with

		price index in line with the increase in Dearness Allowance.
		2. Try to get the vacant OBC/SC/ST/PH seats in various colleges filled. Various aspects of the fee structure of the university will be analysed so that we can make an effort to make it more equitable and logical.
		3. Remedial classes for all SC/ST/OBC/Economically weak students.
2018	This year, ABVP primarily upheld the idea of nationalism, while also addressing campus concerns. The manifesto focused on demands under the expansion of its acronym: A- academic, sports and co- curricular reforms, B- *Bharat* first, V- vision for world class infrastructure, transportation and facilities, P- pledge for women safety, security and gender sensitisation.	
	Gender	1. To spend half of DUSU's budget on women and social justice related activities. 2. Installation of sanitary napkins vending machine in all DU colleges. 3. Launch an app (specific purpose of the app not outlined).
	Sports	Special introduction of a 'sports manifesto'. 1. To make sure that University Stadium is open for all the students. 2. Demand revision in five percent sports quota seats per department. 3. Demand increase in diet rates for sports person in line with price index.
	Affirmative action	1. Remedial classes for SC, ST, OBC and economically backward students.
	Campus	1. 24*7 reading room in the university campus. 2. 'One course one fee' for all PG courses; reduction of fees.

		3. Guaranteed internship for 10000 students in government institutions.
2017	This year, the theme behind the manifesto was 'Agitation with a Solution'.	
	Gender	1. Conduct self-defense classes. 2. Increase access to police and its services. 3. Launch an app (specific purpose of the app not outlined).
	Campus	1. Financial concessions to students from rural backgrounds 2. Transparency in quota admissions. 3. Insurance for every student. 4. Voiced concerns against Lyngdoh rules. 5. Affiliate all DU colleges to DUSU. 6. Demand for more colleges, reserve 50% of them for female students. 7. Sports centre in South campus.
	Affirmative action	1. To fill the vacant seats of OBC/SC/ST/PH in various colleges. 2. Conducting postgraduate courses in Hindi and the facility to write exams in Hindi.
2016	This year, the theme was 'Nation First'- picking up from JNU's Feb 9 incident, focus on conversations on who ABVP considers 'anti-national' was a manifesto issue. Focus was on betterment of sports facilities and infrastructure.	
	Gender	1. Mobile Police Control Room (PCR) vans outside every college. 2. Self-defense classes. 3. Fully-equipped medical rooms. 4. Launch an app titled 'I Feel Safe — Safety *Ka* Power Button' (power button for safety). 5. CCTV surveillance in campus, especially around women's colleges and residential spaces.
	Campus	1. Printed mark sheets.

		2. Delhi Transport Company (state-run buses) bus counter in campus and increase in the number of the university special (U-special bus).
		3. More hostels.
		4. Formation of 'East' and 'West' DU campuses and attempt at making 'North' and 'South' more closed campuses.
	Sports	1. Better implementation of sports quota.
		2. Extra-curriculars, including sports, to be commiserated with credits.
	Affirmative action	1. 'No discrimination' stand against different groups.
2015	This year the theme was 'Agitation with Solution' and '*Ek baar fir se, ABVP dil se*' (ABVP once again). Prominent aim was regarding the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS).	
	Campus	1. Enactment of Choice Based Credit System (CBCS).
		2. Implementing regulations for accommodations like the Room Rent Control Act, Paying Guest Regulation Act etc.
		3. Metro card concessions.
		4. Begin evening courses in colleges or start more evening colleges.
		5. Special bus service for DU students.
		6. Steps towards making a 'closed campus'.
		7. Demand for printed marksheets for students.
		8. In case of large groups of students failing the same subject, supplementary exam should be provided.
		9. Centralising ECA and sports quota admissions.
	Affirmative Action	1. Enable a safer campus for students from the northeast of India.
		2. 'Remedial classes for SC/ST/OBC students'.

| | Gender | 1. Naming of a road in the university as "Nirbhaya Marg" (named after the young woman who was murdered in the 2012 Delhi Rape case). |
| | | 2. Helpline numbers for women's safety, accessible 'round the clock'. |

Table 2: Manifestoes of past ABVP aspirants in JNU (2015-2020)

Year	Category	Agenda/Promises
2019-2020	All the parties in campus put the abrogation of Article 370 at the centre of their conversations. ABVP echoed support of the government and its opposition spoke against it. 'Tukde-tukde gang' was remembered as being anti-India, anti-Indian army, and anti-JNU. The focus was also on persecution of RSS and Sangh activists in Kerala and Bengal.	
	Affirmative action	1. Ensuring social justice in entrance exams and appointments.
		2. Strict implementation of reservation policy and deprivation points.
		3. Increase of MCM (Merit-cum-Means) and non-NET (National Eligibility Test) fellowship.
	Campus	1. Focus on 'campus-centric' policies.
		2. 'Hostel and library issues'-demand for new hostels, lab resources, more space in libraries.
		3. Name the library after Dr BR Ambedkar.
		4. Pushback against 'leftist/communist' (*vampanthi*) syllabi.
		5. Only E-rickshaws and bicycles on campus.
		6. Ensuring the 200-point roster.
		7. Sports quota in admissions.
	Gender	1. Sanitary pads dispensing machines.
		2. Self-defense training to women 'Mission Sahasi'.
		3. Deprivation points for women.

2018	The ABVP spoke of weeding out 'anti-national elements' from campus if they were voted to power. The Presidential candidate in his speech remembered Hanumanthapa (martyred soldier), Dantewada, Nandigram and Singur violence, and how it was the only organisation in campus that stood against the chants that Indian army uses rape as a weapon. It posited itself against the people who allegedly chanted anti-India slogans. The call was to preserve the integrity of the Indian nation ('... from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Kohima to Kachchh...'). There was promise to solve campus issues '...from the mess table to classroom table...'.	
	Campus	1. Better infrastructure (mess, roads, hostels). 2. Better health center and turn it into a hospital. 3. Roll back attendance.
	Gender	1. Sanitary pads vending machine.
2017	'*Rashtrawadi vichaardhaara*' (nationalist ideology) was the plank that ABVP was promoting this year and against '*vaampanthi*' (communist) ideology. The echoed the idea of a development and the issues that were relevant in the national political sphere (Triple Talaq, Juvenile Justice Bill, UPSC language debates etc). The focus was also on campus issues.	
	Gender	1. Sanitary pads vending machines. 2. A regular gynaecologist is made available to students.
	Campus	1. Establishment of a placement cell. 2. Increasing frequency of Metro feeder buses and making it easier to travel within campus (E-rickshaw). 3. Increase number of hostels. 4. 'Seat scam' and seat decrease.
	Affirmative action	1. Reconstitute 'deprivation points'. 2. Reduce VIVA percentage constituting grade.
2016	'Feb 9' and 'Shut down JNU' were the most pertinent issues on campus, dominating campus elections conversations. The larger theme of this election was 'save the JNU from 'anti-nationals' rhetoric'. Since ABVP	

		had a seat in the previous JNUSU, they reiterated the developments that had occurred in the past year (WiFi, protests against Prof Arshad Alam and campus left activist Anmol Ratan). The rhetoric was directed against Left coalition.
	Campus	1. Implementation of a placement cell. 2. Building more hostels. 3. Build an indoor stadium. 4. Expand health centre. 5. Expand Library services. 6. Expand WiFi services in campus.
	Gender	1. Strengthen GCASH (Gender Sensitisation Committee Against Sexual Harassment).
	Affirmative action	1. Bring back conversation on 'deprivation points'.
2015		This year, ABVP fought on the issues of the campus and proposing a 'strong check on anti-national activities'.
	Gender	1. Increase women security (streetlights and more patrolling in dark areas around campus). 2. Make a 'women-friendly campus'.
	Campus	1. Build more hostels. 2. Increase fellowship amounts (MSM, non-NET). 3. Build infrastructure in libraries, make it 24x7. 4. More efficient placement cell. 5. Open a Canara Bank branch. 6. Start the provision of supplementary examinations.

Protest Slogans

	Main caller	Crowd	Translation	Type of protest
1.	*Bolo, bolo, Bharat Mata Ki*	*Jai*	Speak: Hail Mother India.	All
2.	*Na (related entities being protested, eg: Maowaad, Naxalwaad; aatankwaad, jatiwaad etc).*	*Sabse upar rashtravaad*	Nationalism is paramount (not Naxalism, Maoism, Terrorism, Casteism etc).	Register dissent, against other student groups
3.	*Chhatra apna haq maangte...*	*Nahi kisi se bheek maangte*	The students demand their rights, they do not ask for charity.	Register dissent
4.	*University hamare aap ki...*	*Nahi kisi ke baap ki*	The university is ours, it does not belong to someone's father (it is not private property).	Register dissent
5.	*Galat pathyakram nahi padhenge*	*nahi padhenge*	We will not study wrong curriculum (misleading).	Register dissent
6.	*(Entity being protested eg: Naxalwaad, Pakshpaat) nahi sahenge*	*Nahi Sahenge*	We will not tolerate (Naxalism, biased curriculum etc).	Register dissent, against other student groups
7.	*Karl Marx nahi padhenge*	*Nahi Padhenge*	We will not study Karl Marx.	Register dissent,

				against other student groups
8.	*ABVP Zindabad*	*Zindabad, zindabad*	Long live ABVP!	All
9.	*(Entity being protested) down down*	*Down down, down down (or up up; up up)*	Depending upon the subject of the protest, denouncing it or upholding a value they hold dear (for example: naxalism down down, nationalism up up).	All
10.	*(Entity being protested) murdabad*	*Murdabad, murdabad*	Dishonour to the idea/person who is at the helm of the protest.	All
11.	*Vidyarthi Parishad badhe chalo*	*Badhe chalo, badhe chalo*	ABVP, progress steadfast.	All
12.	*Vande Mataram*	*Mataram*	Hail to the motherland.	All
13.	*(Entity being protested) jaan le; Boriya bister baandh le*	*Teri baari aayi hai; Teri baari aayi hai*	Warning the subject of the protest that they are under the lens of the ABVP and that they should begin packing their belongings (to indicate ousting).	All
14.	*VC tera ek agenda*	*Propaganda, propaganda*	The sole aim of the VC is propaganda.	Register dissent

15.	*Ye zor-zulm ke daftar mein…*	*… Sangharsh hamara naara hai*	In this institution of oppression, struggle is our slogan.	Register dissent
16.	*Hostel list mein sabka naam…*	*… Warna hogi neend haram*	There will be no peaceful sleep until the resolution of the protest has been reached.	Register dissent
17.	*(Entity being protested) sharam karo…*	*… Sharam karo*	Asking the protested entity to be ashamed.	Register dissent
18.	*(Entity being protested) dhaava bolo…*	*… Dhaava bolo*	Aim to concentrate protests on the entity.	Register dissent
19.	*Hostel, safety aur padhai…*	*…Parishad ki yahi ladai*	Hostel, safety and studies- this is the fight of the ABVP.	Register dissent