State and civil society in India came under critical challenges since the 1980s. During the last three decades, particularly since the early 1990s, there have been momentous changes within the country and across the world. At the domestic level, there was an unprecedented economic crisis which affected India’s position very badly. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc, the ascendency of neoliberal/New Right forces and market economy, the ever-expanding role of global capital, the formation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001, and the ‘war on terror’ were the critical developments during the period.

The economic crisis led India to substantially revise its development paradigm and the economic/industrial policies pursued for more than four decades. When India began to adopt neoliberal policies in the 1990s, many questions emerged with respect to the role of State and civil society, long-held policies of self-reliance, import substitution etc. This was also the period when India experienced new trends and patterns within its political system with communal mobilisation, regionalism, shifting electoral strategies of political parties, governmental instability etc having an impact on the State and civil society. Coalition experiments too became an accepted practice during this period with political dispensations transcending traditional ideological moorings began to explore new avenues of political alignment. It is within this backdrop of developments that the new wave of Hindutva and its securitisation of culture and society must be analysed. This chapter begins with a brief analysis of the structural transformation of the Indian State and civil society in the 1980s and 1990s. It, then, examines how the Hindutva forces cashed in on the emerging situation and deployed new strategies of securitisation through several issues that dominated Indian politics and civil society. The chapter also analyses the perceptions and policies of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition government during 1998-2004, particularly in relation to issues of security.
State and Civil Society: Structural Transformation

The decades of 1980s and 1990s were marked by major changes in the world economy as well as in the global politico-strategic landscape. The changes in the world economy had their beginning in the early 1970s when it came across unanticipated fall of the ‘golden age’ (Sweezy 2002: 18-37; UNCTAD 1995: 123-24) of capitalism. The prosperity of the post-war era—sustained throughout the 1950s and 1960s in advanced capitalist countries—had ended up in severe inflation in the early 1970s. Consequently, Keynesianism came under challenge because of the very course of the evolution of the international political economy in the post-war period (Pilling 1986: 1-2; Kozlov 1977: 523-27; Shonfield 1965).

The burgeoning inflation in the 1970s, accompanied by the collapse of industrial production and employment, undermined the very rationale of Keynesianism (Pilling 1986: 6). This mix of inflation and industrial recession was understood as a new trend by a large number of economists (Kaldor 1978: 215) some of whom began to call it as ‘stagflation’ (Baran and Sweezy 1966: Sweezy 1966: 39-59). The crisis generated other problems too. The Keynesian Welfare State that existed in many countries sought to blend capitalist economic efficiency with social and national cohesion. Samir Amin, however, says that “it was the fear of communism and the radicalisation of the national liberation movements of the peripheries that gave rise to the Keynesian policies and development support of the post-war period” (Amin 1997: 42). Thus, the social consensus on welfarism that prevailed for more than two decades suddenly collapsed in the context of the economic crisis and, inevitably, the Welfare State became no longer suitable, which also called for a rollback of the political and economic advances of the previous years. Seeing the growing public expenditures as the major cause of the crisis, the New Right forces in advanced capitalist countries began to abhor the mounting public spending and praise the virtues of privatisation of social services (Clarke 1987). Leonard points out that the tensions between the New Right, who rejected all welfare spending and the conservative welfarists, who stood for state intervention, were reconciled in favour of the former (Leonard 1997: 3). According to Foster, the crisis had implications for the mixed economy, Keynesianism, the Welfare State and, above all, the idea of “capitalism with a human face” (Foster 1999: 37).
The fall of the Welfare State in the West, in fact, triggered off a deepening crisis in the developing countries too. The notion of social and economic development as two sides of the same coin was no longer sustainable. The breakdown of Keynesianism thus led to the rollback of social development and welfare initiatives of the UN Development Decade (UN 1970; Berger 2001: 211-34) as these were seen as basically ‘nationalistic’ and conflicting with the requirements of global capitalist development (Amin 1997: 142; George 1990). Thus, demands for a free market play were forcefully made by many during this time pointing to the “bureaucratic inefficiency” and “fiscal extravaganza” of the Welfare State. Davison Budhoo, who had worked with the World Bank and the IMF for some time and, later, became a critic of these institutions, pointed out that attempts were underway “to replace all development theory” with “Reaganomics and Chicago school monetarism” and to turn “post-war development economics on its head ” (Budhoo 1990: 97). A shift of the dominant macro-economic model could be perceptible at this time - from the Keynesian mode to a monetarist and neoclassical type. The New Right in the West became the proponents of this transition, which later came to be associated with neoliberalism. McChesney says:

> Neoliberalism refers to the policies and processes whereby a relatively handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximise their personal profit. Associated initially with Reagan and Thatcher, neoliberalism has for the past two decades been the dominant global economic trend adopted by political parties of the centre, much of the traditional left, and the right. These parties and the policies they enact represent the immediate interests of extremely wealthy investors and less than one thousand large corporations (McChesney 1999:40).

This period also witnessed a move from the emphasis on national development to globalisation, a heterogeneous and multifaceted process of political, social and cultural change marked by financial deregulation, trade liberalisation and privatisation, in which the State plays an increasingly important globalising rather than its earlier national development role (Kurian 1994: x) . Since the early 1980s, the Reagan and Thatcher governments in the United States and Britain, under pressure from transnational companies, took the lead in directing the IMF and
World Bank to encourage financial deregulation, trade liberalisation and privatisation of public sector in the developing countries through the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the aim of which was to put them on the track of global capitalist development. Through the strict implementation of structural adjustment policies, the IMF and World Bank sought to ensure that the developing countries that were seeking loans from the IMF and World Bank “become faithful adherents to the philosophy of monetarism” (McLeod in Budhoo 1990: vii).

The outcome of the SAP was the worsening debt crisis in developing countries. Consequent upon the recession in the West and the resulting fall in demand, the prices of the major commodities exported by the developing countries fell drastically. This caused unfavourable terms of trade and price instability that became very acute for developing countries. Export prospects were considerably restricted due to the protective measures of the advanced capitalist countries. The UNDP estimated that the global market conditions made the developing countries lose economic opportunities worth around $500 billion annually (UNDP 1992: 77-78). The net impact of all this was that the gap between the developed and the developing countries further widened. The South Commission Report (1990) recorded these widening disparities in terms of the expanding power of the advanced capitalist countries. It says:

The fate of the South is increasingly dictated by the perceptions and policies of governments in the North, of the multilateral institutions which a few of those governments control, and of the network of private institutions that are increasingly prominent (South Commission 1990: 3-5).

It is in this background that one has to analyse how India began to address such issues within the structural compulsions of the international as well as its own domestic economy in the 1980s. The State and civil society in India began to experience new forms of challenges against the backdrop of a new political economy regime which was gradually emerging in the 1980s. Its main objective was to ensure a slow but steady rollback of the State, deregulation of industries, decontrol of prices, liberalisation of imports, tax reductions etc. The new regime began to operate with the IMF loan India borrowed in 1981 and subsequent policy initiatives, which got impetus in 1985 following the recommendations made by several
official committees appointed by the Government. It was these committees which set the essential framework and background papers for the new economic regime (Jha 1985; Narasimham 1985; Sengupta 1984; Hussain 1984; Ahluwalia 1985). By mid-eighties the public opinion within the country was created against the policy regime of controls and regulations. The three decades’ of economic policies had already brought the country to an irreversible balance of payment crisis towards the end of 1980s.

Rajiv Gandhi’s emergence as Prime Minister in 1984 was a decisive turn. With the proclamation of a new economic policy by the Rajiv government, slogans like ‘self-reliance’ and ‘import-substitution’ etc. were substituted by catchwords like ‘export-orientation,’ ‘technological upgradation,’ ‘efficiency’ and ‘modernisation’ (India, MI & B 1987: 95-98, 98-109 and 147-155). Appropriating the new industrial policy put in place as part of the liberalised economic policy, the corporate sector (both national and international) rushed into the Indian market. The export-import policies announced in 1985 and 1988 under the Rajiv government, and in 1990 under the National Front government led by V. P. Singh, fell in line with the trade liberalisation prescriptions of multilateral financial institutions (India, Ministry of Finance (MF) 1985; India, MF 1986; India, MF 1991). To invite foreign firms and get the much-needed foreign exchange for financing the consumer booms, several measures were taken (Ghosh 1999; 295-334; Patnaik 1988: 3-16). In sum, the import-pushed export-oriented development strategy initiated in the 1980s speeded up the integration of the Indian economy with the world economy. The resulting scenario saw acute fiscal and balance of payments crisis, inflationary pressures, deceleration in productive economic activities including employment growth rate, widening of economic inequalities, etc. The economic and industrial policies eventually led to undermining the major public sector industries and indigenous cottage as well as small-scale industries, thereby facilitating the large-scale entry of multinational corporations (RBI 1988; India, CSO 1989).

Meanwhile, India was pushed into a severe debt trap, which culminated in a major economic crisis in the early 1990s. There was a sharp fall in foreign exchange reserves, soaring inflation, large fiscal and current account deficit and a heavy and growing burden of debt (Jalan 1991; Nayyar 1996).
The Narasimha Rao government which came to power in 1991 embarked on a wave of economic reforms to meet this challenge. These measures initiated under the supervision of the IMF and World Bank constituted the second phase of a programme designed to restructure the economy with the twin pillars—macroeconomic stabilisation and the structural adjustment policy. It was first initiated as stabilisation policy under the direction of the IMF followed by a structural adjustment policy dictated by the World Bank (World Bank 1991; Swamy 1994: 245-49) They sought to ensure (a) gradual withdrawal of the State from the economic activities as well as from the social sector; (b) the encouragement of private investment; (c) increasing reliance on external private capital for economic development; (d) other gradual privatisation of public enterprises; and (e) the introduction of fiscal and monetary policies that tend to pass on control over the overall direction of economic policies from the Indian State to external private finance capital(Patnaik 1994: 917-21). Thus, the introduction of the reforms constituted a clear departure from the past and the State has been retreating from the socio-economic sphere, perhaps most dramatically since the early 1990s. When the disintegration of the socialist bloc came, it was interpreted as the vindication of the triumph of market ideology and the rejection of the role of the State in the economic sphere (Patnaik 1992: 54).

This was when the World Bank, through its enormous direct and indirect influence, forced its debtors and its member countries to accept ‘good governance’ as a key component of both developed and developing economies, thereby also assigning importance to the role of the civil society as a facilitator of both democracy and market economy (Berglund 2009). More importantly, the failure of the state to address social and economic needs of the people has had effects not only on the levels of development but also on the structure of the civil society. In a way, this failure impelled groups and individuals to engage in civil society, but the inability to provide basic services hampered the development of civil society. Consequently, the Indian State and various aid agencies utilised the competence and infrastructure of civil society in order to encourage social development. NGOs have been incorporated in the governmental development plans. At the same time, the relative failure of the Indian State created feelings of exclusion amongst large segments of the
population, and allegations that the State is not neutral, but biased on the basis of class and caste interests. These biases created sentiments of apathy and also facilitated negative mobilisation and manipulation of various primordial identities such as religion and caste. This caused many problems that led to demands and actions which seriously undermined the democratic system by the strengthening of exclusivist identities. These are based on religion or caste and are now at the centre of political mobilisation, which involves political parties as well as other parts of Indian civil society. According to Amir Ali, this resulted in the cementing of the community based identities, which obstructed democratisation of Indian society, with the current Hindu nationalist challenge as a case in point (Ali 2001). The ascendancy of this movement was most evident within the party system, where BJP in the 1980s and 1990s grew from a marginal party to a dominant force of Indian politics.

Rise of Hindutva: Securitisation and Mobilisation

scholars observed that as a result of the extremely personalised rule of Indira Gandhi, especially after the Emergency (1975-77), the ‘Congress System’ (Kothari 2002)—a broad consensus within the State and civil society that existed for long—went into decline, creating a political vacuum which was filled by competing regional, caste and linguistic interests (Hardgrave and Kochanek 2000: 151-53). Moreover, as Indira Gandhi’s government could not alleviate poverty in the ways that it had promised in the slogan Garibi Hatao, the people became disillusioned with the Congress dominance and turned to alternatives. Consequently, the divisions that characterised the Indian politics in the 1980s and 1990s were marked by a more competitive electoral environment in which coalition building and the support of consistent vote banks became the hallmark of a successful political strategy (Nadadur 2006).

It is here that the rise of Hindutva in India needs to be placed within the larger context of the struggle and debate over the secularism of the postcolonial Indian state (Bhargava 1998), on the one hand, and the emerging social issues and tensions following the introduction of liberalisation and privatisation, on the other. This became significant since the 1990s, the decade that saw the end of Congress’s dominance and the rise of BJP. Writing on the discourse of violence that the BJP and other
Hindu Right organisations carried on during the period, Dibyesh Anand noted that the hate campaign against the minority Muslims was “facilitated and justified in the name of achieving security for the Hindu Self at individual, community, national as well as international levels.” He said that the “will to secure the Self has as its corollary the will to make insecure the ‘Other’, the desire to control and use violence.” The new discourse of security/insecurity that the Hindutva set in motion enabled “extreme violence to be normalized, systematized and institutionalized.” The ‘politics of hate’ spawned by the Hindutva was a good example that fed upon, as well as shaped, local societies’ conceptions of security/insecurity. The global environment, “with its own dynamic politics of representation of dangers” (Anand 2005), had a direct impact on the civil society.

The decades of 1980s and 1990s were thus marked by the growing fear generated by the Hindu Right that the minority Muslim population was increasing its presence in India, challenging Indian sovereignty and rule of law, and controlling the politics of the country. The ‘insecurity’ of the Hindus was blown out of proportion, and the BJP, RSS, VHP and other Hindu Right organisations had worked hard within the civil society in the task of securitisation of the Hindu identity. Thus, BJP’s emergence as the most dominant Hindu Right force in India in the 1980s was the culmination of a sustained effort on the part of its predecessor, Jan Sangh, VHP and the RSS to bring Hindutva into mainstream politics. According to Nadadur, the BJP and other Hindu Right organisations played on “the fears of the Hindu majority” that the “Muslim population posed a threat to Hindus in India.” This was based on the “changing demographics of the Muslim population and the political mobilization in the 1980s and 1990s” such as the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and the changing voting patterns of the Muslim population (Nadadur 2006). This has also been linked with ‘terrorism’ and ‘Islamism.’ According to L.K. Advani, “the ideological basis of terrorism in India has been unmistakably anti-national in its intent and pan-Islamic in its appeal. It is the manifestation of a deeper malaise of the spread of extremism in most parts of the Muslim world, funded as it is by fundamentalist groups based mainly in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries.” He wrote that “one of the most virulent forms of terrorism in our times seeks the cover of Islam” which called its “murderous campaign”
jihad, and the terrorists “actually pursue a definite objective: to establish worldwide domination of political Islam, which is also called ‘Islamism.’ Naturally, India’s multi-faith society, the constitutional principle of secularism that has anchored the Indian state, and the cultural-spiritual ethos of Hinduism that have defined the character of both the Indian society and state, are anathema to Islamism” (Advani 2007).

Thus, the Hindu Right organisations and their leaders persistently talked about the ‘threats’ to the Hindus. A study circulated by the RSS in the aftermath of the 1991 Census read that “the fact remained as prominent as ever that the rate of population growth of Muslims is much higher than that of the Hindus, particularly in some areas where the majority is on the verge of being reduced into minority” (BJP 2006; Nadadur 2006). During this period, the VHP leader Praveen Togadia made a strong plea to the Hindus to increase their population. He said that “the Hindus should encourage growth in their population in the light of the demographic changes taking place in the country.” Togadia was on a campaign “to make the Hindus take pride in their identity” (Indian Express 2005). Similarly, illegal immigration from neighbouring Bangladesh contributed to the perception that the Muslim population in India was growing rapidly (VHP 2007). Yet, another campaign that led to the perceived threat from Muslims that Hindus ‘experienced’ came from “the systematic campaign to drive away Kashmiri Pandits and Hindu families from their natural homeland” (Advani 2007). Mohan Bhagwat, Sara-Sanghchalak, RSS, in a speech said that the “patriotic forces in the Kashmir valley need to be strengthened...to restore the demographic balance of the valley.” “The legitimate demand of the Kashmiri Hindus for permanent and honourable return to their home land as patriotic citizens of Bharat and followers of Hindutva - well equipped to defend themselves and pledged by the government - needs to be fulfilled immediately” (Bhagwat 2009).

Re-emergence of Bharathiya Janata Party (BJP)

The Jana Sangh, which spearheaded the cause of ‘Hindu nationalism’ for long, ceased to exist in 1977 when it merged with other non-communist parties (such as Congress (O), Socialists and Bharatiya Lok Dal) to form the Janata Party in March 1977 and assumed power at the centre. But the Janata experiment soon fell through when it was caught up in conflicts
among its constituent units. The Jana Sangh faction finally left the Janata Party. One of the main causes of the collapse of the Janata experiment was ‘the dual membership’ (BJP 2010)—the loyalty of the Jana Sangh faction to the RSS. The question was whether a Janata Party member could simultaneously remain loyal to the RSS (Ghosh 2003: 229). However, it led to the formation of the BJP in April 1980, which, according to Graham, “offered a second chance for Hindu nationalists to bid for majority status in northern India” (Graham 1993: 258). From the very inception, the leaders of the BJP faced two main problems; first, how the new party could be distinguished from the former BJS, in order to exhibit its ‘newness’ and to “broaden their electoral reach on both a geographic and demographic basis”; secondly, how it could be placed as an alternative to the Congress (Malik 1995: 36-38). As a strategy, the BJP declared itself committed to a programme of ‘Gandhian Socialism’ and introduced a new set of policy documents known as ‘Our Five Commitments,’ intended to produce a national consensus.

The first principle underlined that while “India is one nation and Indians are one people, constituting and mutually accommodating plurality of religious faiths, ideologies, languages and interests,” those “who have external or extra territorial loyalties or are engaged in anti social activities cannot be by definition expected to contribute to national consensus and therefore will have to be kept out.” ‘Commitment to democracy and fundamental rights’, ‘Positive Secularism involving an acceptance of the need to protect fully the life and property of minorities’, ‘Gandhian Socialism’ and ‘value based politics’ were other principles the BJP espoused. Graham rightly pointed out: “In rhetorical terms, this text presented the BJP as a progressive party with liberal and humanitarian concerns, implicitly laying claim to the mantle of the Janata Party and as a furthermore, to the social and political ideal which Nehru’s Congress Party had proclaimed in the 1950s” (Graham 2006:160). Indeed, the BJP had been trying to appropriate the space which the successive Congress governments had been unable to sustain after Nehru.

Thus, in the 1980s, the BJP was determined to become a counterforce to the Congress. Its leadership criticised the Congress for its ‘denial of democracy by imposing emergency in 1975,’ ‘minority appeasement,’ and distortion of ‘secularism,’ ‘corruption,’ ‘unprincipled pursuit of power,’
‘unbridled consumerism in disregard of India’s cultural traditions’ etc. (BJP 2010; Advani 2007; Malik 1995:38). However, the attempts to broaden its support in the 1984 parliamentary elections failed to attain the expected results. The BJP got only two seats with 7.86 votes in the elections (Ghosh 2003:230-31). This was a setback to the party. The RSS during this time indicated that the remedy to the crisis lay in the restoration of the leadership’s rapport with a sizable section of its ‘selfless cadres’ (RSS) still alienated since the Janata rule (Organiser 7 April 1985; Noorani 2000:61-62). It also argued that ‘positive secularism’ and ‘Gandhian socialism’ had alienated the party. In the wake of this, the BJP appointed a high power Working Group to study the results of the elections which later came out with remedial action. The Party streamlined its organisation and “re-pledged itself to ‘Integral Humanism’” (BJP 2010).

Meanwhile, two events in early 1986 provided considerable leeway for BJP’s re-emergence which it skilfully utilised through its mobilisation in the civil society with the help of RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal. The first one was the order of the Faizabad District Judge on 31 January to unlock the gates of the premises of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. In February, the Rajiv Government moved the Muslim Women’s Bill in Parliament to override the Supreme Court’s verdict in the Shah Bano case. The BJP and the Sangh Parivar organisations decided to appropriate these issues, thereby mobilising the majority Hindu community for drawing political mileage. It was during this time that the BJP held its plenary in May 1986 with L.K. Advani assuming the leadership of the party.

The change in leadership had rejuvenated the hardcore members of the Sangh who were motivated by the principles of ‘Hindu nationalism’ rather than ‘Gandhian Socialism’ (Malik 1995:76). As soon as he took charge of the party, Advani said: “if anyone were to ask me which is the most distinctive trait of BJP’s personality, I would say that BJP is the voice of unalloyed nationalism. Ours is a ‘Nation-First’ Party” (Advani 2007; BJP 2010; Ghosh 2003: 31; Malik 1995: 77). He denounced the cow slaughter and the destruction of Hindu temples in Jammu and Kashmir. During this period, the relationship between the RSS and the BJP got strengthened, and leaders like Vajpayee and Advani attended the conclave of prominent Swayamsevaks (Noorani 2000: 62-63). The Congress was, at this time, on
its wane, when Rajiv Gandhi was charged of corruption in the Bofors Scandal. The internal turmoil, compounded by the increasing number of riots after 1980s (in the 1987 Meerut riots alone, about 150 people lost their lives and more than a thousand were injured) also contributed to the strength of opposition parties. This clearly paid dividend in the next parliamentary election. BJP’s aggressive nationalism and his strategy of electoral alliance brought 86 seats to the party and it became the third largest party in Parliament. The BJP and the left parties gave support to the V.P. Singh-led National Front government. However, this was seen as the victory of a new wave of politics played by L.K. Advani. Thus, the BJP’s strategy of gaining popularity needs to be understood in the context of its politics of mobilisation and securitisation since the middle of 1980s.

Uniform Civil Code (in the context of the Shah Bano case), Article 370 (in the context of the Kashmir question), Ayodhya dispute (in the context of Rama Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue), Mandal Commission Recommendations (reservations for backward classes), ban on cow slaughter were some of the prominent issues that the BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal and other Sangh organisations took up for mobilisation in the civil society.

**Shah Bano Case and Uniform Civil Code**

The Shah Bano Case (AIR 945, 1985, SCC (2) 556, 1985) was one of the most controversial issues in the 1980s which led to communal mobilisation among both the Muslims and Hindus. It all began when Mohammed Ahmad Khan, a provincial lawyer, refused to pay to his aged, destitute wife, Shah Bano, a small amount awarded by the Madhya Pradesh High Court as monthly maintenance and appealed to the Supreme Court. He pleaded that as a Muslim he was governed by the Muslim Personal Law. The Court held then that Section 125 of the Cr PC applied to all cases, irrespective of Muslim Personal Law. It also held that if the divorced wife was able to maintain herself, the husband’s liability to provide maintenance ceased with the expiration of the period of *iddat* (the span of three months after the divorce). If she is unable to maintain herself, she was entitled to take recourse to Section 125 of Cr PC. The judgment went on to make comments on the need to enact a Uniform Civil Code. Some sections of the Muslim religious leadership felt at that time that this judgment was an onslaught on the Muslim Personal Law.
Under their pressure, the Rajiv government enacted the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986.

While introducing the Bill in parliament, the Government declared that it was to provide that a “Muslim divorced woman shall be entitled to a reasonable and fair provision and maintenance within the period of iddat, by her former husband and in case she maintained the children born to her before or after her divorce, such reasonable provision and maintenance would be extended to a period of two years from the dates of birth of the children.” The Bill intended to provide that where a Muslim divorced woman was unable to maintain herself after the iddat period, the magistrate was empowered to make her presumptive heirs or the local Wakf Board maintain her. Asghar Ali Engineer viewed that in this case the Muslim elite sections were not motivated by religious concerns or religious fervour, but by “a curious mixture of male chauvinism and political interests” (Engineer 1985). In fact, the Muslim identity was most aggressive during the Shah Bano controversy—the result of ‘insecurity’ and perceptions that the Muslims had long suffered in India. This “insecurity syndrome” was gently used by the Muslim leadership in the Shah Bano controversy (Engineer 1995). On the other hand, BJP, VHP and the RSS did all efforts to make known that the passing of the Act was a precedent to justify their refusal to accept the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to adjudicate on matters of faith. According to them, the Act was passed with the perceived intention of making the Supreme Court decision in the Shah Bano case ineffective. The campaign, then, was that Parliament appeased the sentiments of the Muslim community by passing the Act of 1986 and that the Muslim community had therefore ‘benefited.’ L.K. Advani, who during this time became the President of BJP, observed that Rajiv Gandhi’s “capitulation in the Shah Bano case, once again placed a question mark over his maturity as a leader” (Advani 2007). The BJP said that having “done this ‘favour’ to Muslims” Rajiv Gandhi “proceeded to organise the unlocking of the Ayodhya structure in a bid to please the Hindus” (BJP 2010). Raising the voice against the ‘politics of minorityism,’ Advani said:

Since India is not a theocratic state, the religious rights and the identities of the various faith-based communities that constitute the Great Indian Family must indeed be protected. But notions of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’
should have no place in the politics and statecraft of our nation much less be manipulated for vote-bank considerations. This divisive mindset jeopardises India as one united, integral and harmonious nation. The Congress party is trying to divide the nation by continuously harping on ‘minority protection’ in the same way that the British rulers did for their own ulterior motives (Advani 2010).

Advani reminded that the “progress, welfare and security of all sections of India’s diverse society are inter-related and indivisible.” He, therefore, called for Muslims to “come out of the trap of the minority mindset and join the national mainstream with equal rights and responsibilities to build a strong, prosperous and just India” (Advani 2010). Mobilizing the majority community on the issue of the need of a Common Civil Code, Advani remarked:

A small section of Muslims intellectuals favours Muslim law reform, but is opposed to a uniform civil code. They strongly advocate reform in Muslim laws in India in the matter of polygamy, divorce etc to bring these in line with the laws in Turkey, Pakistan and other Muslim countries. But the anti uniform civil code campaign that is being systematically built up draws its strength from leaders and sections who are opposed to reform as such and who question the very competence of courts and legislations to deal with the subject (Advani 1986).

The BJP also understood that the Rajiv Government was playing both minority and majority cards simultaneously. While appeasing the Muslims in the Shah Bano case, the government also decided to authorize the Hindus to conduct prayers at the site of Babri Masjid by opening the gate of the premises in an attempt to woo the Hindus (BJP 2010). Encouraged by this, the Hindu Right organisations intensified their struggle for Rama Janmabhoomi.

**Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi Movement**

The Ram Janmabhoomi movement began to gather momentum when the Hindu Right organisations like RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal, with the BJP’s blessings and participation, launched a series of powerful mobilisations using religious symbols and gestures such as a campaign to collect bricks for the temple, carrying Ram-Jyotis (lamps in processions), and holding special pujaas (worship) in cities and towns. Highly politicised sadhus and upper-caste cadres of the Sangh Parivar constituted the most committed
participants in the movement. Very soon, it also began to gather the support of the low and middle-caste Hindus. For them, the movement’s main attraction was that it sought to provide a pan-Indian or pan-Hindu and a homogenous, respectable and 'Sanskritised' identity to them, as distinct from the subaltern, marginal and oppressive reality of their (typically rural or semi-urban) existence (Bidwai 2004). When the BJP found the rising popularity and potential of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement in the 1980s, most of its leaders also actively participated in it (Jaffrelot 1996; Engineer 1992; Gopal 1993; Sharma).

The Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute emerged in the 1980s as a socio-political one, not merely as a historical one (India, MHA 2009, hereafter Report of the Liberhan Commission: 58-284). It was the outcome of the competitive assertion of the two identities, the Muslims and the Hindus. The Hindu Right organizations claimed that in the sixteenth century the Muslim ruler Babar had destroyed a temple at Ram Janmabhoomi, the birthplace of the deity Rama, and constructed a mosque at the site. According to the leaders of the BJP, “the Hindus had been trying for centuries to reacquire access to the spot and to reconstruct the magnificent temple.” L.K. Advani, in his foreword to the White Paper published by the BJP in 1993, said:

Reconstructing the temple for Sri Rama became the symbol of this rising consciousness ridding the country of the perversities to which it was being subjected in the name of secularism, forging a strong and united country. The object of the movement thus became not just to construct yet another temple, the object became to put our country back on its feet, to purify our public life, our public discourse (BJP, White Paper 1993).

According to H.V. Sheshadri, Sarkaryavah of the RSS,

Ayodhya is not an exclusive incident in the odyssey of the ongoing Hindu Renaissance. But it certainly is the high point of centuries-old struggle, a situation which has been developing and ripening for several decades. (Hindu nationalist) resurgence remained neglected for a long time. The RSS picked up the thread and resuscitated the national spirit through tens and thousands of Shakhas, its multifarious Seva projects, various leading organizations...This resurgent spirit of national assertion finally found a historic expression in the Ayodhya movement... (Sheshadri 1998: 3).
The controversy over the Babri Masjid originated in the nineteenth century (Srivastava 1991; Engineer 1990; Pandey 1993). Various studies point out that in order to show sympathy to the Hindu majority, it was the Britishers who had popularised the idea that the Mughal rulers had demolished Hindu shrines in Ayodhya (Srivastava 1991: 28-29; Engineer 1990). However, Babur-Nama (memoirs of Babar translated by A.S. Beveridge in 1922) stated that the Mughal emperors had visited many temples, but there was no evidence of destroying any temple. Scholars also affirm that there was no evidence of Babur and Aurangzeb ever came to Ayodhya; nor had they ordered to break the temples in the place (Srivastava 1991: 67-96). However, the BJP and other Hindu Right organisations continued to argue that “Babur ordered his commander Mir Baqi to erect a mosque at Ayodhya” and that the latter “established the mosque after demolishing the Temple of Sri Rama” (BJP, White Paper 1993; VHP 1991; Advani 1992; Vajpayee 1992).

However, the issue remained dormant for long. It was in the 1920s, just before the inception of the RSS, that Swami Shradhanand, the leader of the Arya Samaj and a militant nationalist, published a pamphlet Hindu Sangatham: Saviour of the Dying Race. Here he wrote about the first step towards the organization of the Hindus; the building of one Hindu Rashtra Mandir in every city and important towns in India (Pandey 1993: 242-43). Accordingly, each Mandir should have a compound capable of holding an audience of 25,000 and a large hall for recitation from the holy texts and epics. Unlike most Hindu temples, associated with a particular tradition or sect and dominated by their own individual duties, this new Mandir is to be devoted to the worship of the three mother spirits; Gau-mata (Mother Cow), Saraswati-mata (the Goddess of learning) and Bhumi-mata. The large compounds also provide space for Akharas where wrestling and gymnastics would be practiced. All these activities themselves were to be run by the local Hindu Sabhas (Gupta 2001: 429; Pandey 1993: 242-43). The very notion of Rashtra Mandir carried a political meaning, i.e. the importance of crystallizing the political identity of the Hindus, irrespective of their vivid religious orientations. By rejuvenating the issue of Ramjanmabhoomi, the Sangh was apparently doing the same thing (Gupta 2001: 4291).
In 1949, idols of Lord Ram were installed by devotees in the Babri Mosque. Prime Minister Nehru intervened and stopped the Hindus from worshiping there. However, because of the sensitivity of the issue, the idols were not removed. Meanwhile, the Nehru Government declared the site ‘disputed’ and locked the gates to the mosque (India, *White Paper on Ayodhya* 1993, hereafter *Government of India White Paper on Ayodhya* 1993). Since 1949, the Masjid premises remained locked until it was thrown open in February 1986 by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (*Report of the Liberhan Commission* 2009; *Government of India White Paper on Ayodhya* 1993). The process of communalisation was thus facilitated by the Rajiv government. BJP says: “The Congress Government told the court through the District Magistrate, Faizabad that there would be no law and order problem if the temple was unlocked.” It took the Government 36 years to acknowledge this. “It is this that had held up the judicial order so long. Thus, it was the threat of direct action by the mass movement, and the deadline that made the Government respond in the manner it did” (BJP, *White Paper* 1993; also see Advani 1992; Vajpayee 1992; *Report of the Liberhan Commission* 2009).

The BJP argued that the Hindus have been “waging unremitting struggle” for centuries “to recapture their holy place. According to the party, the struggle was in three phases: First, by “military expedition and war diplomacy, when barbaric aliens were ruling the country” and there was no rule of law; Secondly, by legal means, when the British established their model of rule of law (from 1885); And thirdly, by mass movement from 1984 (along with legal steps) when rule of law “became insensitive to their legitimate plea even under indigenous dispensation” (BJP, *White Paper* 1993).

In 1983, the VHP became the central figure in the Sangh family with its ‘sacrifice for unanimity.’ It launched three processions (*Ekatmata Yatra*) throughout India with the ‘Sacred Water’ from the river Ganges. The Ganges water was distributed in towns and villages and, along the way, refilled the pots from local sources of sacred water, especially from the temples. The Ganges became a unifying metaphor, and the VHP stressed the importance of the ‘Hindu unity’ (VHP 1991; Sheshadri 1988: 278-84). The RSS leader Sheshadri noted that the most striking aspect of *Ekatmata*
Yatra was “its exemplification principle of unity in diversity.” In his own words, “The countless spots of pilgrimages temples and Ashrams, which have been till now looked upon mainly as symbols of our punyabhoomi, a holy land, have now acquired a new and vital emphasis; they are symbols of a common Mathrubhoomi as well (Sheshadri 1984: 174). However, this symbolic agitation had culminated into a full-fledged mobilisation on the Rama Janmabhoomi issue. Television serials telecast by Doordarshan during this time (such as ‘Mahabharata’) had also contributed to communal mobilisation. The most striking aspect of these serials was its visualization of ‘war’ with the traditional weaponries, and such visualization was supported by the most sophisticated technologies which ultimately produced an image equivalent to the modern warfare. The RSS mouthpiece Organiser reported that B.R. Chopra’s serial ‘Mahabharata’ ended in July 1990 “reaffirming the age-old cultural unity of India.” It has been traditionally described as the ‘fifth Veda’- It is the Veda of human life and an epic presentation of the struggle between value based life and harsh reality (vastav) (Kelkar 1990:7). And the overall mobilization that the Sangh carried on was legitimized on this line, the struggle for a value based life”, i.e. Ramrajya.

The VHP meanwhile launched another programme named Ram Puja. It was a ceremony in which the bricks (shila), inscribed with the words ‘Shri Ram’ were consecrated locally and, then, collected and taken them to Ayodhya in special chariots for building the proposed Ram temple. It was reported that the VHP was planning to organize 3.30 lack programmes which included door-to-door campaigns, prayers, kirtans, discourses, music concerts, symposia in the five lakh villages and also the programmes would be organized in about 120 foreign countries (VHP 1991; Organiser 28 May 1989). The VHP also announced the puja of consecrated bricks in 5, 00,028 villages. The peculiar feature of this campaign was the participation of ordinary devotees, through a simple act of consecrating a single brick in the name of Ram, and they were said to be participating in a gigantic programme, which they equated with the nation building (Organiser 8 October 1989; VHP 1991).

The role of the ‘Soldier Monks’ in the Ayodhya agitation was also prominent. Historically, the monastic rivalries were common in the Indian society. Kumbhamela was the major site of resolving monastic rivalries
and, most often, it led to sectarian violence. During the colonial period, the Britishers saw it as an unhealthy trend and took measures to prohibit it. The Naga (warrior) Sadhus had great influence among the common people. During the nationalist struggle, they showed their support, but they kept away from the movement because they were unwilling to subordinate their institutional religious loyalties to the Gandhian nonviolent mode of struggle (Pinch 2005:140-47). However, the Bharat Sadhu Samaj (BSS), an organization founded in 1956 sought to bring together the Sadhus of India for the betterment of the society. The ‘hard-line’ BSS leaders were fascinated by the aggressive stance of the VHP on the Ayodhya issue and they were invited to the BSS convention. The BJP and the RSS decided to play a behind-the-scene role in the Ayodhya agitation, and the Sants, Sadhus and Mahants led the agitation. Under the auspicious of the BJP, various Dharma Sansads and Sant Sammelans were conducted (Chatterjee 1993: 4; VHP 1991). The VHP and non-VHP Sadhus had deep rooted hatred towards the ‘aliens’ and sought to destroy the reforms and progress made within the Hindu society, thereby re-establishing a fundamentalist Hindu order based on the old Brahminical social order. During this time, the BJP was also able to mobilise them in the name of a proposed Ramrajya.

There was another organisation which was in the forefront of the Ayodhya agitation, Bajrang Dal (BD), the militant youth wing of the VHP. The name of the Bajrang Dal invoked the imagery of the army of monkey warriors in the epic Ramayana. This organization was primarily seen as an instrument of other organizations (Brass 1997: 17; Brass 1996). Ashis Nandy notes:

> The VHP had all the essentials to launch a massive agitation of the kind it wanted, a well-planned strategy and financial and political backing. The only thing that was missing was somebody to take the issue to the streets. The VHP required, to put it plainly, substantial muscle power under its control to meet the needs of agitation politics. In time, the youth power of the Dal came to fulfill this need of the VHP (Nandy 1998: 96).

Unlike the RSS cadres, the Bajrang Dal members were known to recruit “untrained, volatile, semi-lumpen elements” (Noorani 2001: 72) and they were mainly from the unemployed educated youths in the urban areas.
Nandy specifically pointed out that the cadres of the Bajrang Dal were from the poor upper caste background, and from the smaller cities and semi urban town areas. They were also partly educated and jobless (Nandy 1998: 97). The VHP had been gently using these ‘frustrated minds’ for the mobilisation of the local population. Most often, they were guided by an image of a ‘glorious past’ and a ‘perverted present’ and the possibility of ‘good future.’ The VHP sought support by deploying an image of the possibility of a ‘glorious future’ consistent with the past. However, the organization was in the forefront of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, which they viewed as the first step towards ‘Ramarajya’ (Report of the Liberhan Commission 2009; Government of India White Paper on Ayodhya 1993).

Yet another opportunity for the BJP-RSS-VHP-BD combine to gain further political leverage occurred during 1989-90 when the National Front government led by V.P. Singh decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission to provide 27 per cent reservations in public education and employment for the castes officially designated ‘Other Backward Classes’ (OBCs). The BJP was initially in a dilemma on the issue as it used to get support mostly from the upper caste sections, besides the OBCs, SC/STs, Muslims etc. (Heath 2002: 232-256). The upper caste sections, in turn, started violent agitations against the Governments’ decision. As a supporter of the Government from outside, the stance of the BJP was crucial. It knew that the party had to appease both the upper caste sections and the OBCs. According to Amrita Basu, “The Government’s decision heightened the salience of caste over religion and, thus, threatened to fragment the BJPs Constituency” (Basu 2005: 58; Ghosh 2003). The BJP formally supported the Mandal recommendations at the national level and undermined it locally, especially in places where it relied on upper caste support (Basu 2005: 58). However, the BJP sought to deal with it in a clever way. In the background of the emerging crisis, L.K. Advani announced his Ram Rath Yatra with an obvious motive. BJP’s basic perception was very clear:

VP Singh suddenly came up with the Mandal report, not because his heart was bleeding for the poor but because he thought that, on this issue, he could dissolve the House to go to the polls, collect some 350 seats and rule the country on his own without the bother of consulting
anybody on anything. But it was a gamble that failed, because the BJP had already raised the Ayodhya issue. And it had done so early in 1989, not on the basis of any electoral calculation, but on ideological conviction. Historic wrongs had to be righted, however, symbolically, for a lasting solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem. Advani's Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya effected a sea change in the political scene. While Mandal had divided the people, Ayodhya united the people (BJP 2010; Advani 1990).

Although linked to the Ayodhya issue, the aim of Advani’s Rath Yatra was “to raise three fundamental questions that had all along lurked in the collective sub-conscience of the nation but nobody had dared ask them, fearful of retribution from the pseudo-secularists who had ruled India by default since 1947. These questions were: What is secularism? What is communalism? Can national integration be achieved by constantly pandering to minority communalism? Cannot Government reject the cult of minorityism” (Advani 2010a). The Rath Yatra began from Somnath on 25 September 1990, the birth anniversary of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya and was expected to conclude at Ayodhya on 30 October 30 after traversing 10,000 km. The importance of Somnath was underlined by the BJP by invoking the historical cases of ‘assault’ on the Hindu culture. The party and its leaders repeatedly said that it was at Somnath that the assault on Hindu temples and shrines, the living symbols of an ancient nation, by Islamic invaders began (Advani 1990; Advani 2010b). According to BJP, Advani had to choose “Somnath as the starting point of his yatra because the reconstruction of the shrine on the rubble of loot and plunder was the first chapter in a journey to preserve the old symbols of unity, communal amity and cultural oneness. The Yatra was scheduled to conclude at Ayodhya because the liberation of Ram Janmabhumi would be the second” (Advani 2010b).

The success of the Sangh combine was its strategic approach to mobilise the pluralistic Hindu folk towards a particular end, the ‘re-construction’ of the Ram temple Ayodhya. The iconographic choices and expressions throughout the Rathyatra were not simply the representation of the existing ‘Hinduism,’ but a clear cut attempt to reconstruct Hinduism, towards a new religious and political configuration, called ‘Hindu Unity’ and Rama Rajya (Davis 2005: 27-34). However, it cannot be viewed as an imposition of the religious unity, but an attempt to invent a unity by
showing emotional symbolic expressions. Like the very definition of the Hindutva, it has nothing to do with the religious belief of the common Hindu, but everything to do with the political. Achin Vanaik observes: “It does not intervene within Hinduism to make choices but posits an opponent for all Hindus regardless of their variant beliefs and practices. This approach is absolutely central to the Sangh combine’s task of constructing the desired Hindu unity (Vanaik 2006: 183).

The other approach was the construction of a loose and more accommodating Brahmanism. But it would cause tension with more popular forms of practice and worship. The first approach was, therefore, found to be more appropriate to frame the Hindutva choices. For example, in the Ayodhya agitation, there was a plurality of meaning, i.e. a ‘community of meanings to Ram.’ Through the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, the VHP was able to locate the universal Self in a particular, originate space. Reintegration with the Self then meant a quest to recover one’s manifest inheritance. It turned an otherworldly search into an enterprise that was more easily appreciated by a society of private property owners (Datta 1993: 47-50). That means, each and every space must be utilised in this massive process like the role of the priests to ‘Hanuman Sena,’ and ‘Monkey warriors,’ in the epic Ramayana. In the Ayodhya agitation, the upper caste Hindus, Dalits and the Adivasis were mobilized for the realisation of the ‘common’ cause, the possibility of the ‘Ramarajya.’ The Sangh had successfully crystallized the political identity of the Hindus by deploying a common ‘threat,’ the Muslims. The BJP leaders also invoked historical parallels to celebrate the outcome of the Yatra:

The moral and revolutionary dimension of the Ram Rath Yatra made it comparable to the Salt Satyagraha or “Dandi march” of Gandhi in 1930. The yatra effectively drove home the point that if Ram represented the ideal of conduct, Ram Rajya represented the ideal of governance. The sheer magnitude of popular support made it comparable to Tilak’s appropriation of Ganesh Chaturthi to mobilise public opinion against colonial rule. The cultural dimension of the yatra made it comparable to the anti-cow slaughter campaign of Gandhi (Advani 2010a).

The most common feature of Advani’s Rath Yatra was the offering of traditional weaponries by local people belonging to different castes
Advani was presented with bows and arrows, discs, maces, sword, trishuls and kirpans. This was a symbolic expression of militancy. It was, in fact, not a spontaneous act, but an outcome of a clear-cut conscious strategy by the Sangh. The influence of serials like ‘Ramayana’ and ‘Mahabharata’ was apparently significant. ‘Ramayana’ created a particular version of Rama bhakti, and the Ramjanmabhoomi issue had territorialised it, and this ‘politics of space’ invented a new version of Rama, who was significantly different from the figure represented in the traditional iconography. The traditional iconography represents Rama in *shanta rasa*. The images then available showed *ugra rasa*, Rama with a bow, pulling the bow string, the arrow poised to annihilate. The background was furnished with Shri Ram Jyoti, and it had a photographic-like image of a temple on it—the temple that was to be built in Ayodhya (Kapur 1993: 74-75). The video cassette produced by J.K Jain, ‘Bhaye Prakat Kripala’ showed another image of Rama, ‘Infant Ram’ who was in the disputed mosque and displaying a variety of ‘cute’ poses and eventually stringing a bow (Sarkar 1993: 27). As Richard H. Davis pointed out, “If the aggressive young warrior Rama of the posters served as a militant role model for the Hindus taking control of their homeland, the infant Rama called upon maternal devotion from those who would nurture the young reincarnation of Hindu nationhood (Da
vis 2005: 41). In order to spread the message of their campaign, the VHP distributed small stickers depicting Rama and the temple. The households were requested to fly saffron flags. The syllable ‘Om’ was taken as a unifying ‘mantra.’ The most notable thing was that the VHP did not put its signature in any of these visual products, and exhibited it as the ‘spontaneous response’ of the Hindu devotees (Ibid). Thus, the Sangh’s mobilisational strategy was multidimensional. It addressed almost all sections of the Hindu folk and ensured their presence in the programme (BJP, *White Paper* 1993; VHP 1991; Jaffrelot 1996).

Advani’s Rath Yatra was accompanied by massive bloodshed, and several communal riots occurred throughout India (Setalvad 2001; Basu 2005: 71-72). On 24 October 1990, Advani was arrested and the riots grabbed the states of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan. The riots were orchestrated by the BJP. The BJP electoral victory in the 1991 elections, particularly in the UP were influenced by these riots (Basu 2005: 72).
Vander Veer observed that that those chief Ministers who acted against
the Rath Yatra were also influenced by another factor that they were ‘low
caste’ leaders, and were the main beneficiaries of the Mandal
recommendations (Vander Veer 1996:5). However, the Sangh generally
Liberhan Commission* 2009; *Government of India White Paper on Ayodhya*
1993). Swami Chinmayananda, founder of the Chinmaya Mission (also the
founder of the VHP), in an interview said: “When is it that blood is not
there? When you were delivered, when you are a baby was it not in
blood? A nation is built in blood. A nation imbrues in blood and a nation
disappears in blood” (Pragna Bharati-3). Such statements from the
responsible leaders of the Sangh Parivar were a source of legitimation and
great inspiration to the Sangh followers. Ashok Singhal, the then Secretary
of the VHP, made a statement in an interview:

I want to appeal to our Muslim brethren once again that there is still time
to ponder over it and come to a mutual settlement by handing over the
deliberate places to the Hindus, namely Ram Janmabhoomi, Krishna
Janmasthan and Gyan Vapi, Varanasi. If they fail to decide on this then
we will start our campaign for liberating 3000 sacred places of Hindus
desecrated by Muslim vandalism. The choice is now up to them whether
3 or for 3000” (Asharma 1990:14).

According to Balasaheb Deoras, the then Sar-Sanghachalak of the RSS:
“The determination for reconstruction of Ram Mandir does not emanate
from any feeling of ill-will or hatred towards any religion or creed. On the
contrary, it is a step in the direction of creating the feeling of Sarvadharma
Sambhava in them.” It means equal respect for all religions. It is based
upon the question of tolerance (Deoras 1990: 13-14).

The long years of communal mobilisation through more than 84
organizations controlled by the RSS culminated in the destruction of the
460-years old Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992 (*Report of the Liberhan
July 1992, the then Prime Minister P.V Narasimha Rao had assured the
parliament that he would try to find a solution to the Ayodhya issue within
four months. By early November 1992 the Sangh combine announced:
“the Rao Government failed to find out a solution to the issue and it would
go ahead with the proposed ‘Karseva’ with effect from 6 December

Similarly, the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, L.K. Advani and the then Chief Minister of UP, Kalyan Singh also assured the protection of law and order situation through various press meetings, public conference etc. Meanwhile, Advani and M.M. Joshi started a new round of Yatras from two places of UP, Varanasi and Allahabad, asking the people to join for ‘Karseva.’ Thousands of others had indulged in seeking public support and mobilising the public. Lakhs of people were thus mobilised. Much before the time fixed for ‘Karseva’ Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara, with around 2 lakh Karsevaks had taken their positions at the disputed site (Report of the Liberhan Commission 2009). An hour before the so-called symbolic ‘Karseva’ was planned, at 11.40 AM, the first batch of ‘Karsevaks’ reached the top of one of the domes of the Masjid. The forces were apparently frozen by the UP Chief Minister. The Central reserve police was also inactive. Within five hours, the three domes of the Babri Masjid were pulled down with pickaxes, hammers, crow bars, roper shovels and iron rods. Indeed, this assault was “systematic” and “pre-planned.” The BJP called it as a ‘spontaneous’ act and was beyond control (BJP, White Paper 1993; VHP 1991). Two points mainly counter the very notion of ‘spontaneity.’ First, without a pre-planned effort, no one could bring down such a mighty monument within a short time of five hours; second, the picture showing Uma Bharati embracing and hugging M.M. Joshi, when the third dome was collapsing, was the finest evidence of the BJP’s role (Government of India White Paper on Ayodhya 1993; Esteves: 235-36). The Liberhan Commission, which inquired into the demolition of the Babri Masjid brought out vast evidences it gathered during its tenure that spread over 17 years, including statements of witnesses and official records. One of the key conclusions of the one-man commission is that the “entire build-up to the demolition of the structure was meticulously planned” and that there is “nothing to show that the top leaders of the BJP were either unaware of what was going on or were innocent of any
wrongdoing.” The Liberhan Commission’s task was to investigate the “sequence of events leading, and all facts and circumstances relating to the occurrences at Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid complex on 6 December 1992 (Report of the Liberhan Commission 2009). The White Paper issued by the Government of India also brought out concrete evidences of the role of BJP and other Sangh organisations (Government of India White Paper on Ayodhya 1993). The BJP, in reply to the Government’s White Paper, brought out another White Paper to counter the Government’s position where it argued:

The Ayodhya movement appears to have taken the lid off the Muslim community in India and set-off a debate which that community was consistently held incapable of. It has not stopped, at that. The Ayodhya movement has made all secular parties less allergic to Hindutva and the Marxists now find even Swami Vivekananda agreeable (BJP, White Paper 1993: Chapter VII).

The provocations for the demolition were outlined by the BJP: The general and growing Hindu resentment against pseudo-secularism and minority appeasement; the allergy of most political parties to Hinduism and the consequent loss of national identity; the political effect implicit in the Babri structure which is an invader’s victory monument; the deliberate pseudo-secular attempt to ignore the truth and clothe it with religious sanctity; the identifying of a mosque structure in Sri Rama’s birthplace as a symbol of minority rights and secularism; the insulting interpretation of Sri Rama and the Ramayana by Marxists under the cover of secularism; the characterisation of Babar as secular and the Ayodhya movement as communal; ignoring the fact that for 37 years till 1986 the idol of Rama was behind bars and under lock at Ayodhya - a most provocative sign for any Hindu; forcing the Hindus to fight for everything on Ayodhya etc. BJP says that “the cumulative effect of all this produced a volcanic explosion at Ayodhya which could not have been controlled except by an understanding system - the Government, the courts and the political parties. It also said that “the demolition of the disputed structure was an uncontrolled and, in fact, uncontrollable upsurge of a spontaneous nature which was provoked only by the callousness of the Government in dealing with the Ayodhya issue without understanding the sensitive nature of the issue” (BJP, White Paper 1993: Chapter VI). The Liberhan Commission, on the other hand, came to the conclusion that “the mobilisation of the
Karsevaks and their convergence to Ayodhya and Faizabad was neither spontaneous nor voluntary. It was well-orchestrated and planned" (Report of the Liberhan Commission 2009: 917, Para 158.9).

The BJP came down heavily on the Liberhan Commission Report and said that it “has failed to come up to the expectations of the people. It has failed to dig out facts and serve the purpose for which it was constituted. The report appears to be the handiwork of a prejudiced mind was pre-determined to give the report on a particular persons and or institutions” (BJP 2009: 7). Criticising the Liberhan Commission Report, L.K. Advani said: “I am proud of my association with the Ayodhya movement. I was grieved over the demolition of that structure but the establishment of a huge Ram Temple on that spot in keeping with people’s aspiration is my aim in life and until it happens, I will keep pursuing it” (Advani 2009: 18) An editorial appeared in the RSS mouthpiece Organiser later commented that what happened in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 was “a spontaneous manifestation of the collective Hindu angst and faith.” It reads:

If the demolition of one structure, which the Muslims and their cohort pseudo-secularists believed was an insignia of an invader's victory to be preserved for future generations, pushed the nation to "the brink of communal discord", how many times should the nation have been pushed to the brink and beyond when temples were destroyed in hundreds in independent secular India? ....December 6 is etched in the memories of Hindus as a day of bravery, to be celebrated and sung in folk narratives for centuries to come-as the day when the Hindu unleashed his power and demonstrated what he can do when pushed against the wall (BJP 2009: 25-26).

After demolition of the alleged structure on 6 December 1992 three organizations namely RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal were banned through Government notifications under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 on 10 December 1992 (Government of India White Paper on Ayodhya 1993). However, The Sangh Parivar celebrated the demolition across the country and it was followed by an outburst of communal violence in Mumbai, Surat, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Bhopal, Delhi and several other places. In Mumbai, more than thousand people were killed and many Muslim women were mass raped (Sreekrishna Commission Report 1993). The demolition of the Masjid and the accompanying communal violence
helped the BJP to securitise the whole issue, thereby polarising the population into groups. The party very skilfully utilised the issue for electoral gains. From 1989 onwards, the BJP had made considerable progress in terms of the number of seats that it won in various elections as well as the percentage of votes that they secured. In the southern states too, there was progress in the percentage of votes that the BJP had gained (Election Commission of India 2010).

**BJP, Hindutva and the NDA Rule**

The demolition of the Babri Masjid had invited widespread criticisms against the BJP and its support organisations from all over the world (Jaffrelot 1996; Engineer 1992; Gopal 1993; Sharma). The BJP was, therefore, in a defensive posture for some time. Yet, the increase in the voting percentage of the BJP (also of its predecessor Jana Sangh) was so amazing. It had risen from 3.1 per cent in 1952 to 7.7 per cent in 1984, 11.3 per cent in 1989, 20 per cent in 1991, 20.2 per cent in 1996, 25.4 per cent in 1998 and 23.7 per cent in 1999. In the 1999 Lok Sabha elections the BJP had secured 298 seats and became the ruling party at the centre with a clear-cut majority in parliament (Election Commission of India 2010). Apparently, the common factor in the increase in the popularity of the Jana Sangh and the BJP was their indebtedness to Hindutva and cultural nationalism (Advani 1990; Vajpayee 1992). L.K. Advani, later, acknowledged that the “BJP’s subsequent trajectory of meteoric growth was due to the Ayodhya movement. He also admitted that the movement had “changed my profile in Indian politics” (Advani 2007).

The ascendancy of the BJP as the ruling party of India during 1998-2004 represented the revival of Hindutva. Communal sentiments continued to echo in the writings and campaigns of the BJP, which tended to see Hindutva as a unifying force that would create a national identity and ensure social cohesion for India. A manifestation of this ideological prejudice in the nation-building process could be discernible in the Election Manifesto of BJP in 1996. In the introduction, entitled “vision, faith, and commitment” of the BJP, the Manifesto declared: “The present millennium begun with the subjugation of our ancient land. Let a re-invigorated, proud, and prosperous India herald the next millennium” (BJP 1996). It concluded with an appeal to all patriotic Indians to assist the BJP
in the task of reconstructing a nationalist Hindu Rashtra. The section in the 1996 Manifesto entitled "Indian Immigration: A Democratic Invasion," construed the Muslim immigrant refugees of Bangladesh as democratic threats to India unlike the Buddhist immigrant refugees (Chakmas) to India from the CHT of Bangladesh. In the same manner, BJP's slogan “justice for all and appeasement for none” was motivated by the communal goal to restore a sense of 'Indianness' within the Hindu Rashtra, perceived to have been undermined by the ‘pseudo secularism’ of the Nehruvian legacy. According to the BJP President, L. K. Advani, democracy and liberalism as preached by Nehru were denuded of their Indianess. He believed that “India is what it is because of its ancient heritage—call it Hindu, or call it Bharatiya (India). If nationalism is stripped off its Hinduism, it would lose its dynamism (Advani 2007; Advani 2010). However, the BJP specified that the concept of Hindutva as the underlying basis of a Hindu Rashtra did not mean religion. Rather, “it means a pan-Indian identity.” Yet, the success of the BJP in establishing the discourse of Hindutva as the nationalist identity of India might help to use the terms Hindutva, Hinduism, and the Indian national identity synonymously. According to the BJP, “Hindutva awakened the Hindus to the new world order where nations represented the aspirations of people united in history, culture, philosophy, and heroes. Hindutva successfully took the Indian idol of Israel and made Hindus realize that their India could be just as great and could do the same for them also” (BJP 2010).

There were several instances in which the BJP-VHP-RSS combine had indulged in the constructions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ on the basis of religious identity. A VHP leader, Sadhvi Rithambara, supported the Hindus in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid movement in 1992 as "a fight for the preservation of a civilization, for Indianness, for national consciousness” and the BJP spokeswoman, Sushma Swaraj, suspected alleged treachery on the part of the Muslims against India because the former "rooted for Pakistan during the two Indo-Pakistan wars”. The BJP claimed that its nationalism has been based on "one nation, one people, one culture." Thus the concept of Hindu Rashtra “becomes virtually essential to Hinduism as the dominant religion in India.” Muslims have been constructed as "invaders and foreign transplants" (Das 2002: 80-82). It openly said: “Muslims, led by the Islamic clergy and Islamic society have
innate unwillingness to change, did not notice the scars that Hindus felt from the Indian past. It is admirable that Hindus never took advantage of the debt Muslims owed Hindus for their tolerance and non-vengefulness.”

Referring to the concessions Muslims always enjoyed, the party said:

India even gave the Muslim minority gifts such as separate personal laws, special status to the only Muslim majority state -- Kashmir, and other rights that are even unheard of in the bastion of democracy and freedom, the United States of America. Islamic law was given precedence over the national law in instances that came under Muslim personal law. The Constitution was changed when the courts, in the Shah Bano case, ruled that a secular nation must have one law, not separate religious laws. Islamic religious and educational institutions were given a policy of non-interference. The list goes on (BJP 2010).

While Hindutva sought to carve out a cultural space during this period, the BJP as a ruling party began to face a serious dilemma in the realm of economy. In the 1990s, the BJP’s economic policy was caught between two contradictory tendencies: ‘pragmatism and ideological purity.’ The moderates in the party tended to be ‘pragmatic’ than ‘nationalistic’ on economic matters. For them, cultural nationalism was more important than economic nationalism. For the right-wing of the party, cultural and economic nationalism constituted two sides of the same coin. The right-wing apparently took a backseat in the actual functioning of the party. Hence nobody expected serious departures from the reform process initiated by the Congress party in 1991 (Arulanantham 2004; Lakha 2008; Mayer 2008; Patnaik 2008). The BJP’s 1998 election manifesto had expressed a strong Swadeshi (self-reliance) component, causing speculation that the party would end the programme of external economic liberalisation initiated by the Congress government of Narasimha Rao in 1991, and move to protectionism. It said:

The economy of India has come under tremendous pressure because of misguided tariff reductions and an uneven playing field for the Indian industry....It is clear that foreign capital will be only of little value to the national economy, though crucial to some sectors like infrastructure....While the declared agenda [of every nation] is free trade, the undeclared, but actual agenda is economic nationalism. India too must follow its own national agenda. This spirit is Swadeshi (BJP 1998: 2).
The BJP’s slogan was “vote for BJP is vote for nationalism” (*Organiser* 15 February 1998). The document, however, spoke of ‘calibrated globalisation.’ It suggested that although internal liberalisation would continue, the state would intervene to protect Indian industry from foreign competition and regulate external influence in the economy (BJP 1998). Yet, despite the pre-election rhetoric of Swadeshi, external economic liberalisation continued during the BJP’s tenure from 1998-2004. Not only did the BJP fail to modify the policies of its predecessors but it systematically accelerated globalisation. Thus, the notion of Swadeshi was deployed to appeal to intra-party elements and find an electoral space in response to the liberalising agenda of the opposition. However, after assuming office, the leadership switched positions to appeal to the middle class, which embraced globalisation.

It may be noted that while in opposition, the BJP opposed the Insurance Regulatory Authority (IRA) bill in 1997 which sought to privatise the state-run insurance industry and invite foreign investment. Later, the BJP government passed a bill privatising the insurance industry, allowing up to 40 per cent foreign equity in the newly deregulated market. In 1995, the BJP undertook a campaign against the Dunkel Draft, which sought to widen the General Agreement for Trade and Tariffs (GATT) and create the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The party also opposed the introduction of product patents in compliance with the WTO’s subsequent Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, and argued that reduction of customs duties should be conducted on a “case by case basis.” In parliament, the BJP blocked the Patents Amendment Act allowing for product rather than process patents. Yet in 1998, the BJP passed the Patents Bill (with support from the opposition Congress party), ushering in the product patents they had opposed and aggressively moved to phase out customs duties. The party also aggressively sought to phase out customs duties according to WTO schedules (Arulanantham 2004; Hansen 2001; Ghosh 2001; Nayar 2001).

The BJP leadership defused tensions within the Sangh Parivar by relying on the politics of compromise and coalition politics. Strict party discipline silenced the BJP’s own Swadeshi contingent. According to Achin Vanaik, “Tensions undeniably exist between the virulent cultural nationalism of
the RSS, traditionally associated with protectionism, and the BJP’s current pursuit of neo-liberal objectives. But they are containable, as the two wings of the Sangh operate a tactical division of labour: the BJP does not compromise too much on Hindutva; the RSS restrains itself on the NEP (Vanaik 2001). The BJP’s decision to test nuclear weapons in May 1998—signalling India’s arrival as a nuclear power—strengthened the hand of the reform faction. The nuclear explosions were greeted with euphoria within the Sangh Parivar for having displayed Indian power and assured its status in the world. This gave the pragmatists a certain political space to continue reforms. Arulanantham notes:

The rhetoric of Swadeshi was a ploy to energise ‘the base’ while differentiating itself from and obstructing the ruling governments. Once in power, the pragmatists exerted their influence to continue liberalisation and to satisfy the urban middle class. This group harboured a sense of “India’s greatness” and found the BJP’s articulation of power appealing. As this case suggests, nationalism and globalisation are not necessarily opposing forces but sometimes self-reinforcing—in other words nationalism can facilitate movements that give rise to globalisation and in turn feed back onto itself to create stronger national identities (Arulanantham 2004).

Hindutva and Education

The BJP’s education policy also sought to legitimise the cultural logic of Hindutva (Hasan 2008; Kumar 2002; Yadav 2002; Kumar 2001). An assessment made by the NCERT in 1996 noted that the textbooks used by the Vidya Bharati, the educational wing of the RSS, were “designed to promote bigotry and religious fanaticism in the name of inculcating knowledge of culture in the young generation.” Children in these schools were “indoctrinated in religious intolerance, the inferiority of non-Hindus, and the collective blame of Muslims and Christians for wrongs against Hindus at various points in Indian history, as interpreted by Hindu nationalists” (Narula 2003). The West and its culture were projected as “enemies of Hindu culture.” Religions such as Islam and Christianity were depicted as “alien to India,” as they were the religions of foreign invaders—the Mughals and the British. The historical reconstruction of “Muslim and Christian atrocities” and their projection onto the present as a ‘threat’ to the integrity and security of India were powerful weapons in
legitimizing the violence against Christians and Muslims” (Elst 1997). Tanika Sarkar writes:

If the motif of infinite, elastic revenge unifies past, present and future, then the production of an appropriate historical memory is crucial for the generation of the new political culture. History teaching, textbooks and historical scholarship have been special targets of Sangh attacks. They need to assert their monopoly over historical truth, for there is a strange symmetry between their historical allegations and their present violence. They assert that Muslims broke temples, and then they demolish mosques. They allege forced conversion, and then they command victims to utter the name of Ram or to convert. Legends of rapes of Hindu women abound, and Muslim women are then raped freely (Sarkar 2002).

Leaflets depicting Muslims as ‘terrorist’ intent on destroying the Hindu community were also in circulation years before the 2002 attacks. RSS and VHP leaflets circulated in August 1998 proclaimed: “India is a country of Hindus…. Our religion of Rama and Krishna is pious. To convert [or] leave it is a sin.” Another leaflet by the VHP in Bardoli, Gujarat, warned, “Caution Hindus! Beware of inhuman deeds of Muslims….Muslims are destroying Hindu Community by slaughter houses, slaughtering cows and making Hindu girls elope. Crime, drugs, terrorism are Muslim’s empire” (Narula 2003).

Sangh Parivar’s strategy was to assert its cultural–educational goals across a wide spectrum of education (Elst 1997). There was conscious an attempt to Hinduise the educational system, root out liberal and leftist influences, and to re-write history in order to justify its anti-minority outlook. This was evident not only from the much publicised agenda sought to be implemented at the State Education Ministers’ Conference held in October 1998 but also from the massive text book revision undertaken by the Sangh Parivar in keeping with this design (Hasan 2008; Kumar 2002; Yadav 2002; Kumar 2001).

The basic agenda was incorporated through moral education and general knowledge texts that concentrated on inculcating a Hindu consciousness and ‘pride in being a Hindu.’ In the Government schools, in the BJP ruled states and in the 20,000 odd Vidya Bharti schools and the shishu mandirs all over the country, the prescribed syllabus presented Indian culture as
Hindu culture, totally denying its pluralistic character and the contribution of the minorities to the creation of the Indian identity (Taneja 1999:91). Everything Indian was shown to be of Hindu origin and the minorities were characterised as ‘foreigners’ owing their first allegiance to political forces outside this country. The communal and sectarian interpretation of history also extended to the study of the national movement, where the Muslims were painted as the enemies of the nation responsible for partition, and the Hindu communal forces as the greatest patriots and nationalists. In the name of ‘Indianised nationalised and spiritualised’ education there was an attempt to polarise and divide people along religious lines by communalising their consciousness. Through a distortion of facts there was an effort to reconstruct history and tradition along communal and sectarian lines. In fact, it was quite clear what the agenda paper at the Conference meant by the abrogation of the Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution. Uma Bharti, the Union Minister of State in the Ministry of Human Resources went to the extent of saying that the “Kashmir problem finds its roots in the teaching pattern in the Madrasas and that there is a need to closely monitor them.”

In BJP’s agenda, science was to be necessarily combined with spirituality, thereby obscurantism and chauvinism were freely allowed to masquerade as national pride. Vedic Mathematics was introduced in the UP schools but had to be withdrawn (Jayaraman 1993:100). The implementation of the compulsory Saraswati Vandana and Vande Mataram mandate in the Government schools in the BJP-ruled states, the renaming of towns and streets, bhajan mandalis, ‘social service’ festivals, even sporting events, particularly cricket matches between India and Pakistan, were transformed into lessons of popular education outside the formal classroom. The BJP also filled the top positions in the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) with historians known for their association with the VHP campaign on Ayodhya and without any credibility in the field of history writing. The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), The Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS), Nehru Museum and Memorial Library, All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), University Grants Commission (UGC) etc saw the induction of RSS-VHP supporters and followers in high positions.
In 2002, the NDA government spearheaded by the BJP made an attempt to change the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) school textbooks through a new National Curriculum Framework. The changes made were deemed to be of the Hindutva ideological leanings of the party, which were regarded as a narrow sectarian and Hindu chauvinist ideology (some media referred to it as ‘saffronization’ of textbooks). The NDA government’s term prompted criticism when it attempted to ‘saffronise’ public education by raising the profile of Hindu cultural norms, views and historical personalities in school textbooks and portraying other religions in a negative light. The BJP justified that their only goal was to overhaul the stagnant and saturated institutions like NCERT and free them from the dynastic control and hegemony of the Indian National Congress and the Communists. Party members also pointed out that their goal was not to promote sectarianism, but present a more accurate picture of Indian history and Indian culture (such as Vedic Science), which was being downplayed by the left wing ideologues (Kumar 2002; Yadav 2002; Kumar 2001). The Vision Document 2004 issued by the BJP on the eve of 2004 elections continued to reflect this approach. It sought to rectify “the biases in history education, increasing the moral and cultural content in syllabi, and restoring the neglected focus on character-building (Advani 2010a).

Hindutva and the Gujarat Carnage

In 2002 the state of Gujarat experienced a traumatising episode of communal violence in which the Muslims were aggressively targeted. Gujarat was even called “Hindutva Laboratory” (Asian Age 25 March 2002). The state government ruled by the BJP has been held responsible for accentuating the violence. Although the extent of its logistical involvement has been debated (for instance see India, Government of Gujarat 2008 (hereafter Nanavati Commission Report 2008); Advani 2007; Gujarat Carnage 2002; Engineer 2002; Brass 2003), the rhetoric of many Hindu Right organisations created and demonised a religious ‘Other.’ The protagonists of Hindutva used a language that created pervasive religious binaries, which were instrumental in the recurrence of violence.

Between 28 February and 2 March 2002, hundreds of people—mostly Muslims—were killed in Gujarat, apparently aided and abetted by the BJP-
ruled state government headed by Narendra Modi. Intermittent violence against Muslims continued in the months that followed. In the aftermath, thousands of people were rendered homeless and internally displaced. Numerous inquiries and commissions—such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India—held that Narendra Modi, as the Chief Minister of the state, had complete command over the police and other law enforcement machinery during the period. They all condemned the role of the government in providing leadership and material support in the politically motivated attacks on minorities in Gujarat. Commenting on the carnage in Gujarat, the National Human Rights Commission in its Proceedings of 6 March 2002 noted that a large number of reports have "appeared which are distressing and appear to suggest that the needful has not yet been done completely by the Administration. There are also media reports attributing certain statements to the Police Commissioner and even the Chief Minister which, if true, raise serious questions relating to discrimination and other aspects of governance affecting human rights" (India, NHRC 2002: 21). The Commission pointed out that "there was a comprehensive failure on the part of the State Government to control the persistent violation of the rights to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the people of the State" (India, NHRC 2003). It also took serious note of the inadequate response from the Government of Gujarat to address the human rights violations in Gujarat. The Commission said that the "initial failure to protect human rights was compounded by the failure - at least thus far - to provide justice to those whose rights had been violated" (India, NHRC 2004: 28). Every major Indian and international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Commonwealth Initiative for Human Rights, Citizen’s Initiative, People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) etc condemned the Gujarat violence, and pointed to the complicity of the Government of Gujarat in the execution of the event. K.R. Narayanan, former President of India, said that there was a ‘conspiracy’ between the BJP governments at the Centre and in Gujarat behind the riots of 2002 in Gujarat. Narayanan said: “There has been government participation in Gujarat riots. I had sent several letters to the then Prime Minister Vajpayee, and also talked to him. But he did not do anything effective” (The Hindu 2 March 2005).
The train of events started on 27 February 2002 when the Sabarmati Express carrying the Sangh volunteers, who were travelling to aid in the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya, caught fire in the town of Godhra, killing about 59 pilgrims inside one coach (Nanavati Commission Report 2008). Although various reasons have been cited, including arson by a Muslim mob, the cause of the fire has been still debated. Communal riots soon erupted in the city of Ahmedabad and in some villages around the state. Estimates say that within a few days, nearly 2,000 people were killed and 100,000 were displaced and moved to relief camps. Humanitarian organizations claimed that up to 2,500 were killed and 140,000 were displaced (Parker 2008). The BJP-led NDA government’s Ministry of Home Affairs’ Annual Report 2003-04 recorded that 722 communal incidents took place in the country in 2002 claiming 1130 lives and resulting injuries to 4375 persons (India, MHA 2004). However, these riots were called ‘pogroms’ by professionals from various fields, including scholars such as Steven Wilkinson (2005:3) and Paul Brass (2003: 390) because of the highly disproportionate number of Muslim casualties.

Chief Minister Narendra Modi and other leaders belonging to the Hindu Right organizations alleged that the Godhra tragedy had been a pre-planned Muslim conspiracy to attack Hindus, subvert the state, and damage the economy. In addition, Modi further sought to stoke religious passions of the majority Hindu community by taking the decision to bring the charred remains of the victims of the tragedy to Ahmedabad in a public ceremony intended to arouse passions. On 1 March 2002, at the height of the violence in the state, Narendra Modi declared that he would control the “riots resulting from the natural and justified anger of the people” (Asian Age 25 March 2002).

Investigations found that many Muslim-owned businesses were destroyed. Inventories of Muslim businesses, including hotels with Muslim partners, and Muslim residences were made available to the mobs by BJP, VHP and Bajrang Dal leaders and cadres, and the Gujarat State Police, as were voter registration lists/electoral rolls that aided in the targeting of Muslims in mixed, or dominant Hindu neighbourhoods. Witnesses described how Sangh Parivar mobs were armed with liquid gas cylinders, tridents, knives, and sticks. People from rural areas were trucked into
neighbouring villages and towns to participate in the violence, sporting the uniform of the Sangh, saffron scarves and khaki shorts. Mob leaders used cell phones to coordinate the movement of thousands of armed men through densely populated areas. Many of the mobs descended upon Muslim neighbourhoods, homes, and businesses, hacking and burning people and property. Women and girls were beaten, thrown into wells, targeted for rape, gang rape, and collective rape, sexually mutilated and burnt. Instead of intervening and taking decisive action against the State government, the Central government ruled by BJP-led NDA had chosen to minimise the seriousness of what happened, with senior Central government leaders early on alleging without proof, Pakistan’s ISI involvement in Godhra.

Referring to the communal violence in Gujarat, L. K. Advani, who was then the Union Minister for Home under the NDA Government, said that the “events were ‘indefensible’ and ‘a blot on my government.’” Advani was all “the more distressed” because “they blemished the Vajpayee government’s widely appreciated record, until then.” Later, in April, in the parliamentary debate, Advani said, “I am a sad man as I participate in this debate. Our government’s clean and proud record of riot-free governance for the past four years has been sullied. When I look at what has happened in Gujarat in its totality, I cannot but say that both Godhra and post-Godhra violence is condemnable and shameful” (Advani 2010g). Yet, Advani defended the role of Narendra Modi in the whole episode saying that “Gujarat made spectacular progress” under him. He said that “people of all castes and communities in Gujarat have benefitted” from his “commitment to security, development and clean administration.” He went a step further and said that “Modi’s re-election has highlighted several lessons which are relevant not only for Gujarat but for the whole country. I have no doubt that my party’s spectacular victory in Gujarat would indeed become a turning point because it signals the BJP’s resurgence” (Advani 2007). Dibyesh Anand writes:

The BJP state leadership, which was clearly identified as complicit with the Gujarat 2002 killing machinery, was confident of gaining electorally after the riot and the fact that this confidence paid off is an indictment of the silent majority. The electoral victory in the State Assembly elections of December 2002—the best performance ever by BJP on its own in any
state in India—challenged most factors that are seen as important in India’s electoral democracy (e.g. anti-incumbency factor, lack of development and strength of the opposition) and showed that violence against Muslims had paid off. This cannot be explained by the instrumental interests of the Hindu majority alone but by the lack of compassion for the Muslim victims. There was a curious reversal of responsibility as many Hindus blamed Muslims for the violence and saw themselves as the victims whose security was threatened by ‘the Muslim’ (Anand 2005: 210-15)

Similarly Smita Narula offers an insightful observation:

To demand equal protection of the law for all or to protest when the government kills its own citizens is deemed a threat to the integrity of the nation and an attempt to defile India in the eyes of the international community. Conversely, outright murder or rape in the name of avenging past and present attacks on Hindus (whether fact or fiction), or constructing a Hindu temple where a Muslim mosque once stood, are all patriotic acts in the service of one’s country. In the governmental arena, patriotism cloaks itself in the garb of national security. In an age in which even extrajudicial state action is condoned in the name of fighting terror and in which terrorism has become the involuntary monopoly of the non-state (and often Islamic) actor, political opponents and religious minorities become easy targets(Narula 2003: 57).

Thus, the anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 was cloaked by the Hindutva organisations as ‘inevitable’ and ‘understandable’ acts to secure the Hindu ‘Self.’ The discourse of security thus offered the Hindu Right organisations “a tool to legitimize violence as nonviolence, killers as defenders, rape as understandable lust, and death as non-death” (Anand 2005: 203-215). The NDA government continued to exploit the rhetoric surrounding the global ‘war against terrorism’ in order to target religious minorities and political opponents. Most notably, the long debated anti-terrorism legislation, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), was pushed through parliament in March 2002. Its close resemblance to the much misused and then lapsed Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act of 1985 (amended 1987) foreshadowed a return to the widespread and systematic curtailment of civil liberties.

Securitisation: Pokhran-II and Kargil War

In critical International Relations literature, security has been conceptualised as a ‘productive discourse’ that produces insecurities to be
operated upon, as well as defines the identity of the object to be secured (Campbell 1998; Krause and Williams 1997, Lipschutz 1995; Weldes et al. 1999). This questions the dominant conceptual framework of security that considers insecurities as unavoidable facts, while focusing attention on the acquisition of security by given entities. It foregrounds the processes through which something or someone (the ‘Other’) is discursively produced as a source of ‘insecurity’ against which the ‘Self’ needs to be secured (Anand 2005: 203-215). As such the discourses of insecurity are about ‘representations of danger’ (Campbell 1998; Dillon 1996). Dibyesh Anand says that insecurities, in such conditions, are “social constructions rather than givens—threats do not just exist out there, but have to be created.” All insecurities are “culturally produced in the sense that they are produced in and out of the context within which people give meanings to their actions and experiences and make sense of their lives” (cited in Anand 2005; Weldes et al. 1999). Insecurities and the objects that suffer from insecurities are therefore mutually constituted. That is, in contrast to the received view, which treats objects of security/insecurity themselves as pre-given and natural and as separate things, we treat them as mutually constituted cultural and social constructions and thus products of processes of identity construction of Self–Other. Anand further says that the argument that security is about representations of danger and social construction of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ does not imply that there are no ‘real’ effects. What it means is that there is nothing inherent in any act or being or object that makes it a source of insecurity and danger (Anand 2005).

Security is therefore inextricably interlinked with identity politics. How we define ourselves depends on how we represent ‘Others.’ This representation is integrally linked with how we ‘secure’ ourselves against the ‘Other.’ Representations of the ‘Other’ as a source of danger to the security of the ‘Self’ in conventional understandings of security are followed by an abstraction, dehumanization, depersonalization and stereotyping of the ‘Other.’ The ‘Other’ gets reduced to being a ‘danger’ and hence an object that is fit for surveillance, control, policing and possibly extermination (Foucault 1977; 1988; Anand 2005). This logic of the discourse of security dictates that the security of the ‘Self’ facilitates and even demands the use of policing and violence against the ‘Other.’
This can be exemplified in the case of Hindutva’s politics of representation, which legitimises anti-Muslim/anti-Pakistan stance in the name of ‘securing’ the Hindu body politic at various levels. ‘The Muslim’ is seen as a ‘threat’ to national, state and international security. These representations of ‘the Muslim’ as a danger to the ‘security’ of the Hindu body politic facilitate the politics of hate against the Muslims in India (and inevitably against Pakistan too). While the Gujarat carnage (2002) is an example of this campaign of Hindutva in the realm of domestic politics, Pokhran-II (1998) and Kargil War (1999) represent two other major instances in the realm of national security/defence whereby representations do matter for legitimising the logic of cultural nationalism. Pratap Bhanu Mehta writes:

The installation of a BJP-led government at the centre was supposed to have a profound impact on at least one area of governance, defense. Here was a government committed to more self-confident and aggressive foreign policy posture, unencumbered by idealistic pieties in international relations, openly confrontational in its approach to Pakistan, and given to a shrill rhetoric of militarism. When India conducted its nuclear tests, many feared that it would be engulfed by a rising tide of militarism, a security obsession that would adversely affect its development priorities. The rhetorical postures of the government, its open commitment to ‘coercive’ diplomacy, and loose and wild talk threatening war, all seemed to signal the onset of a new militaristic state (Mehta 2003).

The NDA governments’ decision to test nuclear weapons in May 1998—signalling India’s arrival as a nuclear power—strengthened the hands of the pro-reform elements within the party. The nuclear weapons tests were welcomed with euphoria by the Hindu Right organisations for having displayed ‘Indian power’ and assured its status in the world. This gave the pragmatists within the BJP considerable leverage to proceed with neoliberal reforms. The VHP projected the nuclear weapons as a “symbol of militarised Hindu revivalism” and celebrated the blasts with the cry of “Jai Shri Ram” (Manchanda 2008” 366). According to Runa Das, “the BJP’s nationalist agenda constructed an ‘internal’ Othering vis-a-vis Islam/Pakistan, thereby justifying India’s nuclearisation policies (Das 2002:76-89).
The BJP’s project of gaining for India ‘global recognition’ and a rightful place among the leading powers called for substituting the Gandhi-Nehru traditions with “images of Hindu masculinity and martial-endowments.” For K.N. Govindacharya, the ideologue of BJP, forging a Hindu India “embracing Kshatriya/Shakti [warrior] tradition of revolutionaries instead of the timorous Brahminical Bhakti [devotional] tradition” was the main psychological makeover for BJP foreign policy (Chaulia 2002). ‘Operation Shakti’ (Pokhran-II) was rightfully regarded within BJP ranks as their moment in history. “Synthesising the tenets of political realism and the moral mission of the party” the BJP marked the anniversary of the explosions as “resurgent India day.” The BJP’s historical connection between the bomb and national vitality is well known (Ghosh 1999). The party (as well as its predecessor Jana Sangh) and the other Sangh Parivar organisations never tried to conceal their nuclear posture (Seethi 2005). In the 1998 General Elections, the BJP campaigned with an ideology of Hindutva that envisaged a ‘great’ India as a militarily powerful India. Its election manifesto stated that the “frenetic pace of military expansion and modernization by some of our neighbours” had not been addressed by previous administrations: “Since 1991, the country’s defence budget has been declining in real terms....from 3.4 per cent of the GDP in 1989-90 to a mere 2.2 per cent this year,” and it listed numerous defence projects that had been delayed for lack of adequate funds. The manifesto committed the party to a specific list of strategic, organisation and deployment options, including: The establishment of a National Security Council to “constantly analyze security, political and economic threats and render continuous advice to the Government (as well as to) undertake India’s first-ever Strategic Defence Review. The manifesto also indicated re-evaluation of India’s nuclear policy with a view to exercising the “option to induct nuclear weapons” and “expediting the development of the Agni series of ballistic missiles” (BJP 1998).

Strength has always been visualised by the BJP primarily in terms of ‘hard strength’ (military might). Jana Krishnamurthy, the then President of BJP, believed that nuclear weapons would “give us prestige, power, standing” and foreclosed India from being “blackmailed and treated as oriental blackies” by the Western world (Chaulia2002: 220-21). The RSS organ Organiser wrote:
In this world ambience India has stirred the nuclear club with its reverberations echoing all over the world. The BJP-led Government has finally decided to prepare the nation to enter the dharmakshetra. India, like the Pandavas, has collected the sack of weapons from the Shami tree. The Pandavas, too, were denied their due share, their very right to existence. But then dharma was on their side: And the rest is history (Organiser 24 May 1998).

In a congratulatory letter, the RSS leader H.V. Sheshadri appreciated the Prime Minister of India for the nuclear explosions. He said: “all the world has got a loud and clear message that India can no more be treated as a second or third rate nation now” (Sheshadri 1998:3). The VHP leader Ashok Singal said: “Hindu Sadhus and religious leaders, in a bid to 'immortalise' the recent nuclear tests at Pokhran, are planning to set up a shakti peeth (seat of divine power) near the blasts' site.” “India intends to be powerful in the interest of world peace, in keeping with the preachings of Lord Buddha,” he quipped, adding that there could be no peace without power. "Look at the Hindu deities, they all bear weapons in their hands," Singal remarked” (The Pioneer, 18 May 1998.) In a letter to the Prime Minister, Rashtra Sevika Samiti Pramukh Sanchalika Usha Tai Chati said that “this singular historic feat has aroused the dormant self-respect of the nation” (Organiser 24 May 1998). Aijaz Ahamad said that the ‘consensus’ behind the BJP’s dangerous nuclear adventure was “an attempted consensus behind Hindutva”. The “Security adventurism had satisfied the hard-core elements in the Sangh” (Ahamad 1998:21)

Generally, India’s nuclear explosions were viewed as the advancement of the country in the realm of science and technology. Referring to the technical details of the tests, R. Chidambaram, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission said: “Five explosions in less than 48 hours is some kind of a world record...it becomes even more significant when one notes that all these devices were of different types” (Chidambaram 1998:11). Justifying the Pokhran-II, Prime Minister Vajpayee and Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh said that the decision to conduct the tests was taken after due consideration of all factors relevant to India’s national security. These tests sought to “address the security concerns of the Indian people and provide them with necessary assurance” (India, MEA 1998; India, MEA 1999; India, MD 1999). However, on 28 May 1998 Pakistan exploded five
nuclear devices and one more on 30 May in Chagai. In a post-Chagai statement, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said: “Our hand was forced by the present Indian leadership’s reckless actions” (Ram 1998). As a response to the Pakistani nuclear explosions, Vajpayee said: “A new situation has been created by Pakistan’s tests but India is prepared to meet any eventuality. We are committed to maintain deterrence. (The Pakistani action) has vindicated our policy and stand…. In fact, Pakistan’s clandestine preparations forced us on the path of a nuclear deterrent. We had our concerns” (India, MEA 1998; India, MEA 1999).

Vajpayee established a National Security Council in April 1999 “to analyse the military, economic and political threats to the nation and render continuous advise to the government.” Two new offices have been created – Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) – to integrate weapons acquisition, logistics and strategy, hitherto performed compartmentally by the Chiefs of Army, Navy and Air Force (India, Ministry of Defence 2000). Pursuant to the BJP mantra of “security first and the rest will follow,” a massive military modernization drive was underway with party claims of “the largest ever increase in defence budget.” In Advani’s words, a “comprehensive systemic overhaul to meet security challenges of the 21st century” is being carried out for the first time in independent India’s history (The Hindu 23 May 1998). On 17 August 1999, the NDA government released India’s draft nuclear doctrine prepared by the 27-member National Security Council and Advisory Board (NSAB), which called for “development of a credible, minimum deterrent” (Kargil Review Committee 2000: 205; India, MD 2000; Joshy 2010). The BJP sought to justify its policy of “defence diplomacy, coupled with adequate preparedness of our armed forces,” “reviewing the security environment to cover all aspects of defence requirement and organisation,” and “institutionalisation of forward planning” (BJP 1999: 27, 62, 70).

The war that broke out in Kargil (in Jammu and Kashmir) between India and Pakistan in May-July 1999 was the first direct ground war between the two countries after they had developed nuclear weapons. The war took place when Pakistani forces and Kashmiri militants were detected atop the Kargil ridges and 14 July when both sides had essentially ceased their military operations. It was believed that the planning for the operation, by
Pakistan, might have occurred much early in 1998. The incursion of Pakistan-backed armed forces into territory on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir and the Indian military campaign to repel the intrusion left hundreds of Indian soldiers dead and several hundreds wounded (Kargil Review Committee 2000). The Kargil war provided a huge boost to the campaign of Hindutva forces and thereby the electoral future of the BJP. The war generated a “unifying response of binding a nation together as never before” claimed by the NDA government. The public saw for themselves that Indian military personnel assigned to winkle out the infiltrators entrenched in commanding heights with clear lines of fire “performed heroically” (India, MD 2000).

According to Rita Manchanda, the way in which the mass media, a major realm of civil society, participated “in shaping and even driving the changing terms of the discourse of Indian nationalism – that is militarized Hindu nationalism was particularly evident during the Kargil conflict.” She characterised it as India’s “first war in a media society” (with satellite news channels brought the images and sounds of war in real time to the drawing rooms of viewers). It was also “first experience of war as spectacle and war as infotainment.” Manchanda said that, “the media not only reported the Kargil war, but endowed militarism with a nobility of purpose and defined nationalism as patriotic flag waving, dangerously intolerant and demonising of the ‘other’ - in this case, all Pakistanis. Pakistan and the people of Pakistan became the enemy, fused in the media shaped popular imagination with rogue states and Talibanised terrorists” (Manchanda 2002: 23-30).

Amitabh Mattoo and Kanti Bajpai observed:

> It was a discourse that closed off any discussion on the political “why and wherefore” of the Kargil conflict as event, glamourised war and martyrdom and spurred a jingoistic hysteria of militarised patriotism. Calls for ceasefire and peace were derided and worse denounced as anti-national. Security became exclusively military security, at whose territorial altar was sacrificed the notion of human security (Mattoo and Bajpai 2001).

During the war, two media images dominated. The first, the “representation of the jawan, unyielding, etched against the silhouette of
dangerous mountains, the markers of the boundaries of the other land, the nation. It was a statement of aggressive territorial nationalism.” The second one, “the endless televised spectacle of ceremonially draped coffins, ritualistic public mourning of heroic martyrs while dry eyed families waited for the privacy to weep and may be question why their sons were dying?” A martyrdom was constructed around “the media hyped shradhanjali kitch, that defined a patriotic nationalist discourse of self sacrificing macho heroes who died valiantly asserting ... fresh from one victory and raring to go on to another” (Manchanda 2002: 23-30).

Following the outbreak of the war, the BJP and other Sangh organisations unleashed a violent campaign across the nation. Political leaders, strategic analysts and sections of the media in India called for a more aggressive war and the opening of new fronts (Mattoo and Bajpai 2001). There were also calls in India for the bombardment of Pakistani supply routes to Kargil. Some went even further. Kushabhau Thakre, then national president of BJP, suggested that the ultimate aim, after evicting infiltrators from the Kargil region, should be to take back the part of Kashmir held by Pakistan. According the BJP leaders, unilateral ceasefires against militants and ‘Pakistani mercenaries’ would be signs of weakness and softness before ‘a duplicitous adversary’ and difficult for (the BJP) cadre to swallow (The Hindu 24 November 2000). Narendra Modi said that “defensive steps will neither protect innocent people nor bring about a change of heart among terrorists and that the time has come to pay Pakistan back in its own language” (Chaulia2002: 224-225). Home Minister L.K. Advani later on wrote:

India had been a victim of Pak-sponsored terrorism since the beginning of the 1980s. But it is only the determined and concerted efforts of the NDA government that made western democracies accept that Pakistan was, indeed, the sponsor of cross-border terrorism against India. As a matter of fact, our diplomatic offensive succeeded in another related objective: in making them realise that Pakistan’s abetment of terrorism was a threat not only to India but to the entire world (Advani 2007).

Having won the Kargil Conflict, the NDA predictably played heavily on its national security credentials during the 1999 general elections. Its 1999 manifesto expounded the war leadership shown by the caretaker administration which “rose to the challenge and acted decisively... [and
The last of the Pakistani intruders were cleared from the Kargil Sector on 27th July.” The manifesto also was very specific in noting the high ratio of national security pledges made in 1998 and their achievements in just thirteen months of government, including exercising the nuclear option, successfully testing a second-generation Agni ballistic missile, increasing the defence budget, and creating a NSC to advise the government on all matters of national security. In October 1999, the NDA headed by BJP came back to power which won a comfortable majority in the 13th Lok Sabha. In contrast, the Congress suffered its worst defeat ever.

The December 2001 terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament further widened the rift between the kernel of the party and moderate elements within the NDA government. The BJP rank-and-file felt that their past appeals to the Prime Minister not to negotiate with Pakistan had been vindicated with “yet another betrayal.” Calls for a declaration of war on Pakistan for complicity in the Parliament, drawing parallels with America’s war on the Taliban after September 11, were made regularly from the RSS, while Vajpayee adopted a more mellow tone while warning that India’s “patience is running out.” His position was that India would “go more than half the way to meet Pakistan” if there were credible reductions in infiltrations into Kashmir and an end to jihad (Chaulia 2002: 215-234).

Thus, the mobilisation of the Hindu Right organisations since the 1980s saw aggressive campaigns and violent incidences—from the demolition of the Babri Masjid to Gujarat carnage, from Pokhran nuclear explosions to Kargil war. Using the vast spectrum of the civil society in the country, the Sangh Parivar unleashed security-centred assertions and identity-based mobilisations almost simultaneously. The revivalism of Hindutva was, in fact, propelled by the structural transformation of the Indian State and civil society since the 1980s. The BJP’s rise to power in the 1990s can, thus, be explained in terms of the crisis of the Indian polity and economy caused by social dislocations following the introduction of liberalisation and neoliberal reforms.