

Religious Discourse in the Bombay Riots 1992-1993:
The Language of Hindutva Politics in Maharashtra

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1. Introduction

Recent right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) victories have shifted the political environment in India, complicating further intricate cultural discourses of identity and belonging.¹ Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi was first elected in 2014, many have observed increased tensions between religious and political groups, most recently culminating in the widespread outcry against the new citizenship amendment that is criticized for being discriminatory against Muslim citizens and refugees.² However, communal tension is nothing new to the subcontinent.

There are few issues that manage to motivate large cross-sections of Indian society, but the Babri Masjid/Ram Janmabhoomi³ issue is one of them. For Hindus, Ayodhya is the birthplace of Lord Ram, and for Muslim communities, the Babri Mosque has been a treasured place of worship for generations. The site remains a touchstone for Hindu nationalist politicians at campaign rallies.⁴ In 1992, the destruction of the contested 16th Century Babri Mosque by Hindu nationalist *karsevaks* in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh sent shockwaves across the country and is associated with causing massive outbursts of violence between Hindus and Muslims.

The riots in Bombay, Maharashtra, were some of the most vicious and traumatic. After the nationally televised destruction of the masjid, tensions between Hindu and Muslims came to a boiling point. Over 1,300 people were killed during the clashes throughout

¹ *"Shoot the Traitors": Discrimination Against Muslims under India's New Citizenship Law.*"

² Gettleman, Jeffrey, and Maria Abi-habib. *"In India, Modi's Policies Have Lit a Fuse."* The New York Times. March 01, 2020.

³ Hereafter referred to as the "Babri Masjid conflict", as the structure destroyed in 1992 was the Babri Masjid.

⁴ *"In Jharkhand Election Rally, Adityanath Asks People for 'Rs 11 and a Stone'."* News18. December 14, 2019.

Bombay with hundreds more injured.⁵ Businesses and homes were burned to the ground and suspicion and fear hung heavy in the air long after the smoke had cleared. The acts of violence were vicious and intimate, as the government's report stated in the aftermath, was, "as though the forces of Satan were let loose, destroying all human values and civilized behavior."⁶ How did an event ostensibly so far removed from the every day lives of those in Bombay motivate them to turn against their neighbors?

While there are innumerable possible causes for a conflict this large, I argue that there is a consistent rhetorical environment in which these events take place. To this end, I illustrate how Hindu nationalist hindutva discourse transforms otherwise unremarkable aspects of everyday life into instruments of violence. Hindutva, or "Hindu-ness", is a discourse predicated on forcing an essential and ahistorical Hindu identity formed in opposition to other religions. Proponents of hindutva rhetoric, including the Modi administration, have accelerated a metaphorical and literal divide between religious communities by weaponizing Hindu notions of service, Sanskritizing spoken language, and militarizing Hindu ritual and iconography to engender violence.

2. Geographical and Historical Context

Geographical Context

It is essential to emphasize that the language of Hindu nationalism is at the same time a national and local narrative, and their respective local environments shape sometimes differing regional perspectives. In Maharashtra, the geography of the land itself is an important force shaping the religious and political identity. The ways in which this particular space has shaped certain local understanding of the sacred can be experienced through local literature, language, and regional history.

⁵ Burns, John F. "Riot Scars Are Gone, but Bombay Is Still Healing." *The New York Times*. April 17, 1994.

⁶ "Justice Denied- Why? *The SriKrishna Commission Report and the Maharashtra Government's Response*." December 9, 1998.

The regional language, Marathi, is a poetic one tied to the land, with even things so fundamental as North and South, up and down, gesturing to the sacred rivers: “upstream” or “downstream”.⁷ Connected to the rest of the country by the ties of the holy water that sustains a largely agrarian nation.

The state of Maharashtra lies nestled between the Arabian sea’s bountiful waters and the verdant ecosystems of mountain ranges along its’ boundaries. Mumbai (previously Bombay) is a wealthy, densely populated port city. Inland from Mumbai, the large state of Maharashtra is vivisected by river systems and connected by sacred sites largely originating from the Hindu epic, the Ramayana. These spaces are conceived of as being either physically connected, (as in a local river reaching eventually the river Ganges) or they are connected by pilgrimages of either deities or devotees (as in the route Ram and Sita took during their exile.)⁸ As Anne Feldhaus explains in *Connected Places*, that, “In the case of the coastal area of Maharashtra, the Konkan, a figure from mythological traditions known all over India not only *lived* in the region, but also *created* it. The axe-bearing incarnation of Vishnu, Parashuram, brought the Konkan into being with one of his arrows.”⁹ There are spiritual and social connections between the land and the divine, the logic of immediate geographical relevance is left insufficient. Despite the contested birthplace of Ram being over a thousand kilometers away, in the mind of many in Bombay and beyond, this remains as relevant as the ocean shore down the block. This, coupled with a careful priming of the Hindu population to see Muslims as threatening invaders, made the Babri Masjid issue an especially charged fight.

Historical Context

After the rise of Hindu nationalism, a particular flavor of Maharashtrian *hindutva* has shaped the relationship between Hindus and their neighbors and changed the very ideas of what it means to be a Maratha. The idealized history of Maharashtra becomes increasingly defined in opposition to Muslim “invaders”, and a palpable longing for a

⁷ Feldhaus, Anne. *Connected Places Region, Pilgrimage, and Geographical Imagination in India*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Pg. 6.

⁸ Ibid, pg. 12-13

⁹ ibid

hyper-masculine, proud warrior past. This discourse has deep roots in the colonial project, and remains relevant throughout the rhetoric of the Babri masjid conflict and the riots in Bombay.

There are many scholarly works on religious violence and politics in India. After the shocking Partition violence in 1947, postcolonial scholarship has paid keen attention to the conflict between Hindus and Muslims in both the pre- and post-colonial eras. The conflict over the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya provided an urgent impetus for scholarly reflection on Hindu-Muslim conflict in South Asia in general. In Richard Eaton's introduction to "*India's Islamic Traditions*", he notes that the destruction of the masjid in 1992 pushed scholars and cultural commentators alike to dig deeper into history and religious discourse to search for answers for the contemporary conflict.¹⁰

Popular discourse on religious violence in India usually identifies solutions based on the flawed foundation of the essentialist romantic colonial literature painting Hinduism as a unified, peaceful spirituality untroubled by the complications of lived tradition. Paul Brass notes that instances of communal violence in India, "...are not explained by the spontaneous furies of mad mobs... nor can they normally be stopped by saints."¹¹

Explaining Hindu-Muslim riots usually falls into several methods, first "spontaneous" (Brass pg. 11), incited by a seemingly random event, or secondly, the inevitable explosions of a communal pressure cooker environment. These are inadequate either separately or together and do little to address the political and social systems that perpetuate violence. These riots are sensationalized in the media as religious fervor, often lacking any nuance about caste, urbanization, or political representation. Some of these questions often are limited by only linear, causal explanations, begging to know why riots occur more in certain places than others, usually pointing to specific incidents. In the case of the Bombay riots, innumerable reports and articles were published to lay blame to one

¹⁰ Eaton, Richard Maxwell. *Indias Islamic Traditions: 711-1750*. New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013. Pg. 1.

¹¹ Brass, Paul R. "*Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*". Seattle: Univ. Of Washington Press, 2015. Pg. 6.

party or another, some convincing, and some less so.¹² Brass articulates the questions and methods used in these works as follows:

“Issues of persistence and incidence/timing seem to require causal and/or functional analysis: why do riots persist, occur here and not there, occur now and not then? Whose interests are served by the occurrence, persistence, or disappearance of Hindu-Muslim riots? The struggle over meaning, explanations, and power relations requires attention to discourse. To what extent is there a communal discourse that accounts for the persistence of communal rioting over time by providing a framework of explanation and meaning, an ordering of relations between Hindus and Muslims, and an ordering of the respective relations of these two categorical groups to the state? Further, to what extent does such a discourse itself contribute to the persistence of the violence that it claims to explain?”¹³

The trappings of colonial era categories and assumptions about religious monoliths of “Hinduism” and “Islam” are difficult to shake from the frameworks of studies of communalism in India.¹⁴ As we investigate the rhetorical frameworks surrounding the Babri Masjid conflict and the Bombay riots, it is important to keep in mind that these categories are often much more permeable than they are purported to be.¹⁵

Analyzing the ways in which deeply held values change meanings under the pressure of violence brings a different light to the chaos of moments of violence. Just as a traumatic experience changes a person’s core memories or beliefs, the trauma of violence leaves a mark on communal values.

¹² Engineer, Asghar Ali. *"Bombay Shames India."* Economic and Political Weekly 28, no. 3/4 (1993): 81-85.

¹³ Brass, *"Production"*, pg. 11

¹⁴ Talbot, Cynthia. *"Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India."* Comparative Studies in Society and History

¹⁵ Talbot, *"Inscribing the Other"*

3. Hindutva Mirrors Colonial Narratives of Hindu-Muslim Conflict

By tracing the genealogies of the underlying ideas of the modern Hindu nationalist *hindutva* movement, it becomes clear that these are recapitulations of colonial critiques of South Asia. Concepts like an ahistorical glorification of the Vedic age, the perceived threat of a Muslim other, and the production of one, essential Hinduism, are later transformed to become instruments of violence.

The essentializing Orientalist historiographical approach utilized by the British forced a narrative of an age-old conflict between Hindus and Muslims that later influences the *hindutva* (sometimes translated “Hindu-ness”) movement and the rise of organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra as modern political forces.

The narrative of communal violence propagated by the British was one that was convenient to the needs and desires of the Empire. This historical reordering was conducted through an effort to systematize knowledge and consolidate British power.¹⁶ In colonialist writings, the predominant theme was, “representing religious bigotry and conflict between people of different religious persuasions as one of the more distinctive features of Indian society.”¹⁷ In the minds of the British writers, stirring up internal conflict between minorities and the Hindu majority would help deflect criticism from colonial rule. As Sir H.M. Eliots’ *History of India as Told by its Own Historians* notes, the historical works of Orientalist writers pays keen attention to the “mildness and equity” of the British and goes to great lengths to enumerate the “immense advantages” the Indian subjects gained from their rule.¹⁸

¹⁶ Pandey, Gyanendra. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012. Pg. 57,

¹⁷ Ibid, pg. 23

¹⁸ Pande, B. N. “*The Hindu Muslim Problem.*” New Delhi: Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, 1995. Pg. 7.

One of the most important examples of this was the scholarship surrounding the riots in Banaras in the 1800s. This was cited by many historians including James Mill, writing in his “*History of British India*”, that there was a significant problem with “law and order” before the arrival of the British caused by these communal riots.¹⁹ This justified British curfews and the continuation of the history building that pitted Hindus and Muslims in an unending battle for control of sacred sites and political power.²⁰ Instead of something more difficult to manage like a widespread insurrection brewing, these riots were chalked up to fanaticism and irrationality, thereby minimizing the problem in the mind of the colonial rulers.²¹ However, a deeper investigation discovered that the source of the tension instead was a much more complex question of inter-caste scuffles and anti-Imperial tax sentiment.²²

Amongst other issues, Western writers at the time assumed that religion was the greatest identifying factor in these skirmishes and based extrapolations on this assumption. Additionally, in colonial sources, violence in Banaras was meant to serve as a symbolic metaphor for the entirety of India and allowed these clashes in the early eighteenth hundreds to be projected back onto pre-modern history. This argument was developed further by Richard Eaton’s studies in temple desecration, in which he describes the ways in which the rhetoric surrounding temple destruction in the pre-modern period was largely for political, not religious reasons.²³ Still, these flawed analyses leave an unmistakable mark on the nascent hindutva narrative of the Hindu identity.

4. Hindutva Narrows Hindu Identity

A second similar narrative in colonialist scholarship that went on to heavily influence Hindu nationalist writers was the glorification of the Vedic Age. This pursuit of a Hindu

¹⁹ Elliot, H. M. “*The History of India: As Told by Its Own Historians*”, 1997. pg. 338

²⁰ Pandey, “*Construction of Communalism*”, pg. 26-28

²¹ *ibid*, pg. 39

²² *ibid* pg. 40

²³ Eaton, “*Temple Desecration*”, 2000.

“Golden Age” before Muslim conquest reduces Hindu identity from a vibrant lived tradition to a reified interpretation of Indian communal history.

This is essential in the philosophy and rhetoric of the 1990s Shiv Sena. Seemingly innocuous at first glance, the gross overstatements of Orientalist historians, whether intentionally or not, created an image of premodern India as “essentially spiritual”, feminine, and characterized by a unified people and religion of proto-Hinduism.²⁴ This was incredibly common and heavily encouraged through institutions like Western universities that produced philologists who used the idea of a common language family to create a common racial, geographic, and religious of the ancient Indian past.²⁵ This is an important foundational distinction that comes to play an important role in the racial othering of Muslims in hindutva rhetoric in the 1980s and 1990s. These studies highlighted the resilience and vitality of ancient Hindu society, eventually feeding into the incitement of Hindu-Muslim communal tension, as Muslim rule was the British scapegoat for the end of the Hindu “Golden Age.” Tanika Sarkar writes in *Majoritarian State*, “What the ‘science’ of race difference was to Nazi ideology, the discipline of history is to Hindutva.”²⁶

An advanced and egalitarian Vedic society in actuality may not have been as perfect as Orientalist scholars would have liked, and Muslim rule was certainly not the only reason for its decline.²⁷ Importantly, it was the British representation of the Hindu-Muslim tension drove much of the rhetoric in the nascent hindutva movement. Hindu nationalism, fueled by the discursive framework of Hindu communalism, brought forth the same essentialist ideologies of the Orientalist scholars before them. Understandably, these ideas had been spread and supported by entire systems of activity like census collecting, philology and historiography that had been placed into the Indian textbooks.

²⁴ Bhatt, Chetan. *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, and Modern Myths*, pg. 10, 2001.

²⁵ Ibid p. 13

²⁶ Chatterji, Angana P., Thomas Blom Hansen, and Christophe Jaffrelot. *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism Is Changing India*. 2019. pg. 151

²⁷ Puniyani, Ram. *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 2009. Pgs. 49-55

In the famous pamphlet “*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*”, influential pro-Independence activist V. D. Savarkar pulls this thread to weave this narrative into the foundational grounds for Hindu nationalism, asserting:

“...as it often happens in history this very undisturbed enjoyment of peace and plenty lulled our Sindhusthan, in a sense of false security and bred a habit of living in the land of dreams. At last she was rudely awakened on the day when Mohammad of Gazni crossed the Indus, the frontier line of Sindhusthan and invaded her. That day the conflict of life and death began. Nothing makes Self conscious of itself so much as a conflict with nonself. Nothing can weld peoples into a nation and nations into a state as the pressure of a common foe. Hatred separates as well as unites.”²⁸

He continued on to say, “*hindutva* is not a word but a history. Not only the spiritual or religious history of our people, but a history in full.”²⁹ Despite Savarkar’s vehement opposition to Western ideas, he drew heavily on the essentializing paradigms popularized by British and German Orientalist historians of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For both, India was essentially spiritual, and this religiosity was the defining factor in the Indian identity.

In the development of the Hindu nationalist movement, the importance of the anti-colonial context is not one to be taken lightly. As the subaltern historian Partha Chatterjee discusses at length, the particular conditions of communities under colonial rule create two spheres: an inner, spiritual, feminine cultural sphere and an outer, materialistic and institutional masculine one.³⁰ In both of these historical contexts, these anti-colonial nationalisms were characterized by the marked development of this inner cultural sphere as a reaction against imperialist power in the outer institutions of governance. As the colonizers emphasized the difference between the East and West, Indians began to create

²⁸ Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar. “*Hindutva Who Is a Hindu?*”, 2009.

²⁹ Hansen, Thomas Blom. “*The Saffron Wave: Democratic Revolution and the Growth of Hindu Nationalism in India*”. 2001. Pg. 77

³⁰ Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. 2007. Pg. 35.

their own national identity. Increasingly, this was predicated on European ideas of the nation, history, and religious identity in the subcontinent.

Hindutva heavily relied on the historiographical narratives of the British. Chandranath Basu, the Bengali writer who coined the term hindutva, wrote that “history appeared as an unfolding of mans’ innate spirituality.”³¹ These links between history and Hinduism were the starting point for the Maharashtrian Shiv Sena and its founders to build a militarized Hindu nationalist organization to put India back on this path to its former greatness. However, while ostensibly rejecting the shackles of European history, Shiv Sena discourse seems entirely beholden to European models and analysis.³² Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray liberally utilizes the colonial critique of a passive, feminine Hinduism as the impetus for aggressive retaliation against Muslims.³³

One facet of shaping the ethos of the Shiv Sena was the constant barrage of hyper masculine calls to arms, or the language emasculating the enemy or their women.³⁴ Deepak Mehta elaborates in *Words that Wound* that, “... by making sacrifices for the nation (Thackeray speaks of *dharmayudh*- holy war), by demonstrating individual courage and aggression will Hindu masculinity, and hence Hindu society, recover from its present stage of effeminacy, derision, and disarray.”³⁵ This emphasis on hyper masculinity as a response to the loss of the Hindu golden age bears a strong resemblance to the colonial era literature of the feminine, mystical Orient.³⁶

After Savarkar, the later M.S. Golwarkar continued this trend by looking to Germanic

³¹ Bhatt, “*Hindu Nationalism*”, p. 26

³² Lal, Vinay. *Political Hinduism: The Religious Imagination in Public Spheres*. 2009. p.6

³³ Punwani, Jyoti. "Bal Thackeray: A Politics of Violence." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2012.

³⁴ Hansen, Thomas Blom. *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*. 2002., pg. 90

³⁵ *ibid*, pg. 92

³⁶ While this small fragment does fit within a greater understanding of the textures of the Hindu nationalist political movement in India, it by no means explains the peculiar motivations and manifestations of the hindutva idea throughout the country, or even throughout Maharashtra. In Bombay, there is also a complex relationship between the city and the nation, and Marathi culture and language has prompted violent clashes as described here: Jeffrey, Robin. "Marathi: Big Newspapers Are Elephants." *Economic and Political Weekly* 32, no. 8 (1997): 384-88.

“race pride” in his effort to define the “we” of Indian society. Using German political science texts to formulate his ideas of the unity of the Indian polity, he suggests that nations are built on a common racial link.³⁷ He didn’t envision a universalistic idea of a social contract-based government, but instead suggested that nations were bound together by religion, culture, race, geographical unity, and language.³⁸ It is not difficult to see how Hindu nationalist leaders’ desire for “Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan” comes directly from the narratives expressed in these foundational texts. Commonly, Indian Muslims are seen by the Hindu right wing as being culturally, if not racially/ethnically different than Hindus, posing a danger to the unity of the nation. This is rooted in ideas like Golwarkar’s that emphasize the need for a pure racial and cultural, although not explicitly theological, Hinduism.

5. Cultural Production of a Singular Hindu Identity

After examining the colonial roots of the hindutva rhetoric that remains at the forefront of communal conflict in Maharashtra, we are better equipped to inhabit the cultural and rhetorical moment in Bombay in the 1990s. Immediately preceding the events of the riots themselves, the religio-political landscape at the local and national levels begin to shift. Using the public television broadcast of the *Ramayana* as an example; we will then address the ways in which the religious imagery in popular media becomes more masculine and exclusive, embracing the themes of hindutva ideals. Secondly, there are political challenges that begin to push the Hindu right to organize against Muslims. Lastly, we will analyze the rhetoric and practice of the invention of religious ritual as a political tool with Shiv Sena *maha aartis* and their religious imagery in their publication, Saamna. It is important to note that while these are important developments in the production of a Hindu Maharashtrian identity, but there are also parallel Muslim discourses that are beyond the scope of this project but equally worthy of scholarly

³⁷ Jaffrelot, Christophe. *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader*, 2007. p. 71

³⁸ *ibid* pg. 72

pursuit.³⁹ Here, we address the theo-political issues of the Hindu majority faced with the challenges of defining a nation.

Television and Hindutva in the 1980s

The rise of readily accessible media coverage in the 1980s had a definite impact on the nation's conceptions of Hinduism, concurrent with the rise of the Shiv Sena and other Hindu nationalist groups in mainstream Maharashtrian (and national) politics. For the first time, the Hindu epic *Ramayana* was adapted for television and was broadcast on the Indian state-run channel Doordarshan. Ramanand Sagar's adaptation of the *Ramayana* averaged about 40–60 million viewers, Hindu and Muslim alike, per episode, with the most popular episodes possibly drawing as many as 80–100 million viewers from 1987–1989.⁴⁰ These episodes continued to play regularly up until the late 90s. In Hindu households, hands were folded in reverence to the gods on the screen. Some even placed garlands around their television sets, just as they would in a temple. In the *Ramayana*, the ruler, Lord Ram, is the *maryada purushottam* (the ideal man) that rules over his kingdom until he is exiled and must fight to save his wife after she is kidnapped by a ten-headed demon.⁴¹ Despite innumerable local retellings of the famous story in different vernaculars and registers, in the television adaptation, there is one North Indian version of the *Ramayana* privileged over other local stories, with the script in a convolutedly Sanskritized Hindi and on-screen violence throughout.⁴² For these reasons and others, the connection between this series and the rise of Hindutva politics on a national scale is mentioned often in scholarship on communal violence. Most famous is Arvind Rajagopal's analysis in his book *Politics After Television*, where he posits that the broadcast of the *Ramayan* on state television synthesized a single stream of “social

³⁹ For further reading on the construction of Muslim identity in South Asia, see: Devji, Faisal *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea*, 2013.

⁴⁰ Sengupta, Roshni, “*Iconography of violence in televised Hinduism: the politics of images in the Mahabharata*”, 2012. pg. 151

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² *ibid* Sengupta, “*Iconography*”, 2012.

connectivity” across the nation and “brought into salience the differences in India's split publics” for the first time.⁴³

This cultural and religious event had maintained a close connection with political movements at the time. While there were numerous ongoing religious pilgrimage processions (*yatras*) to Ayodhya being backed by the VHP (another Hindu right-wing political party), the BJP “capitalized on this by putting up some actors of Ramayana and Mahabharata as candidates for the Lok Sabha (lower legislative house) polls in 1989. They won.”⁴⁴

However, I would suggest that any causal connection between Sagar’s Ramayana and outbursts of communal violence are deeply tenuous. These stories had already been deeply engrained in Indian culture for many years, even performed on local stages yearly for special holidays. Instead, the peculiarities of this adaptation simply seem to be indicative of the ways in which the political and religious landscape in India was changing, emphasizing increasingly narrow perceptions of Hindu values and duties in the public sphere.

With this lens, we are able to take a more holistic view of the impact of Sagar’s Ramayana as an example of the militarization of the image of Lord Ram and the fleshing out of an aggressive, violent history of Hindu warriors.

Violence as a means to bringing about a greater good is one of the central themes of the series. Roshni Sengupta elaborates in her analysis of the imagery of violence in the series that, “engaging with violence to further its thematic background – the moral necessity of the victory of good over evil and the creation of a just society – remains the centrepiece of the argument,” she argues, “that televised versions of the Mahabharata have repeatedly and continually glorified violence and attempted to establish binaries between justifiable

⁴³ Manchanda, Rita, *Militarised Hindu Nationalism and the Mass Media: Shaping a Hindutva Public Discourse*, 2002. pg. 302

⁴⁴ Nag, Kingshuk. *The Saffron Tide: The Rise of the BJP*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt., 2014. Pg 33

and unjustifiable violence.”⁴⁵ Ram is muscular, and his warrior chariot becomes a cultural symbol of an emerging hyper masculine Hindu identity. In 1991, Anuradha Kapur notes the narrowing of the types of iconographic possibilities of Ram to exclusively “warrior Ram” post-Doordarshan Ramayana. “The transformation of the Ram image from that of a serene, omnipresent, eternally forgiving God to that of an angry, punishing one, armed with numerous weapons, wearing armor and even shoes, is truly remarkable.”⁴⁶

While the imagery physically presented on screen is an essential part of the development of this singular identity, the language register in which these plots play out is perhaps even more impactful. As Victoria Farmer argues in her analysis of communalism in Indian mass media, “language can be used as a method for lending communal connotations to messages that otherwise carry no communal content.”⁴⁷ Communal, here, refers to conflicts between religious communities.⁴⁸

The type of Hindi used in the series in no way reflected the vernacular Hindi spoken in the street, but instead chose to privilege heavily Sanskritized vocabulary throughout, despite the script having seemingly been compiled from a number of different vernacular retellings, including Tamil and Marathi.⁴⁹

Conceptions of the “local”- geographically, and spiritually, also begin to change after the series. Ayodhya, previously, may have referred to Ram’s home in any temple, and was a geographically fluid concept. As Farmer elaborates, Ayodhya in popular discourse could have “exist[ed] wherever god exist[ed].”⁵⁰ However, after the series and the BJP’s political rise, this locum became a more concretely geographical one in which “Ayodhya” referred exclusively to the town located in Uttar Pradesh.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Sengupta, “Iconography”, 2012.

⁴⁶ Ludden, David E. *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1996. Pg. 103

⁴⁷ ibid, pg. 100

⁴⁸ Lal, Vinay. “On the Rails of Modernity: Communalism’s Journey in India.”, *Journal for the Study of Media & Composite Cultures*, 2002.

⁴⁹ Sengupta, “Iconography”, 2012

⁵⁰ Ludden, “Contesting”, 1996. pg. 103

⁵¹ ibid

6. Consolidation of Disparate Hindu Identities Against Muslim “Other”

As Thomas Blom Hansen notes in his book, *Saffron Wave*, during the 1980s, “majoritarian and communal themes were becoming ever more accepted and legitimate; the nation had been “massified” in a rather concrete spatial sense, as urbanization and proliferation of relatively inexpensive means of transport enabled ever more Indians to live and experience the nation-space through migration, cross-regional family ties, travel, and tourism.”⁵² The economic and cultural environment in the 1980s and 1990s were rapidly shifting to accommodate and adapt to modern challenges such as globalization and urbanization. The political landscape began to emphasize a majoritarian notion of rights and televised representations of mobile and vocal minority groups like Muslims and low caste Hindus became increasingly accessible.⁵³

The right-wing Hindu nationalist BJP suffered a crushing loss in the 1984 election, in which they won only two seats in the lower legislative house.⁵⁴ There was a renewed political need for the party to unite all Hindus, including low caste Hindus that traditionally did not align with upper caste political parties.

The increasing power of low-caste Dalit political parties in Bombay and throughout the country led to a pressing political need to create a platform that was acceptable to low caste voters as well. In Uttar Pradesh, the evidence was clear- there was an inversely correlated relationship between BJP wins and Dalit party losses in the state assembly, where in 1991 Dalit parties represented 9.4% in the assembly and the BJP had won 31.5%.⁵⁵ We see the same trend occur in Maharashtra, as the family of right wing

⁵² Hansen, “*Saffron Wave*”, pg. 157

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ Misra, Satish. “*Understanding the Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party.*” Observer Research Foundation, September 2018.

⁵⁵ Basu, Amrita. *Violent Conjunctions in Democratic India.* 2015. pg. 217

political parties called the Sangh Parivar (of which the BJP is the main political face), commences a concerted effort to portray respected Dalit literatures as anti-Muslim.⁵⁶

Studies of political parties and movements and their various interactions with violent clashes has shed some light on the sorts of political environments that have resulted in violence in the past. For instance, after mapping the Hindu-Muslim riots into a data set, Amrita Basu concludes the “likelihood of violence is...determined by the extent and character of opposition Hindu nationalists encounter from the lower castes and classes.”⁵⁷ This electoral calculation manifested itself in a renewed fervor for a unified Hinduism and a common enemy to Hindu tradition: a scapegoat for the loss of a great Vedic Golden Age.

7. Thackeray’s Shiv Sena Weaponizes Hindutva in Maharashtra

The most influential figure in Maharashtrian right-wing politics at the time of the riots in 1992, Bal Thackeray, and his political party the Shiv Sena, will be the focus of the following linguistic analysis. Thackeray was a charismatic and highly educated media man that came to be a political deity in Maharashtra. Still to this day, his son Uddhav Thackeray retains the family clout as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra.⁵⁸ Bal Thackeray’s cultural and political influence cannot be understated. His speeches and writings provide a prime example of the language of hindutva situated in Bombay at the time of the riots in 1992-1993.

The Shiv Sena, or Shivaji’s Army, invokes the name and mythic heroism of the Maratha warrior emperor Shivaji, who fought against the Mughal empire and the British, promoting revivals of Hindu political traditions and changed the court language from

⁵⁶ Guru, Gopal. “*Understanding communal riots in Maharashtra*”, Pg. 905

⁵⁷ Basu, “*Violent Conjectures*”, pg. 3

⁵⁸ "Uddhav Thackeray Sworn in as 19th CM of Maharashtra." Firstpost. November 29, 2019.

Persian to Marathi and Sanskrit.⁵⁹ At its inception, the platform of the party was a direct response to the perceived struggles of the middle class Maharashtrians culturally, linguistically, and economically. This then evolves into blatant anti-Muslim fear mongering and an engine fueling communal violence.

Bal Thackeray was a well-known cartoonist and writer for an English-language newspaper in Bombay. He was seen as a man of the people, and had great influence over the city of Bombay. He had always spoken about the duty of Marathi-speaking peoples to carve out a space for themselves in an increasingly globalized and competitive market. In the early 1960s, he launched his own paper, *Marmik*, published weekly in Marathi. Thackeray used this enormously popular platform to take up the cause of disaffected Marathas who felt excluded from the booming success of Bombay at the time. These issues were extremely complex, with layers of caste and language and nationality, but at this time, not explicitly against Muslims. The prime target of *Marmik* at the time was recently immigrated South Indian business and restaurant owners in Bombay, presenting a nativist critique of Maharashtra's employment policies and demanding shop signs to be written in Marathi. This remained the Shiv Sena's major focus until around 1975, when the economic situation for Marathas became much too complex to be compellingly bifurcated along the lines of caste and language. In Bhiwandi, a sprawling slum outside Bombay, the rise of the power loom industry had begun to create wealth for Muslim families, leaving Maharashtrian Hindu textile workers disgruntled and unemployed.⁶⁰ This success was seen as yet another way that Muslims were profiting off the suffering of Hindus, spreading discontent and envy in already tense areas. This creates a new focus for Shiv Sena as their political power grows: the threat that Muslims pose to Hindu society.

In 1984, Shiv Sena aligns with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and adopts a new rhetorical strategy: *Hindutva*, or an essential "Hinduness". The new Hindu nationalist rebranding effort necessitates a new focus to unite Hindus. Bal Thackeray's clothes

⁵⁹ Laine, James W. *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India*. 2013.

⁶⁰ Banerjee, Sikata. *Make Me a Man!: Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India*. 2005.

undergo a clear change from his cartoonist days: previously the champion of ordinary Marathas dressed in plain white *kurtas*, now he dressed in the garb of a *sadhu*, or a devoted Hindu monk, always complete with a saffron robe and prayer beads around his neck or hands.⁶¹ In May of 1984, a massive riot breaks out in the industrial belt of Bombay, Thane, and Bhiwandi in which Bal Thackeray plays an essential role. He makes a speech in which he suggests that Muslims with a “Pakistani mentality” should be “driven out.”⁶² Those riots then paved the way for a resounding success for the Shiv Sena in the following year’s Mumbai Municipal Corporation elections, further solidifying the party as a statewide power and cultural force.⁶³

8. Value Shifts in Hindu Nationalist Rhetoric and Ritual

Rather than attempting to trace out causal links between specific speeches or publications and the outbreaks of rioting, which has been written about at length by scholars and courts, instead, I suggest there is something to gain from breaking down the Shiv Sena’s particular modes of communicating these narratives.⁶⁴ In this section, I will present the major themes of Thackeray’s public speeches and writings, the invention of Hindu ritual as a political tool of the Sena, and the ways in which the notion of *sewa*, or service, is changed from acts of personal piety to a duty-bearing value to protect the integrity of the nation.

Aggressively critiquing the “effeminate” Hinduism of the time, Bal Thackeray constantly reaffirmed the need for Hindus to become more masculine. The narrative of the Shiv Sena’s attacks on Muslims is very consistently wrapped up in masculinity, violence, and revenge, “...and most importantly the willingness to strike back and seize one’s rightful share of the benefits is an extremely powerful cultural construct.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ Thackeray, Raj, and Ambarīśa Miśra. *Bal Keshav Thackeray: A Photobiography*. 2005.

⁶² Kapoor, Coomi. “*Call Yourself a Hindu in Hindustan and You Are a Criminal: Bal Thackeray*.” *India Today*. 1984.

⁶³ Punwani, “*Politics of Violence*”, 2012.

⁶⁴ Frontline, “*What Saamna Said*”, 2000.

⁶⁵ Banerjee, “*Make Me a Man*”, pg. 17

The major themes have been oft-discussed in scholarly works on Bombay politics, which generally revolve around the Sena's characterization of Muslims as being "castrated," "effeminate," and "impotent."⁶⁶ This explicitly sexually charged imagery is littered throughout Thackeray speeches. The main thrust of the argument continues that Hindu masculinity and virility is lost temporarily, and drawing upon their warrior past, Hindus can use violence against Muslims to regain their lost manhood and preserve the Hindu legacy of the nation.⁶⁷

This is a prominent theme of the Marathi-language Shiv Sena mouthpiece newspaper *Saamna* (Confrontation). Language about ineffectual government action or perceived "appeasement" of Muslim constituents is labeled in one article as being, "effeminate in displaying courage and manliness in dealing with Muslims"⁶⁸

Circumcision is a frequent topic of discussion in these pieces. Abhik Roy, in his study of Shiv Sena masculinity rhetoric, notes: "Shiv Sena describes Indian police officers who tried to protect Muslims during the riots in 1992–1993, as "hijras [eunuchs] who wear green burkhas [the color of the Pakistani flag] and dance vulgarly before Muslims," implying that Indian police officers have not only lost their manhood but they are also behaving disloyally toward India.⁶⁹ Accusing Hindus that support Muslims of being traitors has a nearly racial undertone.

Saamna was the voice of the Shiv Sena, with each copy branded with Bal Thackeray's name and signature on the front page. Many scholars and politicians alike have criticized the inflammatory rhetoric presented by Bal Thackeray and those in the Sena. In an article detailing the political life of Thackeray, there is extensive discussion given to the influence of *Saamna* in the representation of Muslims in Maharashtra. Noting the vitriol, Punwani notes in her article that, "editorial after editorial in *Saamna* castigated Muslims

⁶⁶ Roy, Abhik. "Regenerating Masculinity in the Construction of Hindu Nationalist Identity: A Case Study of Shiv Sena." *Communication Studies*, (2006): 135-52.

⁶⁷ *ibid*

⁶⁸ *Saamna*, "Because they are Muslims," cited in Roy, "Regenerating Masculinity" 2006.

⁶⁹ *Saamna*, "Loud Acclamation," cited in Roy, "Regenerating Masculinity".

as fanatic traitors, residing in "mohallas (neighborhoods) in which flowed streams of treason and poison". The Muslim community constituted one of Pakistan's "seven atom bombs placed in Hindustan" according to Saamna articles. One editorial asked the corpses of Hindus to come alive to "tell us, from which mosque was a bomb thrown at you? Which fanatic traitor aimed his stengun at you?" The news pages of Saamna celebrated the burning of mosques by "patriotic youth in this dharmyuddh, [Holy War] mosques which have become store houses of unauthorised arms". Thackeray said later, provided the "spark that lit the fire of patriotism which kept the country, god and religion alive."⁷⁰

These narratives of masculinity, violence, and the dire need to fight Muslim appeasement for the renewal of Hindu religion and culture have a profound impact on mainstream discourse of Hindu-Muslim divides. The language surrounding a *dharmayudh* (holy war) heavily infers an obligatory connotation- with *dharma* not only meaning religious, but also *dharm*, or a duty. These are moves in religious rhetoric that are familiar to the audience in Maharashtra, the same audience that had for years become accustomed to the depiction of violent holy wars on television.

Invention of Religious Ritual as a Political Tool

On December 6, 1992, the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya was destroyed by Hindu nationalist *kar sevaks* (volunteers), many of them from the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, resulting in angered mobs of Muslims took to the streets in protest throughout the country. The following riots in Bombay, however, were especially brutal and have left lasting scars on the city. In the following weeks, inquiry commission reports and court documents recount the situation's rapid deterioration from unruly protests to a full communal riot, much worse than had occurred before in 1984.⁷¹ Hundreds of Muslims were the disproportionate victims of police firings in the first days of the riots and Hindu victory

⁷⁰ Punwani, "*Politics of Violence*", 2012.

⁷¹ Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights, "*The Bombay Bhiwandi Riots*", 1984. p.28-30

rallies are stoked on by speeches that suggest that increased mosque attendance indicates a brewing plot for revenge.⁷²

Twenty days in to the near-constant outbursts of violence, Hindu nationalist groups begin to perform counter-rituals to the Friday *namaaz*, which they dubbed a “*maha aarti*” or grand prayer ceremony. Reports indicate that while the Friday Muslim prayers had been minor irritations in the past, that blocking traffic for these *maha aartis* “kept adding to the communal tension and endangering the fragile peace which had been established.”⁷³

Surrounding these *maha aartis* were significant increases in looting and arson of Muslim neighborhoods as hundreds of Hindus make their way to the ceremonies. These continued unchecked until February of 1993, even with permission being granted from police and local governments.⁷⁴

The creation of spectacle, complete with loudspeakers and a congregational call, was a tactic meant to use a religious ritual that is completed daily, usually multiple times (temple aarti), and fit it to be in direct opposition to the Muslim prayers. There is little scholarly work on the performance of the ritual and what all it entails, mentioning only the surrounding violence and inflammatory speeches. There are several possibilities as to why this may be the case. Likely, it seems that across the board, scholars, journalists, and jurists dismissed these rituals as an excuse to keep a political rally in religious clothing, and this may well be the case. However, the unprecedented move of innovating and changing a Hindu religious ritual to be used as a sort of weapon against Muslims is a shift worth noting. As Bal Thackeray glorifies a strong, pure Hindu nation, the lived experience seems to have a sort of flexibility with ritual that is unexpected, but the ultimate end of achieving masculine revival through violence remains a constant.

Semantic Range of Service (Sewa) Narrows

⁷² “Justice Denied,” pg. 30

⁷³ *ibid*

⁷⁴ Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights, “*The Bombay Bhiwandi Riots*”, 1984. p. 105

A key tenet of action in the era of Babri Masjid political and religious mobilization was the need for service, or *sewa*. The mosque was destroyed in 1992 by *kar sewaks*, or those performing a sort of *sewa* for the cause, be it for the nation, for Hinduism, or any number of possible motivations. Before the 1980s, the term *kar sewaks* generally only referred to Sikh devotees volunteering to rebuild or maintain temples. However, the meanings associated with the concept of *sewa* in Hinduism have shifted since the advent of mainstream Hindutva politics.

Previously, *sewa* carried many meanings, largely referring to specific acts of service to others for the greater good. This could be acts, “directed toward society, an individual, one’s parents, God, or one’s guru.”⁷⁵ During the struggle for Indian independence from the British, those that chose to participate in anti-colonial efforts were said to be doing *sewa*. Uplifting untouchables, Gandhi said, was a form of *sewa*- an act of piety taken out of love for neighbor and love for god.

During the Ayodhya agitations, these meanings became obscured and the semantic range of service narrows down to a distinct few actions: 1) physically or financially aiding in the destruction of the Babri Masjid, and thus paving the way for the construction of a temple there, 2) taking up arms against Muslims deemed to be a threat, or 3) performing public service to motivate communities to subscribe to new Hindu political identities or support Hindu nationalist political parties.⁷⁶

It is not a surprise that with different contexts and changing times, religious concepts may shift in their meanings and connotations. However, the shift between private and public realms and the added connotations of duty and obligation are essential to understanding the ethos of Shiv Sena rhetoric and action.

⁷⁵ Bhattacharjee, Malini. "Sevā, Hindutva, and the Politics of Post-Earthquake Relief and Reconstruction in Rural Kutch." *Asian Ethnology*, June 2016.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, pgs 75-104

The layer of obligation, especially in the language of a *dharmayudh*, is one that provides an impetus for immediate action. Sena rhetoric about the need to take up arms provide a sort of just war logic, scapegoating Muslims for all Hindu suffering and demanding that the only way to truly defend themselves is to become the aggressors themselves. This was stated explicitly in the Saamna headline in the thick of the riots in 1993 proclaimed, “*Hindunni ataa akramak vhayala haave*”, “Now Hindus should become the aggressors.”⁷⁷

In a late December 1992 Shiv Sena-led procession, according to police reports from the time, featured slogans in Marathi with explicitly violent imagery:

“*Shiv Senechi dahshat hich sarvajanic surakshitata*’ (The Shiv Sena’s terror alone guarantees public safety); ‘*Khavlelya Hindu mahasagarala takkar dyawayachi khumkhumi konala asel tyane ranangat yave*’ (If anybody has the courage to confront the raging Hindu ocean, come into the battlefield); ‘*Hindu rashtra nirman zalyashivay paryay nahi*’ (There is no alternative to a Hindu nation)⁷⁸

According to Shiv Sena rhetoric in this time, the need for “purification” of the nation of traitors and those that have lost their manhood necessitates killing and violence.⁷⁹ The language of outside alliances, divisions of blood and soil, is thick in any discussions of the nature of Muslim religiosity. Thackeray warns, “whatever [Shiv Sena] had predicted has come true. A Muslim, regardless of his/her country or status, will always remain a Muslim first. His religion comes before his country”⁸⁰ There is no way to be a moderate Muslim in the mind of the Shiv Sena, meaning that each Muslim is a distinct and palpable threat to the Hindu rashtra. Service, then, to the nation, becomes largely a code for violence, leaving behind previous connotations of gentle, personal, pious actions.

⁷⁷ Engineer, Asghar Ali. “*The Gujarat Carnage*.” 2004. pg. 153

⁷⁸ Shaban, Abdul. *Lives of Muslims in India: Politics, Exclusion and Violence*. Routledge, 2018. Pg. 195

⁷⁹ Roy, Abhik. “*The construction and scapegoating of Muslims as the “other” in Hindu nationalist rhetoric*”, 2004, Southern Communication Journal

⁸⁰ Saamna, “*Keep the Nation*,” 1993., cited in Roy, “*Construction of Scapegoating*”

9. Linguistic Divergence, Physical Divisions

'Is desh mein rehna hoga, to Hindu banke rehna hoga' ('If you want to live in this country, you will have to live like a Hindu')⁸¹

The language of Hindutva, or the essential and exclusive traits of a “true Hindu”, systematically divides Hindus and Muslims along linguistic, cultural, and religious lines. As actors like Bal Thackeray shift meanings of deeply held values like service to be linked with a duty to violence, that rhetorical divide also manifests as a physical separation. The trauma of widespread community violence pushes vulnerable communities into increasingly crowded ghettos in Mumbai, creating challenges for attaining basic material needs. In this section, we will discuss the ways in which physical space in the city has been shaped to match the narrative that Muslims in Bombay are unwelcome.

In addition to the challenges of rebuilding neighborhoods and families after mass violence, rebuilding trust is an important aspect of reconciliation and prevention of violence in the future. In *Muslims and the Politics of Exclusion*, the scapegoating of Muslims and patterns of violence, “begins with pre-violence biases, stereotypes, then violence, post violence neglect, isolation, ghettoization and finally leads to the partitioning of the national community at the emotional and physical levels. Communal violence always polarizes communities. In the initial phase (till the 1970s), ghettoization was minimal. From the decade of the 1990's onwards, communal violence has gone to a higher level, where ‘hate the other’ sentiments have worsened and the ‘non-sale of housing units to the Muslim minority’ have become the unwritten norm⁸² To this day, many areas of Mumbai are blocked off for Muslims attempting to rent or purchase a home.⁸³ After the 1992-1993 riots, Muslim shop owners were afraid to write their signs in Urdu for fear of being targeted by Sena gangsters.

⁸¹ Shaban, “*Muslims and the Politics of Exclusion*”, pg. 191

⁸² *ibid*, pg 103

⁸³ Gaikwad, Rahi. "In Mumbai, a 'no Rent, No Sale' Policy." *The Hindu*. July 05, 2016.

Due partially to the huge shifts in refugee camps, the demographics of the slums around Bombay were changed drastically after 1993. In the district of Mumbra, researchers in Mumbai have tracked the population changes after the violence: “From 44,000 in 1992, the population of Mumbra today stands upwards of 800,000, three-fourths of which are Muslims who came here from different parts of the city after experiencing the violence of 1992-93.”⁸⁴ After the riots, the city’s Muslims struggled not only physical displacement, but with a linguistic and political alienation as the 1996 Sena-BJP rule scrapped state minorities commissions and funding for Urdu academies.⁸⁵

In *Ethnic Politics, Muslims and Space in Contemporary Mumbai*, Abdul Shaban notes that ability to participate in public spaces defines the context in which children are socialized and profoundly affects the construction of their worldview.⁸⁶ In his words, Muslims have been metaphorically and literally, “deterritorialized” and “denationalized” from the “imagined community” in India.⁸⁷

The vitriol and exclusionary language of public figures like Thackeray are largely predicated on the “othering” of Muslims, arguing that they are disloyal, corroding Hindu values, and a threat to the nation. This manifests in hyper-local conflicts over physical space. Since the riots, Shaban notes that there has, “hardly been any dispersal of Muslim population from these ghettos to other developed and ethnically-mixed neighbourhoods of the city, but only to new ghettos like Mumbra and Mira Road.”⁸⁸ Ghettoization of the Muslim population in the city also shapes the availability of facilities like proper drainage, staffed and affordable schools, and other necessary infrastructure. Without these, crime and desperation amongst the youth in the slums lead to massive obstacles for social and economic progress.

⁸⁴ “*Remembering 1992: Deepening Divides*”, Tata Institute of Social Sciences

⁸⁵ Punwani, “*Politics of Violence*”, 2012.

⁸⁶ Shaban, Abdul. “*Lives of Muslims*”, 2018. pg.208

⁸⁷ *ibid* pp. 208-214

⁸⁸ *ibid* pg. 215

After the riots, the process of forcing refugee camps and slums for displaced Muslims into segregated and underdeveloped areas only fueled stereotypes. There are rhetorical and metaphorical lines drawn between Hindu and Muslim communities throughout the city. Muslim communities are referred to as “mini-Pakistans”, emphasizing that they are strangers in their own land.⁸⁹ This discourse of denationalization, Shaban argues, compresses time and space to blame Indian Muslims for the wounds of the Partition in 1947.⁹⁰ The compression of space is particularly clear when Maharashtrian Hindus refer to the lines between their neighborhood and the Muslim neighborhood in English as the “line of control”, or in Hindi as a “*shanti rekha*”- a peace line.⁹¹ By reflecting the language used at the India-Pakistan border, thousands of miles away, we are reminded of Maharashtrians’ fluid understanding of space and proximity discussed earlier. When connected to a familiar religious or political discourse, there no longer remains a linear understanding of proximal relevance.

10. Conclusion

There have been many harrowing incidents of communal violence in India since Partition, but the Bombay riots are memorable to those even far from the city. The violence was intimate, as neighbor turned against neighbor and the pressures from decades of vicious rhetoric manifested in a basic contempt for the other.

Throughout this analysis, we have traced important themes of communal conflict and hindutva thought to gain a fuller understanding of the various representations of the Muslim other in Hindu nationalist discourse and the ways in which it has manifested in physical spaces. From the foundations of the Babri Masjid conflict to the colonial roots of hindutva, the rhetoric of Hindu nationalism has focused on simultaneously consolidating various Hindu sects and narrowing Hindu identity in opposition to a Muslim other.

⁸⁹ *ibid* p. 213

⁹⁰ *ibid*

⁹¹ *ibid*

This stark relief was achieved by changing Hindu iconography to fit the “lost Golden Age” narrative, creating new temple rituals in to drive conflict, and shifting ideas like *sewa* or service to a duty-bearing value necessitating violence. The discourse of hindutva was developed through the television adaptations of the Mahabharata and Ramayana, connecting the Babri Masjid conflict with the personal piety of millions of Hindus.

Bal Thackeray’s Shiv Sena capitalizes on this religious and cultural moment by offering an opportunity to regain Hindus’ lost manhood stolen by “Muslim invaders”. For Thackeray, the only way to effectively stamp out the menace of “anti-national” Muslims was through the *sewa* of violence. The violence of 1992-1993 mirrored that same narrative. The continuing divides have manifested themselves in the physical space of the city, changing community geographies and conceptions of belonging.

As right-wing Hindu nationalists continue to make cultural and political inroads through vigilante cow protection campaigns, anti-Muslim immigration policies, and continual “saffronization” of historical education, it is becoming increasingly essential to understand the foundations of hindutva discourse.⁹²

⁹² Bhatia, Aditi. "The ‘saffronisation’ of India and Contemporary Political Ideology." *World Englishes and Critical Discourse Analysis*, May 2020.

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