

# TRANSNATIONAL FUNDING IN HINDU SUPREMACIST MOVEMENTS

Role of Corporates  
in Illicit Political  
Finance



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TRANSNATIONAL FUNDING IN HINDU SUPREMACIST MOVEMENTS

A SCOPING PAPER

ON THE ROLE OF CORPORATES IN ILLICIT POLITICAL FINANCE

August 2024

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With India entering its third term under the rule of Narendra Modi, it is more important than ever to examine the illicit finance behind Hindu supremacist movements. As a prime minister closely associated with billionaire tycoons and who has overseen an unprecedented surge in political finance in the country, it is worth scrutinising the role, scale and sources of financial flows behind Modi, the Bharatiya Janata Party and their Hindu nationalist agenda. Therefore, this scoping paper offers a preliminary understanding of the vast network of illicit political finance behind Hindu supremacist movements, outlining the key players and policies involved in these flows, as well as highlighting the adverse intersectional impacts on oppressed, minority communities.

The report first establishes the urgency of looking at Modi and his financial flows by highlighting the role of illicit political finance in his rise to power. It shows that for over two decades now, Modi has embraced a governance of crony capitalism, establishing a quid pro quo relationship in which business houses benefit from favourable fiscal policies, investment incentives and project allotments. In return, Modi has been able to rely on corporate support and cultivate an image of the “development man” that he uses to shift focus away from his violent and virulent Hindu nationalism. The first chapter illustrates how Modi adopted this tactic in Gujarat, with his flagship business summit, Vibrant Gujarat, and its role in resurrecting his image after the Gujarat pogrom of 2002. It also highlights the crony capitalism under Modi in Gujarat, especially with the business houses run by the Gujarati industrialists, under Gautam Adani, the Ambanis and the Ruias.

The paper then examines two policies that are perhaps the most significant contributors to illicit political finance in India—electoral bonds and electoral trusts. The two schemes combined allowed the BJP to build up a treasure chest of INR 12,930 crore—over USD 1.5 billion—from anonymous corporate and individual donations—between 2018 and 2023. The chapter demonstrates the scale of illicit corporate financing behind these donations, identifying the different companies that have donated millions of dollars to the BJP. Further, the illicit nature of these donations, as well as the weaponization of political finance, is established by the quid pro quo relationship of these payments, with numerous companies making donations in response to scrutiny by investigative agencies.

In the third chapter, the report unpacks the expansive global network of financial flows behind Hindu supremacist movements. Across these international Hindu nationalist organizations—the Global Sangh—a pattern emerges reflecting the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s success in reproducing its organizational structures abroad while maintain the primacy of its Indian counterparts. The Global Sangh primarily operates through numerous multi-million-dollar tax-exempt charitable organizations — in particular in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada. These Hindutva charities are often interconnected with each other through other organizations, financial structures and individuals.

The chapter identifies four central organisations in the Global Sangh—namely, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Sewa International, and the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation. It looks at the financial flows of these organisations across four countries where the Global Sangh is most powerful and well-established: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. These organisations funnel millions of dollars into initiatives in their own respective countries and into India, which are masked as charitable purposes, but effectively serve Hindu supremacist agendas, such as educational initiatives that indoctrinate children into the Hindutva movement. While the source of funding for these organisations remains undisclosed owing to their status as charitable foundations, the report

identifies certain corporations that are run by the same families behind the charities to trace their financial flows.

Finally, the paper lays special emphasis on studying the intersectional impact of Hindutva funding flows. It uses three frameworks to study this impact, by looking at how Hindutva disproportionate discriminates against religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians, the oppressed caste Dalit communities, and the indigenous Adivasi communities. The report shows how the Hindu supremacist financial flows are used in anti-Muslim initiatives not just in India, but globally as well.

In the context of caste, the report spotlights the immense funding behind the Hindu nationalist movement in the United States to exclude the discourse on the oppression of Dalits within Hinduism from the academic curriculum. The chapter then looks at the indoctrination of children from indigenous tribal communities, and how the Modi regime enabled the destruction and acquisition of their lands, in violation of forest conservation laws, to allow extractivist mining projects.



## INTRODUCTION

In 2023, India witnessed the highest amount of remittance inflows across the world, at a whopping USD 125 billion, followed by Mexico (USD 67 billion) and China (USD 50 billion).<sup>1</sup> The numbers are indicative of the strength and wealth of the Indian diaspora—over a third of the remittances were received from highly skilled immigrants in the US, Singapore and the UK. Nearly three dozen CEOs of the world’s biggest corporations are Indian origin and account for a combined business of over USD 1 trillion.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, India also recently recorded the third-highest trade-related illicit financial flow globally, with USD 83.5 billion escaping the government’s tax net in 2020. The Financial Action Task Force, an inter-governmental body formed to combat global money laundering and terror financing, is expected to submit its report on India this year—and for the first time, it might be compelled to look at transnational Hindutva funding.

Ahead of its Mutual Evaluation Review of India in November 2023, the FATF received two reports that may have raised concerns, one by Amnesty International India and another by the Global NPO Coalition on FATF. Amnesty noted how India’s authoritarian tilt under Prime Minister Narendra Modi had led to the weaponization of the FATF’s earlier recommendations to crack down on the NPO sector, particularly those that were critical of the government and undertaking rights-based work.<sup>3</sup> The Global NPO Coalition’s report went a step further to state that while clamping down on NPOs, the Modi government had also

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Remittance Flows Continue to Grow in 2023 Albeit at Slower Pace’ (World Bank, 18 Dec 2023) <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/12/18/remittance-flows-grow-2023-slower-pace-migration-development-brief>> accessed 18 December, 2023

<sup>2</sup> Yoosef K. ‘35 Indian-origin CEOs run global giants with over \$1 trillion revenue’ *CNBC TV18* (23 March 2023)

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, ‘India – Growing Concerns on the Misuse of FATF standards to Target Civil Society’ (2024) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa20/8202/2024/en/>> accessed 24 June 2024

turned a blind eye to terrorist financing of Hindu nationalist—also known as Hindutva—groups in the country.<sup>4</sup>

The charges levelled against the Indian government are significant not only in the context of the FATF review, but more so amid the rising Hindu nationalism and authoritarianism over the last decade. While the Hindu nationalist movement in India is nearly a century old, the national elections of 2014 proved to be an epochal event in its history. That year, the Bharatiya Janata Party achieved an incredible feat: it won the elections with an absolute majority, and it did so on a brazen, unapologetic Hindu nationalist campaign led by Modi. It marked the first time that the Hindutva movement had entered the Indian parliament with such overwhelming success, and the first time in 30 years that any single party had won a clear majority.

The ideological fountainhead of Hindu nationalism in India is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS seeks to transform the country into a theocratic Hindu nation and runs a vast network of organizations — collectively known as the Sangh Parivar, or Sangh family — both within India and abroad.<sup>5</sup> The BJP is its political wing and Modi was a full-time worker of the RSS before he formally entered politics. As a consequence, the Modi years has “rendered porous the associations between government and ultra-nationalist groups.”<sup>6</sup> While rising authoritarianism on the one hand has led to the state’s role in neutralizing all democratic institutions responsible for accountability—including the judiciary, the media, the bureaucracy, the security apparatus and public information mechanisms—on the other, it has encouraged right-wing vigilantism to enforce Hindu majoritarianism. Anderson and Longkumer (2018) have observed that “Hindutva since 2014 appears to be more confident, proud, brazen, and belligerent than ever before.”

The Modi years have also marked by an unprecedented rise in political funding. While Indian elections have seen a steady increase in spending over the last two decades, the increase since

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<sup>4</sup> Global NPO Coalition, ‘Indian Government shields Hindutva Terror Groups in breach of FATF Standards’ (2023) < <https://fatfplatform.org/assets/India-shields-Hindutva-terror-groups.pdf> > accessed 29 October 2023

<sup>5</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

<sup>6</sup> Angana P Chatterji, Thomas Blom Hansen, Christopher Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State* (Oxford University Press, 2019) 12

2014 has been staggering—and an overwhelming majority of the political funding is for and by the BJP. A report by the Centre for Media Studies estimated that the total election expenditure in the India's 2019 elections was a whopping INR 60,000 crore (USD 7.5 billion), making it the world's most expensive election ever—and the BJP was responsible for nearly half of it. The BJP's unrivalled financial growth and dominance is similarly reflected in ADR's studies of assets and liabilities disclosed by India's national parties. In the financial year 2004-05, the BJP reported total assets worth INR 122 crore (USD 14 million), which rose to INR 893 crore (USD 107 million) by 2015-16, and to INR 6,041 crore (USD 726 million) by 2021-22.<sup>7</sup> The BJP is the only national party that has seen its assets grow every year since it came to power in 2014. In the 2021-22 declarations, the Congress was a distant second with total assets amounting to INR 763 crore (USD 91 million).

Modi's brand of authoritarian Hindutva has also been paired with distinctly pro-corporate and pro-upper caste policies.<sup>8</sup> The steep rise in the past ten years is in large part due to amendments to India's political finance policy, introduced by the Modi government in 2017. Most significant among these was the electoral bonds scheme, and opaque political funding system that allowed individuals and corporations to make anonymous donations to political parties. While the identities of the donors remain anonymous, party declarations reveal that in the first five years of the electoral bonds scheme, from 2017-22, the BJP received a whopping INR 5,271 (USD 634 million) crore via bonds, while the Congress was a distant second with INR 952 crore (USD 114 million).<sup>9</sup> The amount was over three times the sum of all donations received by all other national parties in the country.

Two other important amendments firstly, removed the cap on corporate donations, which previously limited it to 7.5% of a company's average three-year net profit, and second, dropped the requirement for corporations to declare their political

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<sup>7</sup> Center for Media Studies, 'Poll Expenditure, The 2019 Elections' (2019) <<https://cmsindia.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/Poll-Expenditure-the-2019-elections-cms-report.pdf>> accessed 2019

<sup>8</sup> Angana P Chatterji, Thomas Blom Hansen, Christopher Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State* (Oxford University Press, 2019)

<sup>9</sup> Walter Anderson, Shridhar Damle, *Messengers of Hindu Nationalism* (Hurst and Company, London, 2019)

contributions.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, when the BJP government was in power in 2003, it had introduced another amendment that made contributions to political parties exempt from taxes. The combined effect of these policies was a strong incentive for corporations to play an increasing role in political finance.

Given this context of illicit finance in India, the political transformation of the country into authoritarian Hindu nationalism, and the corresponding monumental rise in the BJP's political finances, it is exceedingly important to study these aspects in closer detail. Moreover, taking into consideration the economic strength of the Indian diaspora and their multinational corporations, it is necessary to study this through a transnational lens. As such, this report is a scoping paper on the financial flows of transnational Hindutva movements, focusing on the role played by corporates on illicit political funding, with an intersectional analysis on how this disproportionately affects minority communities in India. In turn, the report also proposes strategic opportunities for interventions necessary to tackle the negative influence of corporate money in Hindutva movements.

As a scoping paper for targeted interventions, the aim of this report is not to conduct in-depth, exhaustive research, but rather to provide a comprehensive and insightful study of various transnational illicit funding routes between corporations and Hindutva movements.

In the first chapter, the report will first introduce the concepts of Hindu nationalism and illicit finance, followed by a brief background of the role of corporations in the resurgence of Hindutva. In this context, it will explain why India Inc was essential to resurrect the international image of Narendra Modi in the aftermath of the anti-Muslim pogrom in the Indian state of Gujarat under his chief ministership in 2002. The high-profile global business summit, Vibrant Gujarat, allowed Modi to go from being denied a diplomatic visa by the United States, to receiving a hero's welcome by the US president Donald Trump in front of a fifty-thousand-strong crowd in Texas.

In the second chapter, the report will study the illicit corporate finance in electoral politics in India, focusing on the funds

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<sup>10</sup> Devesh Kapur, Milan Vaishnav, *Costs of Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2018)

received by the BJP. In this context, it will analyse the little information that is available about the electoral bonds scheme, as briefly mentioned earlier in this introduction, as well as electoral trusts setup by corporations in India for the purpose of political funding. The report will also highlight the transnational presence of the different corporations directly financing the BJP, in effect lifting the corporate veil over the global financing behind Hindutva politics in India. Finally, it will look at the international branches of the BJP and their financial support to the party in India.

The third chapter will first introduce the global Hindutva ecosystem, looking at key organisations in countries where the transnational Hindu nationalist movement is strongest and oldest, namely, the US, the UK, Canada, and Australia. The ecosystem primarily operates through numerous multi-million-dollar tax-exempt charitable organizations, and the chapter will begin with a brief overview of these charities and their financials. It will then examine the nexus between these charities and corporations, and present the publicly available information about the scale of corporate funding behind these charities, and how it funds Hindutva movements, both in India and across the world.

The fourth chapter will focus on how transnational corporate financing to Hindutva movements adversely and disproportionately affect minority communities. In this context, it will look at the mining conglomerates Adani and Vedanta's displacement of indigenous communities in India, the Islamophobia of the global Hindutva ecosystem, and the further marginalization of oppressed caste communities.

In the fifth and final chapter, this report will propose strategic opportunities for interventions in order to tackle the influence of illicit corporate finance in transnational Hindutva movements. It will examine the multi-pronged ways in which international organisations can counter the Hindu nationalist movement. While doing so, the report will also address the limitations of this scoping paper and potential avenues for further research.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE HINDUTVA, MODI AND CORPORATE NEXUS

To understand the nature of illicit finance in Hindutva movements, it is important to first understand the resurgence of Hindu nationalism in India, and the mutually beneficial relationship between the prime minister Narendra Modi and corporations. In this chapter, the report will contextualise why corporate finance has come to play such a central role in the Hindu nationalist transformation of contemporary India.

### HINDUTVA AND THE RSS

The Hindu nationalist movement in India is over a century old. Three developments in the early 1900s lay the foundation for political Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva. The first was the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1915, as a pan India organisation with the aim of uniting and representing the country's Hindu population. This was followed, in 1923, by the group's leader, Vinayak Savarkar, writing *Essentials of Hindutva*, which was later retitled *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* The book marked the first codification of Hindu nationalist ideology and articulation for the creation of a Hindu Rashtra, or the Hindu nation.<sup>11</sup>

According to Savarkar's conception of Hinduism, "Everyone who regards and claims this *bharatbhoomi* [Bharat land] from the Indus to the seas as his fatherland and holy land is a Hindu." As the historian Tanika Sarkar has noted, "Savarkar made Hindu and India synonymous, to reserve the nation for Hindus alone."<sup>12</sup> In effect, Savarkar's definition excluded followers of all religions originating outside the Indian subcontinent, including Muslims and Christians, who presently form over 15 percent of India's population.

The third, and perhaps the most significant development in India's Hindu nationalist politics, took place in 1925 with the formation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh—National

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<sup>11</sup> Christophe f, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (Columbia University Press, 1996)

<sup>12</sup> Angana P Chatterji, Thomas Blom Hansen, Christopher Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State* (Oxford University Press, 2019) 156

Volunteers Association. The RSS is a right-wing, Hindu nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organisation whose ideologues have taken inspiration from Mussolini and Hitler. Its primary and smallest unit of organisation are its *shakhas*, or branches, that are organised by its volunteer members across the country. The RSS created local branches across towns and villages that spread Hindutva ideology among the masses, and quickly grew to become the most powerful Hindu nationalist movement with over 600,000 volunteers by the time of India's independence in 1947.<sup>13</sup> As of 2020, the RSS is reported to have over 57,000 shakhas and four million volunteers across the country.<sup>14</sup>

In the years after independence, the RSS began to expand its influence in India by setting up organisations for specific functions, including a religious wing, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad; a service wing, Sewa Bharati; as well as a student wing, an education wing, a trade union wing, and an economic wing, among others. The RSS remained out of politics for a long time, focusing its efforts instead on a cultural transformation from the grassroots of society.<sup>15</sup> This changed in 1948, when Mohandas Gandhi was assassinated by a member of the RSS.<sup>16</sup> The assassination led to the Indian government imposing a ban on the RSS—which was lifted in 1949—and the arrest of 20,000 RSS volunteers.<sup>17</sup> In the absence of political support, discussions within the organisation led to a foray into politics with the creation of the Jana Sangh—the forerunner of the BJP.

Over the years, the RSS has also established a large global presence, with branches of the RSS's international chapter, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, operating in over 40 countries.<sup>18</sup> Its affiliates, such as the VHP and Sewa, have also established international chapters across the world. Across these different global Hindu right-wing organisations, a pattern emerges

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<sup>13</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton University Press, 2009)

<sup>14</sup> 'Factsheet: RSS' (Bridge Initiative, 2021)

<<https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh-rss/>> accessed 18 May 2021

<sup>15</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton University Press, 2009)

<sup>16</sup> Dharendra K. Jha, 'The Apostle of Hate' *The Caravan* (1 January 2020)

<sup>17</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi's India* (Princeton University Press, 2019)

<sup>18</sup> 'Factsheet: RSS' (Bridge Initiative, 2021)

<<https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh-rss/>> accessed 2 August 2024

reflecting the Sangh's success in reproducing its organisational structures abroad—such as the HSS being the apex organisation within each country's Hindu right-wing network—while maintain the primacy of its Indian counterparts.<sup>19</sup> This web of Hindu right-wing organisations is collectively known as the Sangh Parivar—or Sangh Family—and the RSS sits at its helm.

Even today, the RSS website openly declares that it believes “from day one that this country belonged to the Hindus,” that the “the national identity of the people of this country is essentially Hindu.”<sup>20</sup>

#### NARENDRA MODI AND VIBRANT GUJARAT

Narendra Modi joined an RSS shakha as a *bal swayamsevak*—child volunteer—in the state of Gujarat's Vadnagar town at the age of 8.<sup>21</sup> By the 1970s, when Modi was in his 20s, Modi had become a *pracharak*, or full-time member, of the RSS. He rose within the ranks of the organisation quickly, and was ultimately deputed to its political wing, the BJP, and appointed as chief minister of Gujarat for the first time in 2001. Within months of Modi coming to power, in February 2002, Gujarat witnessed a large-scale, targeted anti-Muslim pogrom. A British government inquiry found Modi to be “directly responsible” for the violence.<sup>22</sup>

Riding the wave of religious polarisation and support from the Hindu majority, Modi announced elections months before they were due, and began a state-wide election campaign that introduced him as the “*Hindu Hriday Samrat*”—the Emperor of Hindu Hearts. Modi's campaign adopted aggressive and divisive Hindu majoritarian rhetoric that routinely used communal dog whistles referring to Islamic terrorism, a high Muslim birth rate, anti-Pakistan messaging, and about how he would save Gujarat.<sup>23</sup> The BJP won a decisive victory, winning 42 of the 50 seats in the three districts most affected by the violence. The religious

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<sup>19</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, ‘The Sangh Parivar and the Hindu Diaspora in the West: What Kind of Long Distance Nationalism?’ (2007)  
<<https://academic.oup.com/ips/article-abstract/1/3/278/1851203>> accessed 14 August 2007

<sup>20</sup> Basic FAQ on RSS (RSS website, 3 June 2007)  
<<https://www.rss.org//Encyc/2017/6/3/basic-faq-on-rss-eng.html>>

<sup>21</sup> Vinod K. Jose, ‘The Emperor Uncrowned’ *The Caravan* (1 March, 2012)

<sup>22</sup> ‘India: The Modi Question’ (BBC, 2023)  
<<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0dkb144/>> accessed 2 August 2024

<sup>23</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi's India* (Princeton University Press, 2019)



polarisation under Gujarat brought BJP the support of the so-called lower-caste communities, a significant achievement for the party and the RSS, which had historically been an upper-caste movement. Modi's ability to unite the oppressed castes with the upper caste on a common brazen Hindu nationalist platform proved crucial to his election as prime minister in 2014 as well.

But in order to do that, Modi needed to first rebrand his image. Following the Gujarat pogrom, both the United States and the British governments had imposed diplomatic sanctions on Modi due to his role in allowing the violence, if not ensuring it. While his Hindutva politics had earned him popular electoral support, to receive the political and financial endorsements necessary to become prime minister, Modi needed to rebuild himself.

To do so, Modi turned to corporate India. As the journalist Vinod K Jose observed in a 2012 profile, "Modi has successfully deployed the ancient mercantile and entrepreneurial energy of Gujarat to overhaul his own image."<sup>24</sup> Yet, this took some doing. In the immediate aftermath of the violence, corporate India had publicly voiced their concerns and anger with Modi and his handling of the violence. In February 2003, Jose writes, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)—the country's biggest business trade association—held a special session to meet Modi, at the latter's request, but he was heckled on stage by two prominent businessmen.

But Modi did not cower. He accused them of being "pseudo-secular"—a favourite phrase of the Hindu Right who are dismissive of India's religious pluralism—and of having vested interests, falsely maligning a peaceful state. Soon after, a group of Gujarati businessmen close to Modi, including Gautam Adani the chairman of the Adani Group, formed a rival business association and called upon Gujarati-run businesses to quit the CII on account of the affront to Modi. Ultimately, the CII agreed to a compromise, issued an apology, and over the years, Modi won over the business community.

Modi's ability to transform his image from the Hindutva fanatic behind the pogrom in Gujarat to the wizard behind the Gujarat model of development and investment was crucial to his candidature for prime ministership. And essential to this has been corporate India and the staggering sums of money they have

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<sup>24</sup> Vinod K. Jose, 'The Emperor Uncrowned' *The Caravan* (1 March, 2012)

invested in Gujarat. Since the pogrom, Modi has organised ten “Vibrant Gujarat” summits, in which global corporate titans arrive in Gandhinagar to invest huge sums of money into the state of Gujarat, and in the process pay homage to Modi. In the first five summits since the Gujarat pogrom, investments worth USD 920 billion were pledged—although analysis has suggested that only 25 percent of the promised investments were made.<sup>25</sup> The latest summit held in January 2024 saw pledges were worth over USD 300 billion.<sup>26</sup>

#### CRONY CAPITALISM IN MODI’S INDIA

In Gujarat from 2001 to 2014, and across India from 2014 to present, the Modi years have been marked by a phenomenal rise in fortunes of India’s biggest business houses, especially those run by Gujaratis, such as the Adani Group, the Reliance Groups run by the Ambanis and the Essar Group run by the Ruias. This has been made possible by a combination of factors, including the Gujarati tradition of collaboration between corporations and the state, the maintenance of low wages, the removal of regulatory obstacles, the acquisition of private land for allotment to industries, and tax incentives.<sup>27</sup> As prime minister, Modi has pushed policies that incentivise large investments by foreign companies, particularly in infrastructure and defence sectors.<sup>28</sup>

There is perhaps no better example of Modi’s close ties with corporations and business tycoons than that of the billionaire Gautam Adani and the Adani Group. When Modi took office as prime minister in May 2014, he flew from Gujarat to Delhi on Adani’s private jet. Within months of coming to power, the State Bank of India announced its decision to advance a billion-dollar loan to the Adani Group for its Carmichael coal mine project in Australia. During the Modi years, the Adani Group has seen a spectacular rise, unparalleled in the infrastructure sector, with the acquisition of massive projects. Four years after Modi came to power, the government changed the policy to allow corporations with no prior experience to bid for airports, which was followed by Adani taking over six airport projects. Adani’s wealth grew

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> ‘Vibrant Summit ends with staggering 26.33 lakh crore investment pledges: Gujarat Government’, *The Hindu*. (13 January 2024)

<sup>27</sup> Sabyasachi B R Chaudhury, ‘How India’s Economy and Hindutva Rise Together’ *The Wire* (26 Aug 2023)

<sup>28</sup> Dinesh Narayanan, ‘Billion-dollar loan to Adani cements Modi’s friendship with corporate India’ *Scroll* (18 Nov 2014)

from USD 70 million to USD 7 billion between 2002 and 2014 when Modi was chief minister of Gujarat, and grew to USD 26 billion by 2020.<sup>29</sup>

Adani is far from being the only beneficiary of Modi's corporate relations. In *The Economist's* crony capitalism index of 2023, India ranked 10, with wealth in the crony capitalist sectors having risen from 5 percent to 8 percent of the country's GDP during the Modi years.<sup>30</sup> In 2020, another article in *The Economist* noted that even as the Indian economy shrank during the lockdown, India's wealthy became even richer by the "wielding of political influence and privileged access to capital to capture and protect existing markets."<sup>31</sup> Mukesh Ambani, another Gujarati tycoon with close ties to Modi, saw his wealth rise from USD 23 billion to USD 55 billion during Modi's first term, and in January 2024 he became Asia's richest person with his net worth crossing USD 100 billion.

It is not just Modi, but the RSS as well that has developed closer connections with corporations in recent years. The billionaire businessman Shiv Nadar, founder of HCL Technologies, was the chief guest at the RSS's foundation day celebrations in 2019. That year, the industrialist Ratan Tata, who had previously challenged Modi on his role in the Gujarat pogrom, visited the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat at its Nagpur headquarters.<sup>32</sup> The previous year, Tata Trusts donated INR 100 crore to the RSS-affiliated National Cancer Institute in Nagpur.

In this context, it is important to look at how corporate finance supports Hindutva movements.

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<sup>29</sup> Julien Bouissou, 'In India, 'crony capitalism' is on the rise' *Le Monde* (15 Sep 2022); Stephanie Findlay, Hudson Lockett, 'Modi's Rockefeller': Gautam Adani and the concentration of power in India' *Financial Times* (13 Nov 2020)

<sup>30</sup> 'The 2023 crony-capitalism index' *The Economist* (2 May 2023)

<sup>31</sup> 'India's super-rich are getting much richer' *The Economist* (3 Dec 2020)

<sup>32</sup> Subodh Verma, 'Under Modi Rule, Ambani, Adani Have Doubled Their Wealth' *News Click* (13 Oct 2019)

## CHAPTER TWO: CORPORATES AND POLITICAL FINANCE

On 15 February 2024, the Supreme Court of India delivered a landmark judgment striking down the controversial electoral bonds scheme that allowed for anonymous corporate funding to political parties—and ensured vastly disproportionate funding for the BJP. The court’s verdict dealt a heavy blow to illicit corporate funding, but it came seven years too late, considering that the policies had been challenged when they were introduced in 2017. In the interim period, staggering amounts of illicit corporate funding made its way into the Hindu nationalist party and its movement. In this chapter, the report will unpack the scale of this funding, albeit the opacity built into the system so far creates limitations in the availability of public information.

### THE ELECTORAL BONDS SCHEME

The Electoral Bonds Scheme was introduced by the Modi government through the Finance Act of 2017, with corresponding amendments to the laws governing India’s elections, banks, companies and tax disclosure obligations. To understand the scale to which the government encouraged corporate funding, it is also important to first understand the legal regime of electoral finance.

The Companies Act of 1956, when introduced in India, did not contain any specific provisions regulating political finance. It was first introduced by an amendment in 1960, then prohibited in 1969 after a report warning of the dangers of political finance, and reintroduced in 1985 with specific conditions. These included that the donations could not exceed 5% of its average net profits in the preceding three financial years; that each donation would need to be disclosed in their accounts; and that the company should have been in existence for more than three years. When the Companies Act of 2013 replaced the previous law, these provisions were retained, but the cap on contributions was raised from 5 to 7.5%.

The Finance Act of 2017 removed all these conditions, such that there was no cap on donations, and only the total donations in a financial year would need to be disclosed, without identifying the recipient of the contribution. The Finance Act also removed obligations on political parties to maintain any record of

corporate donations in their tax records, if these donations were made through electoral bonds. Back in 2003, the BJP-led government of the time had amended the Income Tax to make contributions to political parties tax-deductible, in order to incentivise contributions through transparent channels, such as banking systems, rather than through cash. Ironically, the BJP used the same logic in defence of the electoral bond scheme, and it was the same finance minister, Arun Jaitley, who introduced both amendments.

In 2003, the BJP-led government had also introduced an amendment to the Representation of People's Act that mandated political parties to disclose all contributions over INR 20,000 to the Election Commission of India. This obligation, too, was removed by the Finance Act of 2017.

Both the Reserve Bank of India and the Election Commission of India raised concerns about the severe consequences of the electoral bonds scheme in terms of allowing money laundering, opaque political financing, and transnational interference to the Modi government before the scheme was introduced. The Election Commission noted in a letter to the amendments to electoral laws were “a retrograde step as far as transparency of donations is concerned,” while the RBI noted that it opened the scheme “may not only be seen as facilitating money laundering but could also be projected (albeit wrongly) as enabling it.” The Election Commission, too, noted that the amendments to the Companies Act “opens up the possibilities of shell companies being set up for the sole purpose of making donations to political parties.” Yet, these significant concerns were ignored, and in January 2018, the scheme was formally notified.

The Supreme Court judgment on the scheme made note of certain important points before arriving at its conclusion. For one, it observed that the legal regime in India does not distinguish between campaign funding and electoral funding, which means that funding is made to political parties, not candidates; that contributions can be made through the year, not only ahead of elections; and that parties are free to spend this money on any expense, not just campaigning. As a result, the court noted, “there is a legitimate possibility that financial contribution to a political

party would lead to *quid pro quo* arrangements,” which could “not only influence electoral outcomes but also policies.”<sup>33</sup>

The BJP encashed electoral bonds worth INR 6,060.5 crore—over USD 700 million—between April 2019 and January 2024, according to data supplied by the Election Commission following Supreme Court directives to the State Bank of India. Since March 2018, since the scheme came into effect, the party has redeemed a total of INR 8,251.8 crore—nearly USD 1 billion—amounting to just over half the entire donations made through electoral bonds.

The disclosures mandated by the Supreme Court reveal several details about the illicit corporate funding behind the BJP’s treasure chest. In the first year after the scheme was introduced, the BJP had received only INR 210 crore through electoral bonds, which rose to nearly INR 1300 crore by 2022-23, and witnessed its peak ahead of the general elections of 2019, with the Hindu nationalist party receiving INR 2,550 crore—over USD 300 million—that year alone.

An analysis by *The Hindu* of 385 corporations that made donations to the BJP found that between 2022 and 2024, 55 of them made contributions exceeding the 7.5% cap.<sup>34</sup> The Finance Act of 2017 had removed the 7.5% restriction on corporate funding to political parties, an act that was struck down as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court judgment in February. These corporations made an aggregate donation of Rs. 1,993 crore—and the BJP alone received about 71% of these donations, amounting Rs 1,414 crore—around USD 168 million.

Another investigation by *The Hindu* found that at least 45 corporations that donated electoral bonds had suspicious financials that suggested the possibility of money laundering.<sup>35</sup> Among these are thirty-three firms who have donated INR 576.2 crore despite recording negative or near-zero profits after tax between 2016-17 and 2022-23. The combined net losses of these 33 enterprises exceeded ₹1 lakh crore. 16 of the 33 enterprises paid zero or negative direct taxes in total. The fact that these loss-

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<sup>33</sup> *Association for Democratic Reforms v Union of India*, 2024 INSC 113

<sup>34</sup> Prasenjit Bose, ‘Electoral bonds data: 55 firms’ purchase exceeded 7.5% cap in 2022-24, lion’s share went to BJP’ *The Hindu* (5 April 2024)

<sup>35</sup> Prasenjit Bose, ‘33 loss-making firms donated electoral bonds worth ₹582 crore, 75% went to BJP’ *The Hindu* (3 April 2024)

making corporations made such significant donations suggests that they may be operating as fronts for other firms or have misreported their revenues and losses, raising the prospect of money laundering. The BJP encashed 75% of these donations, amounting to INR 434.2 crore—over USD 50 million. Six other firms, whose donations far exceeded their net profit, paid INR 601 crore to the BJP.

The Supreme Court directives also forced the Election Commission and the State Bank of India to identify the corporations behind the political donations, thus opening a window into the illicit finance. The infrastructure company Megha Engineering was the BJP's greatest donor by a substantial margin, contributing INR 584 crore. QwikSupply, which is in effect a part of the Reliance Group, comes in second with donations of INR 410 crore.<sup>36</sup> The Keventers Group came in third with donations of INR 351 crore to the BJP, most of it made during the height of the investigations by the Enforcement Directorate, and which accounted for over half of the donations by the group of companies.<sup>37</sup>

Many donations were timed to investigations and policies that hinted towards the quid pro quo relationship flagged by the Supreme Court. For instance, firms affiliated with the Keventers Group began purchasing the anonymous bonds a year after the Enforcement Directorate launched a preliminary investigation into one of its subsidiaries, Keventer Agro Limited. In fact, a joint investigation by *Newslaundry* and *The News Minute* found that over 41 companies donated INR 417.3 crore to the BJP after being subjected to central agency action.<sup>38</sup> Among them, 18 purchased bonds worth approximately INR 2,010.5 crore—over USD 240 million, and more than five times the total amount donated by the other 41 corporations. Similarly, *Indian Express* reported that of 26 companies that bought electoral bonds and faced action from investigative agencies, 16 of them donated to parties only after

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<sup>36</sup> The Reporters Collective, 'Confirmed: A Reliance Group company donated Rs 410 crores through electoral bonds' *The Reporters' Collective* (15 March 2024)

<sup>37</sup> The Reporters Collective, 'Keventer group gave BJP Rs 320 crore while ED case was hot' *The Reporters' Collective* (22 March 2024)

<sup>38</sup> Prateek Goyal, '41 companies donated to BJP and faced central action. 18 of them bought electoral bonds of Rs 2,010 crore' *Newslaundry* (15 March 2024)

this action.<sup>39</sup> The 26 companies bought bonds worth INR 700 crore before facing the action, and INR 4,479 crore afterwards. The BJP received the maximum share of these bonds with 37% of the total, worth INR 1,900 crore—over USD 226 million.

#### ELECTORAL TRUSTS

Before the electoral bonds scheme was introduced, corporate contributions to political finance were made through electoral trusts. The Electoral Trusts Scheme was introduced in 2013 when the Indian government was led by the Congress party, arguably the main opposition party to the BJP at present. These trusts allowed political donations from individuals and companies, and could receive and distribute donations to multiple parties. The trusts would maintain records of the donors of the contributions, but would not disclose this information to the political parties. They are also required to submit annual reports to the Election Commission of India with details about the total contributions received and disbursed by them.

These reports provide further insight into the corporate financing behind the BJP. In 2021-22 and in 2022-23, the BJP received over 70 percent of all donations made to five electoral trusts—receiving INR 351 crore, or USD 42 million, and then INR 259 crore, or USD 31 million, respectively.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, since the BJP came to power in 2014, the electoral trusts have reported receiving a total of INR 2472.95 crore, of which the BJP was the beneficiary of over 73 percent, amounting to INR 1814.7 crore, or approximately USD 218 million. Moreover, another ADR analysis has shown that even in the ten years before the BJP came to power from 2004-2014, under the government led by the Congress party, the BJP received INR 422 crore from corporate donations, whereas the Congress only received INR 232 crore.

Over the ten years that the BJP held power, it has received the majority of its contributions from one trust in particular: the Prudent Electoral Trust, which was previously known as the Satya Electoral Trust. The trust was set up by the Bharti Group, a

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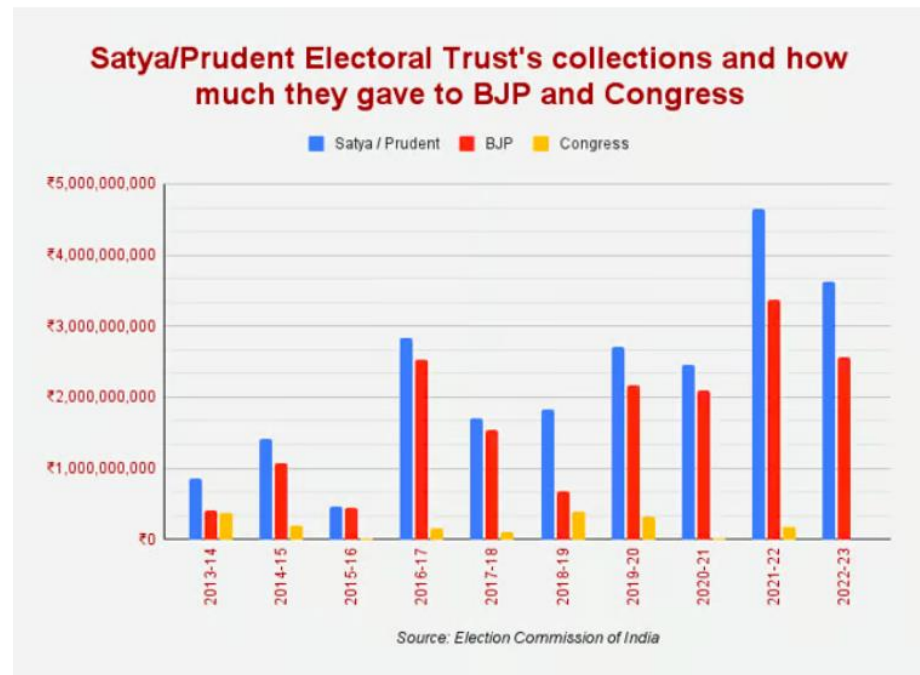
<sup>39</sup> 'Of 26 companies which faced agencies' heat, two-thirds bought electoral bonds after a knock on door' *The Indian Express* (13 January 2024)

<sup>40</sup> 'BJP Got 72% Of All Political Funds Via Electoral Trusts In 2021-22' *NDTV* (29 Dec 2024); A. Mahaprashasta, 'At Rs 259 Crore, BJP Received 70% of Donations by Electoral Trusts in 2022-23: ECI Data' *The Wire* (4 January 2024)



multinational conglomerate headquartered in Delhi. A joint investigation by two news organisations, Newslaundry and The News Minute, compared the contributions by the Satya/Prudent Electoral Trust to the BJP and the Congress over the past ten years, as illustrated below in Table 2.

**Table 2. Satya/Prudent Electoral Trust’s donations to BJP and Congress**



The trust is also the richest of all the electoral trusts in India, and consistently receives large sums of money from among India’s biggest corporations. In 2022-23, its biggest contributors were Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Limited, a multibillion-dollar infrastructure corporation with a footprint in over twenty countries, which donated INR 87 crore; Serum Institute of India, the world’s largest vaccine production company, which donated INR 50 crore; and ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel, the Indian subsidiary of Luxembourg-based ArcelorMittal, the second-largest steel producer in the world, also donated INR 50 crore. In 2021-22, Indian subsidiaries of ArcelorMittal had been the largest donors to electoral trusts, contributing a sum of INR 130 crore, or over USD 15 million. The previous year, the biggest donor was the lottery company, Future Gaming and Hotel Services, which contributed INR 100 crore. While it is difficult to state with certainty that these corporations contributed to the BJP, as Table 2 shows, it is likely given how the BJP received the vast majority

of contributions by electoral trusts in general, and the Prudent Electoral Trust in particular.

Evidently, the BJP has consistently drawn significant corporate funding, and this funding has seen a radical upsurge under the Modi years. While the opacity and incentives of the electoral bonds scheme explains part of the reasons behind the massive financial contributions, the authoritarian actions of the Modi government also play a role. The joint investigation by Newslandry and The News Minute also revealed that at least 30 companies that donated nearly INR 335 crore—over USD 40 million—between 2018 and 2023 had faced action by central agencies during that time. These agencies include the Income Tax authorities, the Enforcement Directorate, and the Central Bureau of Investigation.

The investigation also indicated that 23 of these companies had not donated money to the BJP between 2014, when it came to power, until the central agencies took action against them. Six companies that had donated to the BJP in the preceding year, faced measures for skipping donations in one financial year. Several companies made the donations immediately after the initiation of measures against them. For instance, the year before Future Gaming made its donation of INR 100 crore to the Prudent Electoral Trust, India's income-tax authorities had raided 70 offices linked to the company. The following year, Future Gaming also donated INR 5 crore to the BJP directly.

There is no smoking gun that establishes a quid pro quo arrangement behind these contributions. However, the timing and patterns behind them points to a crony capitalism funding behind the Hindu nationalist party's activities. Moreover, allegations of undue benefits to these corporations have been raised by opposition parties as well. For instance, in the year that ArcelorMittal's subsidiaries contributed INR 130 crore to the electoral trust, the Congress party in the state of Gujarat accused the ruling BJP state government of diverting large swathes of protected forest land for the corporation.<sup>41</sup> As such, it is clear that corporations with a presence across the globe play a central role in the political financing of the BJP and its Hindu nationalist movement in India.

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<sup>41</sup> 'Cong-BJP spar over diversion of forest land to ArcelorMittal' *The Indian Express* (23 March 2024)

### CHAPTER THREE: THE GLOBAL HINDUTVA ECOSYSTEM

In September 2014, just four months after Narendra Modi came to power in India, he addressed a crowd of over 20,000 people at the iconic Madison Square Garden—the largest reception ever for an Indian prime minister. It was his first visit to the country after his visa had been revoked nine years earlier as a foreign government official who “was responsible for or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom.”<sup>42</sup> The British government had similarly revoked Modi’s visa due to his role in the 2002 Gujarat pogrom, but in 2015, Modi addressed an estimated 60,000 supporters at London’s Wembley stadium. Four years later, Modi returned to the United States, this time visiting Texas, at a spectacle attended by over 50,000 supporters, making it the largest ever gathering for a foreign political leader in the country.

This turnaround of diplomatic policy and the scale of his popularity have both been possible primarily due to the efforts of the global Hindutva ecosystem, and the vast funding it enjoys. As noted earlier, the Hindu nationalist movement is led by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which sits at the helm of a large network of organisations known as the Sangh Parivar—or Sangh family, and which had developed several front organisations with specific focus areas. As noted in an RSS pamphlet, “The Sangh’s sphere of influence has been spreading far and wide, not only inside Bharat but also abroad, like the radiance of a many splendoured diamond.”<sup>43</sup> In this chapter, the report will introduce the global Hindutva ecosystem, its financial position and the funding behind it that makes it possible. Since it is impossible to provide an exhaustive list of all Global Sangh organisations, the chapter will examine the key organisations in the countries where the Sangh is most active—namely, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, South Africa and Kenya.

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<sup>42</sup> ‘Issue of Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi’s Visa Status’ (US Department of State, 2005) <<https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rm/2005/43701.htm>> accessed 21 March 2005

<sup>43</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

#### THE GLOBAL SANGH AS CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS

Over the years, the RSS has not only established its international branches across the world, which were registered as the Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh or the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh in different countries, it has also established international counterparts for its front organisation. For instance, there are international chapters of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Sewa Bharati, and Ekal Vidyalaya in countries across the world. There are also numerous other Sangh-affiliated organisations that are specific to each country, and play a large role in the Hindutva mobilising and funding in their respective countries, such as the Hindu American Foundation and the Hindu Council of Kenya.

Across these international Hindu nationalist organizations—the Global Sangh—a pattern emerges reflecting the RSS’ success in reproducing its organizational structures abroad while maintain the primacy of its Indian counterparts.<sup>44</sup> The Global Sangh primarily operates through numerous multi-million-dollar tax-exempt charitable organizations — in particular in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada. These Hindutva charities are often interconnected with each other through other organizations, financial structures and individuals.<sup>45</sup>

The RSS has invested significant effort into expanding its global footprint, which as noted by Andersen and Damle, is “rooted in its overriding goal of pan-Hindu unification.”<sup>46</sup> This international Hindu community is then mobilised by the RSS “to assist the cause at home, with its primary focus on financial and volunteer support for many service projects run by the sangh parivar in India and elsewhere.”<sup>47</sup> They are largely funded by wealthy families and their private foundations, public donations and crowdsourcing as well as government funding initiatives. These funds are then used for promoting right-wing ideologies through

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<sup>44</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, Ingrid Therwath, ‘The Sangh Parivar and the Hindu Diaspora in the West: What Kind of Long Distance Nationalism?’ (2007) <<https://academic.oup.com/ips/article-abstract/1/3/278/1851203>> accessed 14 August 2007

<sup>45</sup> Raqib Hameed, Naikdivya Trivedi, ‘Sangh Parivar’s U.S. funds trail’ *Frontline and The Hindu* (4 July 2021); Charity registers of the United States, United Kingdom and Canada

<sup>46</sup> Walter Anderson, Shridhar Damle, *Messengers of Hindu Nationalism* (Hurst and Company, London, 2019) 46

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

influencing education systems; <sup>48</sup> political campaigning; <sup>49</sup> representing Modi's interests; <sup>50</sup> and financing sectarian organizations in India under the guise of humanitarian aid and relief.<sup>51</sup>

However, the Global Sangh also goes to significant effort to hide its relations to the RSS. This is likely because many of these organisations are registered as charitable organisations, which source a significant sum of money through donations, and the Sangh's militant origins, far-right leanings and theocratic vision for India have all been well reported. A direct association between international charities and the Sangh and its extremist wings could attract legal scrutiny—for instance, the British Charity Commission prohibits the funding of political and sect activities.<sup>52</sup> It could also earn a poor reputation and consequences arising thereof, such as the resignation of the British member of parliament, Lord Adam Patel, as the patron of a British Sangh charity, after he realised that funds that he had been involved in raising were ultimately sent to RSS affiliates in India.<sup>53</sup> Before delving into a more detailed examination of these non-profits, their connections to India and their global activities, it is worth seeing an overview of their vast financials. Indeed, the American Sangh's financials are at such a large scale that they are represented separately in Table 3, while Table 4 lists the

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<sup>48</sup> Teri Sforza, 'UC Irvine Rejects Millions in Gifts from Hindu Group Suspected of Having Ties to Radicals' (2016) <<https://www.ocreger.com/2016/03/02/uc-irvine-rejects-millions-in-gifts-from-hindu-group-suspected-of-having-ties-to-radicals/>> accessed March 2016; Aria Thaker, 'The Latest Skirmish in California's Textbooks War Reveals the Mounting Influence of Hindutva in the United States' *The Caravan* (7 Feb 2018); T. Soundararajan, A. Momin, H. Kaur, & A. Sengupta, 'Erasing tolerance? HAF's changes can only be described as ahistorical edits to history books' *The Indian Express* (1 July 2020)

<sup>49</sup> Peiter Friedrich, 'All in the Family, The American Sangh's affair with Tulsi Gabbard' *The Caravan* (1 August 2019); Nitish Pahwa, 'Why Are Democrats Backing a House Candidate With Reportedly Shady Foreign Ties?' *Slate* (26 Oct, 2020)

<sup>50</sup> Rashmee Kumar, 'The Network of Hindu Nationalists Behind Modi's Diapora Diplomacy in the U.S.' *The Intercept* (25 Sep 2019)

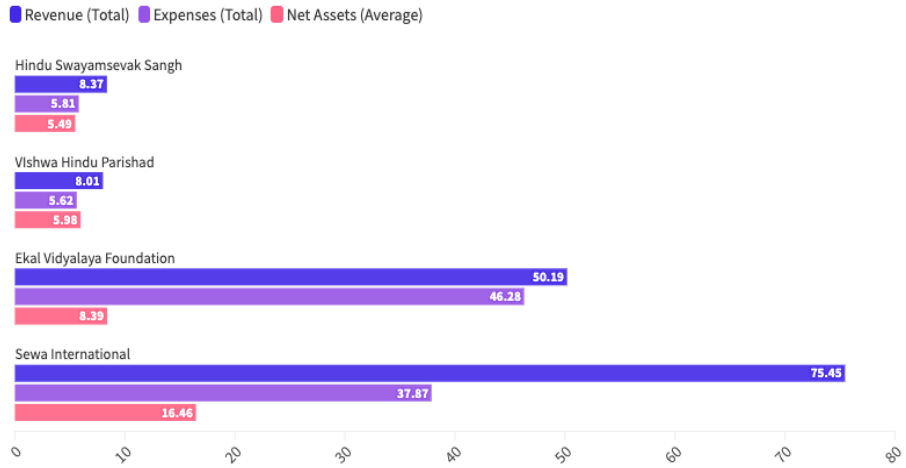
<sup>51</sup> Malini Bhattacharjee, *Disaster Relief and the RSS: Resurrecting Religion Through Humanitarianism* (Sage Publications, 2020)

<sup>52</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, Ingrid Therwath, 'The Sangh Parivar and the Hindu Diaspora in the West: What Kind of Long Distance Nationalism?' (2007) <<https://academic.oup.com/ips/article-abstract/1/3/278/1851203>> accessed 14 August 2007

<sup>53</sup> Awaaz, South Asia Watch Limited, 'In Bad Faith? British Charity and Hindu Extremism' (2004) <Awaaz-South Asia Watch 2004 Report on British charities and Hindutva.pdf> accessed 2004

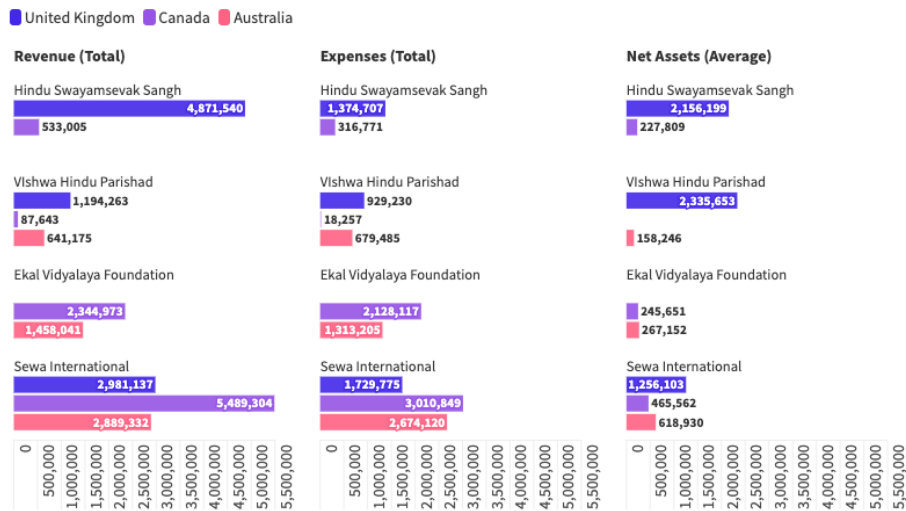
financials of the charities of UK, Canada and Australia, which are not insignificant either.

**Table 3. American Sangh financials of last five reported years**



Source: ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer • All figures in USD millions.

**Table 4. Global Sangh financials of last five reported years**



Source: Public charity registers of UK, Canada and Australia • All values in local currency. Data not available for HSS Australia, Ekal UK and VHP Canada's net assets.

HINDU SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH

UNITED KINGDOM

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh of United Kingdom (HSS UK) was first established in 1966 in London, and its Leicester headquarters was inaugurated in 1995 by the then RSS chief Rajendra Singh. It was registered as a charity in 1974. According to its latest annual report filed in December 2023, HSS UK has 98 branches across 59 cities and towns in the United Kingdom, with

an average total weekly attendance of 2,246. It identifies that the main objectives of the charity are to “advance Hindu Religion (Dharma) and educate the public in the Hindu ideals and way of life.”

In the financial year 2022-23, the charity declared total income of GBP 406,459, total expenditure of GBP 406,459, and total funds of GBP 2,262,339. This included a government grant of over GBP 9,000 and donations of over GBP 200,000.

In 2016, the Charity Commission of the United Kingdom opened a statutory inquiry into HSS UK following an undercover investigation by the British production company Hardcash, which was broadcast on the television channel ITV’s programme, “Charities Behaving Badly.” The investigation pertained an event held by HSS UK in July and August 2014, and specifically concerned comments made by a speaker to students during a Hindu history class. The Charity Commission’s report noted in its findings that the event was held at a school premises and attended by children aged 13-18, in which a speaker made “most offensive and inappropriate comments,” some of which were “particularly objectionable and anti-Islamic.”<sup>54</sup> While the commission stated that the trustees of the charity had failed to comply with their duties and responsibilities under charity law, it concluded that there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the speaker’s views were endemic in the charity and its activities.

Pertinently, the commission also stated that while there were no formal links between the HSS and the RSS, the commission advised the charity’s trustees to ensure the RSS has no control or influence over the charity and its affairs. Yet, while no formal links exist, the direct ties between them is a well-documented, open secret.<sup>55</sup> Jaffrelot and Therwath elaborate on this in some detail:

Like the RSS in India, the HSS in the United Kingdom adopted a centralized structure divided into geographic sections each headed by a movement cadre. The highest leadership council, the Akhil UK Pratinidhi Sabha (a copy of the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha—Delegate

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<sup>54</sup> Charity Commission for England and Wales, Inquiry Report: Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, (2 September 2016)

<sup>55</sup> Edward T. G. Anderson, Hindu Nationalism in Indian Diaspora (Hurst Publishers, 2023)

Assembly of All India) meets once a year like its Indian counterpart, and the Kendriya Karyakari Mandal (Central Executive Committee) every 3 months like its Indian counterpart and homonym. Likewise, every year the HSS holds training camps for the movement cadres: Instructors' Training Camps for shakha leaders, Officers' Training Camps for those of a higher rank. These weeklong camps also decide on the content of the "teachings" delivered daily in the shakhas. The duplication of the RSS modus operandi is all the better insured since emissaries are regularly sent from Nagpur to oversee the camps, or even to hold standard training sessions.<sup>56</sup>

#### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA was founded and registered as a charity in 1989, and according to its latest annual report, it now has over 235 shakhas across 164 cities in 34 states of the country. Its filings note that it is doing business as the Hindu Education Foundation and Hindu Yuva, and as part of the organisation's mission, it states, "to unite Hindus with a view to instill in them devotion to the principles and practices of Hindu way of life."

Anderson and Damle's work on the RSS provides insight into the functioning of HSS USA. They note that the regular attendance of HSS shakhas in the country is between 5,000 to 7,000 people. The HSS USA conducts week-long training camps on running

shakhas, and individuals who complete three such camps, are then allowed to participate in a second-year training at RSS camps in India or camps in Trinidad and Kenya; upon completion of which they can pursue a final third-year camp at the RSS headquarters in Nagpur, India. Several members of HSS USA have reportedly completed all three levels.<sup>57</sup>

According to the HSS USA's latest filings, in 2022, the non-profit recorded a total revenue of USD 1.42 million, net assets of USD

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<sup>56</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, Ingrid Therwath, 'The Sangh Parivar and the Hindu Diaspora in the West: What Kind of Long Distance Nationalism?' (2007) <<https://academic.oup.com/ips/article-abstract/1/3/278/1851203>> accessed 14 August 2007 282

<sup>57</sup> Walter Anderson, Shridhar Damle, Messengers of Hindu Nationalism (Hurst and Company, London, 2019)



5.50 million, and total expenses of USD 1.41 million. The only salaried employee listed in the filings is one Saumitra Gokhale, who is identified as a “Yoga Instructor,” but who is listed on the website of the Hindu University of America as the “Global Coordinator for the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh.”

#### CANADA

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh of Canada was founded as a charity in 1991. The HSS Canada lists 33 shakhas in operation across 21 cities in six provinces. In 2023, a report by the National Council of Canadian Muslims and the World Sikh Organisation of Canada studied the RSS network in Canada, and noted that HSS Canada had a particular focus on children and teaching them in *Balagokulams*, which are specific children’s programmes run by HSS branches across the world. Among the Balagokulam activities listed in the website is an emphasis on teaching children to “become confident representatives of the Hindu” religion. It further notes that “a detailed teacher’s training guide has been prepared which can be used by adults that are interested in conducting Balagokulams in their local community.” The 2023 report notes that many of the shakhas listed on the HSS websites are listed at public schools, and show children venerating portraits of RSS ideologues. (The RSS’s focus on educational activities as a means of its Hindutva propaganda, and the global Sangh’s role in the same, is elaborated further on in this chapter.)

In 2022, HSS Canada reported a total income of CAD 149,916, total assets of CAD 329,100 and total expenditure of CAD 119,405.

#### AUSTRALIA

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh of Australia is curiously not registered as a charity, even though the website describes itself as a non-profit, and HSS Australia is considered one of the strongest overseas branches of the RSS.<sup>58</sup> As a result, however, there is no financial information about the organisation available in the public domain. The Australian Business Register notes that HSS Australia has been registered and active since 2010. According to the HSS Australia website, the organisation has 49 shakhas across eight cities in the country, and sees an average weekly attendance of 1,230 people. On its FAQs page, HSS expressly states that it

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<sup>58</sup> Walter Anderson, Shridhar Damle, *Messengers of Hindu Nationalism* (Hurst and Company, London, 2019)

does not send money to India, and “uses its money for its own activities.” It also states that it is inspired by the RSS vision, but is “an independent non-profit organization in Australia that focuses on the needs of Hindus in this country.”

#### VISHWA HINDU PARISHAD

In India, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), or World Hindu Council, is the religious wing of the RSS, which has previously been designated as a “religious militant organization” by the Central Investigative Agency in the 2018 edition of its World Factbook.<sup>59</sup> The VHP was founded in 1964 with the aim to unite the largest number of Hindu religious leaders, ironically imitating the ecclesiastical structure despite considering Christianity and Islam to be the biggest threats to Hinduism.<sup>60</sup>

A 2024 report published by the civil-society coalition, Savera, studies the VHP in India and the US in detail. Along with its militant wing, the Bajran Dal, the VHP has been centrally involved in the demolition of Babri Masjid, a 16th century mosque in the state of Uttar Pradesh which it believed to be built on the site of a temple marking the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram; the mobilising and violence of the 2002 Gujarat pogrom; the anti-Christian violence in Odisha in 2008; the anti-Muslim violence in Delhi in 2020; and has been generally involved in the hate and violence that has engulfed India under Modi since 2014. The report Savera notes that between 2016 and 2019, the VHP was responsible for 62 violent incidents, and that the research project Hindutva Watch identified the VHP and its youth wings as perpetrators of hate speech 62 times in the first half of 2023 alone.

#### UNITED KINGDOM

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad of UK was founded and registered as a charitable organisation in 1972. According to its 2022 annual report filed with the Charity Commission—its 2023 report is overdue—the VHP UK’s objectives are “to promote the advancement of the Hindu religion”; “to promote studies of and research in the field of Hindu Religious Philosophy” and “to relieve poverty, sickness and distress.” Following the Leicester violence of 2022, the VHP UK wrote a letter to Liz Truss, the

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<sup>59</sup> ‘CIA names VHP, Bajrang Dal as ‘religious militant organisations’ in World Factbook’ *The Indian Express* (15 June 2018)

<sup>60</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Vishwa Hindu Parishad: Structures and Strategies* (Princeton University Press, 2005)

prime minister at the time, propagating false narratives that adopted vilifying rhetoric, Islamophobic tropes and heightened communal tensions in the country.<sup>61</sup> The organisation has ten centres across the country. In 2022, VHP UK reported an income of GBP 298,260 and total funds of GBP 3,560,253.

#### UNITED STATES

The United States is a slight anomaly to the Sangh's expansion into foreign countries insofar as the VHP was established in the country before even the HSS. The VHP of America was founded in 1971, amid a wave of Indian migrants into the country following change in the US immigration policy. This included *swaysamsevaks* (volunteers) and *pracharaks* (full-time workers) of the RSS, such as Mahesh Mehta, a former pracharak who established the VHP's first US chapters.<sup>62</sup> As such, the VHPA plays a more significant role than its counterparts in other countries, and has been directly responsible for the establishment of several other Hindutva groups in the country, including student, advocacy and temple wings.<sup>63</sup>

The Savera report highlights how the VHPA has not only been involved with the VHP in all the significant violent movements, from the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, to the 2002 Gujarat pogrom, to the 2008 Odisha violence and the 2020 Delhi violence, but members of the VHPA have also justified these acts of violence. For instance, the founder and then-president of the VHPA, Mahesh Mehta, justified the Babri demolition as “the undoing of a historic wrong” and the VHPA president and general secretary at the time of the Gujarat pogrom both blamed the Muslim community for the violence. The Savera report further notes that VHPA has also offered financial support during the violence or its immediate aftermath, including the VHPA donated USD 343,404 to its Odisha-based affiliates in 2008, to organisations that had ties to the perpetrators of the anti-Christian violence; and similarly distributed funds to Hindu supremacist groups following the Delhi violence, including USD

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<sup>61</sup> Community Policy Forum and 'Hindutva Report' (Bridge Initiative, 2023)  
<<https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/hindutva-in-britain/>> accessed 24 Nov 2023

<sup>62</sup> Walter Anderson, Shridhar Damle, *Messengers of Hindu Nationalism* (Hurst and Company, London, 2019)

<sup>63</sup> Savera, *The Global VHP's Trail of Violence* (January 2024)

115,000 sent by Sachin Chitlangia, a member of the Houston chapter of the VHPA.

The VHPA is also registered as a charity. According to its latest filing, it recorded net assets of USD 5.19 million in 2022, but its form does not mention any income or expenses in the year. In the previous year, it reported a total revenue of USD 2.36 million and total expenses of USD 1.80 million.

#### CANADA AND AUSTRALIA

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad of Canada was founded as a charity in 1995. In 2022, VHP Canada reported a total income of CAD 21,388, and total expenses of CAD 6,804.

Meanwhile, VHP Australia was founded in 1989, and registered as a charity in 2012. It is headquartered in Sydney, with branches four other cities in the country. In 2022, the current and former prime ministers of Australia, Anthony Albaneses and Scott Morrison, both fell into controversy when they were photographed wearing VHP scarves, while attending events hosted by an affiliated organisation while courting the significant Indian diaspora in the country. According to its latest financial report, in 2021-22, VHP Australia reported total revenue of AUD 155,080, the majority of which—over 62 percent, which is nearly AU 100,000—came from the government. VHP Australia reported expenses of AUD 136,482, and net assets of AUD 238,785.

#### SEWA INTERNATIONAL

In March and April 2021, as India reeled from a devastating second wave of COVID-19 that flooded the internet from visuals of mass graves, the RSS swung into action, deploying its vast network of NGOs and volunteers for relief and humanitarian efforts. Perhaps its most successful fundraising efforts came from its international affiliates—in particular, the branches of Sewa International across the world.

The RSS's use of disaster relief and humanitarian aid as a political and ideological tool has been well researched and documented.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Sagar, 'For the RSS, "sewa" is a means to achieve the Hindu Rashtra' *The Caravan* (15 Jul 2020); Malini Bhattacharjee, *Disaster Relief and the RSS: Resurrecting Religion Through Humanitarianism*, (Sage, 2019); John Zavos, 'Small acts, Big Society: sewa and Hindu (nationalist) identity in Britain' (2015) *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(2), 243-258; Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

Bhattacharjee has noted that in the wake of the partition of India and Pakistan, the RSS's appeal for funds that went beyond "mere fundraising" to bearing "clear political overtones in seeking to consolidate the Hindus against the 'other.'"<sup>65</sup> While the appeals are no longer as transparent, the ultimate purpose behind the Sangh's relief efforts to promote Hindutva and establish a Hindu nation has remained consistent, through the Partition in 1947, the Gujarat earthquake of 2001, and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>66</sup>

The RSS established its service wing, Sewa Bharati, in 1979 with the specific intention of assimilating those on the margins of Indian society, specifically the tribal and Dalit communities, into the Hindutva movement.<sup>67</sup> The act of *sewa*, or service, in the Sangh philosophy is not restricted to disaster relief, and educational projects form a large part of its activities, such as the Vidya Mandir and Ekal Vidyalaya schools.<sup>68</sup> In July 2016, two investigative news portals in India published exposés that revealed perhaps the darkest side of Sewa Bharati's education initiatives. The reports, separately investigated and published by *Outlook* and *Cobrapost*, revealed that Sewa Bharati had trafficked 31 tribal girls from Assam into its educational institutions in Gujarat and Punjab to convert and indoctrinate them into Hinduism.<sup>69</sup>

The financing of Sewa Bharati's activities, in large part, comes from the fundraising efforts by Sewa International, a subsidiary of Sewa Bharati that coordinates all its international efforts, including those of its sister charity organisations in the UK, US and Canada. However, the final beneficiaries of these funds are often different from the public appeal on the basis of which they were raised.

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<sup>65</sup> Malini Bhattacharjee, *Disaster Relief and the RSS: Resurrecting Religion Through Humanitarianism*, (Sage, 2019)

<sup>66</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Malini Bhattacharjee, *Disaster Relief and the RSS: Resurrecting Religion Through Humanitarianism*, (Sage, 2019); Sagar, 'How the RSS co-opted local administrations for its relief interventions during the COVID-19 lockdown' *The Caravan* (10 Jul 2020)

<sup>67</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

<sup>68</sup> Soundarya Chidambaram, 'The "Right" Kind of Welfare in South India's Urban Slums: Seva vs. Patronage and the Success of Hindu Nationalist Organizations' (2012) *Asian Survey*, 52(2), 298-320

<sup>69</sup> Neha Dixit, 'Operation #BetiUthao' *Outlook* (5 Aug 2016); Syed Masroor Hasan, 'Operation Shuddhikaran' *Cobrapost* (29 Jul 2016)

#### UNITED KINGDOM

Sewa International UK was initially established as a service project of HSS UK, in 1991, and later founded and registered as an independent charity in 2009. Pertinently, two individuals, Dhirajlal Shah and Dhirajlal D Shah, are listed as trustees of both Sewa UK and HSS UK. In fact, the former holds the senior-most post in Sewa UK's board of directors, and the latter holds the senior-most post at HSS UK.

One of Sewa UK's biggest early projects was relief funds raised following an earthquake in the state of Gujarat in 2001, and three years later, a report released by the non-profit Awaaz South Asia Watch demonstrated how Sewa used this for the illicit financing of Hindutva projects in India. The report, titled *In Bad Faith? British Charity and Hindu Extremism*, showed that raised GBP 4.3 million for relief and rehabilitation efforts following the earthquake, but over one-third of it was then used to build sectarian schools. Moreover, it found that even among the funds actually used for relief, it was disbursed to Sangh organisations that primarily aided upper-caste Hindus, and the reconstruction of villages was marked by glorification of the RSS and its ideologues.

Sewa UK's tax filings reveal that it raised a significant sum of money during the pandemic. In 2021-22, Sewa reported an income of GBP 871,854, a massive jump from the previous year's GBP 109,034. Similarly, its total expenditure also jumped from GBP 149,985 in 2020-21 to GBP 736,125 in 2021-22. According to its latest filings, Sewa UK reported an income of GBP 1,174,820 in 2022-23, and total funds of GBP 1,998,990.

#### UNITED STATES

In the US, too, Sangh affiliated had used the Gujarat earthquake to raise illicit funds for Hindutva projects. In 2002, two civil society groups, Sabrang India and South Asia Citizens Web, published a report looking at the fundraising by the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF)—a registered charity and the predecessor to the US branch of Sewa International. The report revealed that between 1994 to 2000, the organisation disbursed over USD 3 million to RSS-affiliated organisations in India, nearly 70 percent of which was used for the Sangh's activities focusing on education, reconversion to Hinduism, and

Hinduisation of tribal communities.<sup>70</sup> Only 15 percent was used for relief efforts, which was again distributed Sangh groups aiding only Hindu victims of the Gujarat earthquake.

Sewa International Inc, the US branch of Sewa International, was founded and registered as a charity in 2003, the year after the Sabrang-SACW report on IDRF was published. Ramesh Bhutada, the chairman of Sewa US, is also a joint president of HSS USA. Sewa US, too, raised a staggering sum of money during the pandemic, and its fundraising efforts even saw the participation of Microsoft, Google and Twitter.<sup>71</sup> In 2021, Sewa US declared a total revenue of USD 47.24 million, a massive jump from an already significant revenue of USD 5.59 million the previous year. The jump was by virtue of receiving “gifts, grants, contributions” amounting to USD 45.66 million that year. The charity reported total expenses of USD 28.13 million, which included USD 16.42 million for “Education, Disaster,” which its filings note were incurred in South Asia, without specifying any region or country.

Despite its immense finances, in 2020 and 2021, Sewa US received loans of USD 77,142 and USD 69,578 from the Small Business Administration as part of federal relief funds “to aid small businesses in maintaining work force during COVID-19 pandemic.”<sup>72</sup> It is unclear why the charity sought or was granted these loans, which pale in comparison to its revenue during these years. In its latest filing, for 2022, Sewa US reported a total revenue of USD 6.2 million, and net assets of USD 27.38 million.

#### CANADA

Like its US and UK counterparts, Sewa Canada is also a tax-exempt charity, registered in 1991. In its statutory filings, Sewa Canada describes its ongoing programmes as follows: “Collection of donations from community members in order to provide relief from poverty in the developing countries by providing assistance in the field of education, health, skills development and other necessities of life. Donations have been provided to various charitable organizations in India and Nepal etc.”

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<sup>70</sup> ‘The Foreign Exchange of Hate’ (South Asia Citizen Web) <<http://www.sacw.net/2002/FEHi/FEH/>> accessed 2002

<sup>71</sup> Nikhil Pahwa, ‘COVID Relief Donations Are Supporting a Project to “Hinduize” India’ *Slate* (8 Jun 2021)

<sup>72</sup> Raqib Hameed Naik, ‘Hindu right-wing groups in US got \$833,000 of federal COVID fund’ *Al Jazeera* (27 April 2021)

Its filings reveal that in the calendar year 2021, it had total assets of CAD 1.46 million and made transfers of at least CAD 616,877 to organisations affiliated to Sewa Bharati, as well as another transfer of CAD 547,786 to “Pay COVID in India.” In its latest filing, for 2022, Sewa Canada reported a total revenue of CAD 308,047 and total assets of CAD 1.17 million. Even as early as 2005, Sewa Canada had begun raising as much as CAD 225,000. In 2007, the Sewa Canada founder, Sat Wadhwa, sent 150,000 cheque for several projects in India, many of which were managed directly by RSS groups such as Sewa Bharati.<sup>73</sup>

#### AUSTRALIA

Australia has two charities, Sewa Australia and Sewa International Australia, registered at the same address, both seemingly affiliated to the RSS, and both registered as charities. While Sewa Australia states that it only operates in Australia, Sewa International Australia states that it operates in India and Sri Lanka. According to its latest filings, for 2021-22, Sewa Australia reported a total income of AUD 137,822, total expenses of AUD 109,962 and net assets of AUD 108,927. In 2022-23, Sewa International Australia reported a total income of AUD 19,595, total expenses of AUD 54,956 and net assets of AUD 83,185.

#### EKAL VIDYALAYA FOUNDATION

The RSS has always considered the use of education central to its ideological mission of transforming India into a Hindu nation. In *Bridging Neoliberalism and Hindu Nationalism*, Lall and Anand note that the “specific focus of the RSS schools is to teach ideas about Hindu superiority to protect the Hindu nation against threatening cultural and religious minorities.”<sup>74</sup> One of the Sangh’s central initiatives in this regard has been the development of Ekal Vidyalayas, or one-teacher schools, in India’s remote and tribal regions.

Ekal Vidyalayas are non-formal schools that involve community members as teachers and design their own curriculum based on

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<sup>73</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, Ingrid Therwath, ‘The Sangh Parivar and the Hindu Diaspora in the West: What Kind of Long Distance Nationalism?’ (2007) <<https://academic.oup.com/ips/article-abstract/1/3/278/1851203>> accessed 14 August 2007

<sup>74</sup> Maria Lall and Kusha Anand, *Bridging Neoliberalism and Hindu Nationalism: The role of education in bringing about contemporary India* (Bristol University Press, 2022)



Hindu moral teaching.<sup>75</sup> The VHP spearheaded the setting up of the schools in the 1980s, which were later brought under the Ekal Abhiyan trust in 2012. According to the trust's annual report for 2021-22, there are over 77,000 Ekal Vidyalayas across the country teaching 2.1 million students.<sup>76</sup>

The schools have come under question in India for their ties to the RSS, and the parallel growths of Ekal Vidyalayas in the same tribal regions where the Sangh is most successful in pushing its Hindu nationalist project.<sup>77</sup> It has been argued that Ekal Vidyalayas effectively serve as indoctrination to recruit the Sangh cadre from regions that were not traditionally within the Hindu fold.<sup>78</sup> In 2005, an independent human-rights organisation Khoj found evidence of the Hinduisation of tribals, who traditionally follow indigenous faiths, across Indian states where such schools were operational.

This includes the celebration of Hindu religious festivals, a focus on Hindu cultural and religious education, teaching Sangh history, and the privileging of Hindu morality over constitutional morality.<sup>79</sup> Even a report commissioned by the Indian education ministry itself has noted that the Ekal Vidyalaya schools were “misusing funds and using grants for creating disharmony amongst religious groups and creating a political cadre.”<sup>80</sup>

Yet, not only have Ekal Vidyalayas persisted and grown over the decades, the Global Sangh is central to their funding, and the schools effectively provide a cover for transnational Hindutva organising.<sup>81</sup> According to the Ekal Abhiyan Trust's annual report of 2021-22, in the last five years, out of the Ekal Abhiyan's total income of INR 882 crore—approximately USD 106 million—foreign contributions accounted for INR 291 crore—USD 35

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<sup>75</sup> Walter Anderson and Shridhar Damle, *Messengers of Hindu Nationalism* (Hurst and Company, 2019)

<sup>76</sup> Ekal Abhiyan Trust, Annual Report 2021-22  
<[https://www.ekal.org/resources/admin\\_uploads/annual\\_reports/annual\\_pdf\\_file/1682599290Ekal-Abhiyan-Annual-Report-2021-22.pdf](https://www.ekal.org/resources/admin_uploads/annual_reports/annual_pdf_file/1682599290Ekal-Abhiyan-Annual-Report-2021-22.pdf)>

<sup>77</sup> Shivali Tukdeo, *India Goes to School: Education Policy and Cultural Politics* (Springer, 2019)

<sup>78</sup> Shankar Gopalkrishnan, Priyadarshini Sreenivasa, 'Carnivorous FlowerBringing adivasis within 'communal' fold' *Combat Law* (26 August 2023)

<sup>79</sup> Hartosh Singh Bal, *Growing Tribe*, *Indian Express*

<sup>80</sup> 'Regulatory Mechanisms For Textbooks And Parallel Textbooks Taught In Schools Outside The Government System' *Ministry of Human Resource Development (2005)*

<sup>81</sup> Shivali Tukdeo, *India Goes to School: Education Policy and Cultural Politics* (Springer, 2019)

million—nearly one-third of its funds. These funds are sent to India through international branches of the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation, which are registered as charities across the world.

#### UNITED STATES

The Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA is a principal fundraiser for the programme in India.<sup>82</sup> It was founded and registered as a charity in 2000, and now has over 70 chapters in the United States. Its stated objective in statutory filings is to set up 100,000 one-teacher schools in remote and rural India, which serves the Sangh’s mission of assimilating tribals and Dalits into the Hindutva movement. Owing to the lack of infrastructural or teacher-training expenses in the one-teacher schools, Ekal USA’s fundraising documents “emphatically state that year-long expenses of each school can be met by \$365.”<sup>83</sup> In fact, one of Ekal USA’s fundraising slogans is a dollar-a-day and its website requires a minimum one-time donation of USD 365.

The scale of funds raised by Ekal Vidyalaya Foundations demonstrate why its stated objective of 100,000 schools is not far-fetched. Between 2001 and 2019, Ekal USA reportedly spent USD 70.1 million, out of which USD 39.4 million—more than half—was spent in the five years after Modi came to power in 2014. In its 2022 filings, Ekal USA reported net assets of USD 13.65 million, net income of USD 5.34 million, and total expenses of USD 5.97 million. It received USD 11.26 million in gifts, grants, contributions and membership fees. Its 2019 filing noted that in that year, Ekal USA sponsored 14,088 such one-teacher schools.

#### CANADA

The Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of Canada was registered as a charity in 2007. Between 2017 and 2021, in the period that the Ekal Abhiyan Trust received USD 35 million from abroad—over a third of its total income in the period—Ekal Canada donated CAD 1.9 million to organisations under Ekal Abhiyan in India. Its latest statutory filings note that in 2022, Ekal Canada declared total assets of CAD 279,316 and total revenue of CAD 467,297. It also reported expenses of CAD 480,010 to the Ekal Vidyalaya

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<sup>82</sup> Malini Bhattacharjee, *Disaster Relief and the RSS: Resurrecting Religion Through Humanitarianism*, (Sage, 2019); Walter Anderson, Shridhar Damle, *Messengers of Hindu Nationalism* (Hurst and Company, London, 2019)

<sup>83</sup> Shivali Tukdeo, *India Goes to School: Education Policy and Cultural Politics* (Springer, 2019)

Foundation of India and CAD 98,010 to the Ekal Gramothan Foundation in India.

As part of Hindu Heritage Month, a government initiative to celebrate Canada's Hindu population and culture every November, HSS Canada and Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of Canada logos were prominently displayed as co-sponsors for an event titled, "Hindu Philosophy and its Relevance."<sup>84</sup>

#### UNITED KINGDOM AND AUSTRALIA

There is little information about the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of UK because its financial accounts are not publicly available. However, the 2004 report by Awaaz South Asia Watch notes that Sewa International had raised funds for the one-teacher schools under an initiative named Sewa Education Aid. According to the report, Sewa UK had raised over GBP 300,000 for the schools, including GBP 10,000 from the mayor of Birmingham. Ekal Australia was registered as a charity in 2012, and conducts work only in India. According to its latest filing, in 2022-23, Ekal Australia had a total income of AUD 330,373, total expenses of AUD 3,659, and net assets of 318,127. Its most recent annual report, for 2021, notes that Ekal is sponsoring 740 schools.

#### CORPORATIONS BEHIND THE CHARITIES

The biggest hurdle in investigating the corporate financing behind transnational Hindutva movements—and perhaps the reason behind the strategic choice of registering as charities—is that non-profits do not have to disclose the identities of their donors. As a result, it is difficult to identify the corporations that fund these charities and the scale of their involvement. However, there are some hints about the major corporations involved. For instance, in the United States, two family foundations that are also registered as non-profits are big funders for the American Sangh charities—the Bhutada Family Foundation and the Gupta & Aggarwal Family Foundation. These organisations, and the families running it, are among the most influential in the American Sangh, and also run million-dollar corporations.

#### BHUTADA FAMILY FOUNDATION AND STAR PIPE PRODUCTS

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<sup>84</sup> National Council of Canadian Muslims and World Sikh Organization of Canada, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Network in Canada (1 March 2023)

The Bhutada Family Foundation is run by Ramesh Bhutada, who is listed as the president, his wife, Kiran Bhutada, who is the vice president, and their son, Rishi Bhutada, who is the secretary. The family is also on the board of directors of the biggest American Sangh organisations, including HSS USA, Sewa USA and the Hindu American Foundation. Ramesh moved to the US in 1968, and his father was an RSS member in India. Ramesh began his RSS stint in 1977, protesting in Houston against arrest of RSS workers during the Emergency proclaimed by the Indira Gandhi government in India.<sup>85</sup>

In 1979, Ramesh setup Star Pipe Products, an iron-manufacturing company, in Houston, Texas. Over the decades, Star Pipe has grown into a multinational corporation with 14 distribution centres across North America, and business operations in India and China. Ramesh is the founder and CEO of Star Pipe, and Rishi serves as the company's senior vice president. Its Indian subsidiary, Star Pipe Products (India) Private Limited, was incorporated in 2006 and Ramesh is listed as one of its directors. In its 2022-23 financial filings, the company recorded a net worth of INR 93.32 crore (approximately USD 11.28 million), a total profit of INR 117 crore (USD 14.16 million), and total expenses of INR 96.83 crore (USD 11.70 million).

The Bhutada Family Foundation was setup as a tax-exempt charitable foundation in 2005, with opening contributions amounting to nearly USD 3 million to the foundation by the Bhutada father-son duo in its first two years. Pertinently, the Star Pipe Products headquarters in Houston shares the same registered address with the Bhutada Family Foundation. Since then, the foundation donated over USD 2.19 million to various American Sangh organisations, including HSS, Sewa International, Ekal Vidyalaya, VHPA, Param Shakti Peeth of America and the Hindu American Foundation. According to its latest filings, in 2022, the Bhutada Family Foundation reported a total revenue of USD 176,000, total expenses of 246,497, and net assets of USD 2.28 million.

AGGARWAL & GUPTA FAMILY FOUNDATION AND PARK SQUARE HOMES  
Another similarly influential and wealthy family operation behind the American Sangh is the Aggarwal & Gupta Family Foundation,

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<sup>85</sup> Raqib Hameed, Naikdivya Trivedi, 'Sangh Parivar's U.S. funds trail' *Frontline and The Hindu* (4 July, 2021)

run by its patriarch and chairman, Braham Aggarwal. Braham has served as a senior official with the VHPA's Florida chapter, Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation's Orlando chapter, the HSS's South East America chapter, and is the founder of the Hindu University of America. Prominent members of the Hindu American Foundation have also served on the board of the Aggarwal & Gupta Family Foundation.

Braham also serves as the chairman on the board of Park Square Homes, a multimillion-dollar land development and homebuilding company in Florida. His son, Suresh Gupta, and grandson, Vishaal Gupta, are the co-CEOs of the company. Its Indian subsidiary, Parksquare Homes India Private Limited, was founded in 2007 and Braham is one of its directors. As of March 2023, Parksquare Homes India reported a net worth of INR 11.10 lakh (approximately USD 13,428).

The Aggarwal & Gupta Family Foundation has been registered as a tax-exempt charity since 2001, formed with the purpose to donate to charities supported by them, and was previously known as the Vivek Welfare and Educational Fund. Since then, it has donated at least USD 8.11 million to American Sangh groups, including HSS USA, VHPA, Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation, Sewa US, Param Shakti Peeth of America, the Hindu University of America and the Hindu American Foundation. According to its latest filings, in 2022, the foundation reported a total income of USD 1.18 million, total expenses of USD 3.29 million and net assets of USD 46.37 million.

#### THE SHAH COMPANIES

In the United Kingdom, one of the major families central to the British Sangh are the Shahs, with the patriarch Dhiraj D Shah presiding over the HSS UK as its *sanghchalak*—or president, adopting the RSS designations—and its director, and also serving as a director at Sewa UK. Apart from that, Shah is also a secretary at SPL Corporation, a pharmaceutical company based in Birmingham. According to its latest financial report, as of March 2023, SPL held net assets of GBP 614,890.

The SPL board of directors lists three other Shahs—Vivek Dipak, Bindiya Dipak, and Puja. Vivek is a director at five other companies, two of which share the same registered address as SPL. One of these, M S Property Midlands Limited, was a real estate corporation with net liabilities of 135,673 as of March 2023.

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Bindiya is also a director at this company. The other, Little Lodge Day Nurseries Limited, is a nursery school company with net assets of GBP 71,116 as of August 2022. Its report also notes that it is a 100 percent subsidiary of VK Nurseries, which is one of the other companies in which Vivek is a director, and which shares an address with his final company, Little Lodge Nursery Bransford.

## CHAPTER FOUR: HINDUTVA AND MINORITIES

The Hindutva movement does not merely seek to transform the secular, multi-faith Indian state into a Hindu nation, it seeks to do so in a manner that maintains the hegemony of the upper caste communities, who constitute a minority of the Hindu population. As a consequence, the Hindutva movement disproportionately discriminates against religious minorities in India, specifically, Muslims, Christians, the oppressed caste Dalits, and the indigenous Adivasi communities. MS Golwalkar, the RSS's second *sarsanghchalak*—Supreme Leader—and perhaps its most important ideologue, has expressed the RSS ideology in unequivocal terms, noting that the three biggest threats to India are Muslims, Christians and communists. The global Hindutva movement, too, targets Muslims and Dalits, though it cannot target Christians the same way for obvious reasons. In this chapter, the report will conduct an intersectional analysis of the relationship between Hindu supremacist movements and minorities.

### HINDUTVA AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

The Hindutva movement in India has historically been always been in conflict with the country's Muslim population, ever since its emergence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it was born partly in response to the Indian Muslim aspirations of a pan-Islamic mobilisation. As noted in chapter one, Savarkar's very conception of the Indian state deliberately excluded Muslims and Christians. Golwalkar has asserted in his writing that not a single Muslim should be allowed in the country, and that Muslims must either adopt Hinduism, or accept a status denied any privileges or even second-class citizenship status. A frequently cited Hindu nationalist myth that has persisted over the century since its origin to present-day politics, which has reinforced the anti-Muslim sentiment, is majoritarian fear of Islamic population growth and the Hindus consequentially becoming a dying race in their own country.

In Modi's India, the Islamophobia of the Hindutva movement has attained a normalisation in society and policy like never before. The lynching of Muslims by self-styled Hindu vigilante extremists

became commonplace, with assailants recording videos of the incidents and circulating them on social media, and receiving financial and political support from BJP legislators. BJP-ruled states have adopted the Zionist practices of demolishing Muslim homes. Muslim representation in parliament and state assemblies have reached all-time lows. Muslim personal law has begun to be repealed under a guise of establishing a uniform civil code, but without implementing any changes to Hindu personal law. Muslim religious spaces are forcibly shrunk, creating the profession of Islam an increasingly private affair. Residential spaces are ghettoized, with land owners preventing Muslims from renting or buying property in Hindu dominated neighbourhoods. Interfaith relations are increasingly policed, regulated, and effectively prevented.

While the Global Sangh has not led to an equally sectarian and virulent Islamophobia, the anti-Muslim practices are reflected across the world. In the previous chapter, this report has already noted how HSS UK came under scrutiny of the British Charity Commission for hosting an event where a speaker was allowed to freely share Islamophobic views to students. It also noted how funds raised by Hindutva groups in the UK and the US following the Gujarat pogrom was selectively used for Hindu victims of the violence, and for the creation of sectarian villages. Even educational initiatives of the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation and textbooks distributed by Sewa Bharati have been reported to propagate anti-Muslim, Hindu nationalist ideologies.

A 2023 report about the RSS network in Canada highlights numerous instances of Islamophobic statements by Canadian Hindu who were affiliated to various Indo-Canadian organisations and claimed to speak for the community.<sup>86</sup> Another report about Islamophobia in Canada by Jasmin Zine similarly noted the Hindu nationalist organisations in the country that shared anti-Muslim hate speech, such as Rise Canada and Canadian Hindu Volunteers.<sup>87</sup> In the UK, Islamophobic politicians such as Bob Blackman have increasingly associated

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<sup>86</sup> National Council of Canadian Muslims and World Sikh Organization of Canada, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Network in Canada (1 March 2023)

<sup>87</sup> Jasmin Zine, 'The Canadian Islamophobia Industry: Islamophobia's Ecosystem in the Great White North' (2022) < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48696287> > accessed 2022



themselves with the British Sangh, including receiving funding from Hindutva groups both in the UK and in India.<sup>88</sup> The VHPA's websites publish and promote various Islamophobic conspiracy theories, tropes and violent imagery, including articles that claim that the "fundamentals of Islam clearly divide humanity" and even a category called "Destructive Islam."<sup>89</sup> It has also supported the Modi regime's anti-Muslim policies and lobbied against any opposition to them within the US.<sup>90</sup>

#### HINDUTVA AND CASTE

In addition to the Indian Muslim mobilisation of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, another social development that led to the emergence of Hindu nationalist movement was the conversion of Dalits to Christianity, which fueled the Hindu majoritarian inferiority complex.<sup>1</sup> The Hindu nationalist movement was born out of a desire to unite the Hindu population, but it has always simultaneously adhered to and reinforced caste structures. The Hindu caste system is a hierarchical and hereditary system of socio-economic division of society, comprising three upper-caste communities—namely, the Brahmins, the traditional priestly caste; the Kshatriyas, the warrior caste; and the Banias, the trading caste—a fourth lower-caste community, the Shudras, or the artisanal and service castes; and the outcastes, the Dalits, who are traditionally the most oppressed community.

The Hindutva movement has always sought to protect the privilege, power and dominance of the upper castes, while restricting the efforts of the oppressed castes to escape the shackles of the Hindu caste order. Even though the upper castes constitute less than 15 percent of the country's population, they wield significant power and influence over India's intellectual life and finances.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Nafeez Ahmed, Conservative MP Blaming 'Islamist Extremists' for Leicester Violence Funded by Organisations Tied to Hindutva Militants' *Byline Times* (27 Sep 2022)

<sup>89</sup> 'Factsheet: RSS' (Bridge Initiative, 2021)

<<https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh-rss/>> accessed 18 May 2021

<sup>90</sup> Savera, The Global VHP's Trail of Violence (January 2024)

<sup>91</sup> Hartosh Singh Bal, 'The Unstoppable Rise of Hindu Nationalism' *Foreign Affairs* (13 April 2022)

s The RSS has always been led by Brahmins, and even while it has succeeded in mobilising the marginalized lower-caste communities to join the Hindutva movement, polarising them on religious lines against Muslims and Christians, it has consistently opposed affirmative-action policies. The caste dominance of the RSS is replicated within the Global Sangh as well, where the leadership positions among all the Sangh organisations are held by the upper caste.

Indeed, the Hindutva resistance to any progressive caste reform has been witnessed in the Global Sangh as well—most notably, in the US textbook controversy in California. First in 2005, the Hindu Educational Foundation—run by HSS USA—and another Hindutva group, the Vedic Foundation, raised objections to depiction of caste, Hinduism and Indian history in sixth-grade social science textbooks. The two organisations proposed over 200 edits, which were met with significant objections by academics, anti-caste organisations and progressive Hindu groups. In March 2006, the California State Board of Education rejected the proposed edits, and endorsed an alternate set of edits by its own subcommittee.

The contentions over the textbooks broke out again in 2016. This time, the California education board had first held multiple reviews to decide on a framework to dictate the content of the textbooks. In the final framework, most edits suggested by the American Sangh—which once again aligned with Hindutva ideology, such as the whitewashing of caste oppression within Hinduism—stood rejected.<sup>92</sup> However, in many of the textbooks published the next year, the content aligned with the edits proposed by the Sangh organisations such as HEF and HAF, likely because the American Sangh had reportedly pressurised on the publishers, and even directly participating in their review process—for instance, Murali Balaji, the director of education at HAF, is credited in a textbook by National Geographic as a “reviewer of religious content.” As Thaker reported, “while the framework had described the Dalit community by name, the approved National Geographic textbook fails to do so.” Similarly, another major publisher, Pearson admitted that it had worked

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<sup>92</sup> Aria Thaker, ‘In California, a Debate Over History Curricula Has Brought To Fore Denials of Caste in the Indian American Community’ *The Caravan* (12 April 2016)

with HAF and HEF on its textbook, which had described the caste system as one that “brought both costs and benefits.”<sup>93</sup>

The funds behind this California textbook controversy point to the seriousness with which the American Sangh takes the issue, and its significant growth over the decade that the California textbook confrontation persisted. In 2005, when the Hindu American Foundation started its textbook activism, the charity reported net assets of USD 187,894. By 2016, this had risen dramatically to USD 3.21 million. According to its latest filing, in 2022, its net assets stand at USD 3.71 million, and the HAF reported a total revenue of USD 2.53 million and expenses of USD 2.24 million.

When the California senate passed a historic bill that would have made it the first US state to prohibit caste discrimination, the VHPA opposed the move, citing Hindu supremacist arguments claiming that the caste system was based on a merit-based distribution of skills.<sup>94</sup> Ultimately, the California governor vetoed the bill following lobbying by an Indian American entrepreneur, Ramesh V Kapur, who had in 2020 also lobbied the Joe Biden and Kamala Harris campaign to take a moderate stance on controversial policies of the Modi regime.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, when Ontario Human Rights Commission adopted a framework to incorporate caste discrimination into its code, it faced severe opposition from Hindutva groups in Canada, including the Canadian Organisation for Hindu Heritage Education, which was reportedly supported by HAF.<sup>96</sup> Hindutva groups in the UK, too, have similarly opposed laws that seek to prohibit caste discrimination.<sup>97</sup>

#### HINDUTVA AND ADIVASIS

The British colonial missionary efforts in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries largely focused on the tribal and lower-caste communities, which although initially ignored by upper-caste Hindus, eventually mobilised their support for the Hindu

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<sup>93</sup> Aria Thaker, ‘In California, a Debate Over History Curricula Has Brought To Fore Denials of Caste in the Indian American Community’ *The Caravan* (12 April 2016)

<sup>94</sup> Savera, *The Global VHP’s Trail of Violence* (January 2024)

<sup>95</sup> Raheem Hosseini, ‘He lobbied Gavin Newsom to veto historic caste law. Who is Ramesh Kapur?’ *San Francisco Chronicle*. (23 Oct 2023)

<sup>96</sup> Aria Thaker, ‘In California, a Debate Over History Curricula Has Brought To Fore Denials of Caste in the Indian American Community’ *The Caravan* (12 April 2016)

<sup>97</sup> Vishwa Shamani, Athar Ahmad, ‘Why are UK Hindus against a caste law?’ *BBC* (18 Jan 2017)

nationalist movement. In 1952, the RSS founded the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram—VKA, or Centre for Tribal Welfare—whose primary aim was to counter the influence of Christian movements and proselytization among the aboriginals of India, called Adivasis.<sup>98</sup>

It is worth highlighting that the RSS pointedly refused to address them as Adivasis, which loosely translates to original inhabitants, and instead calls them Vanvasis, which translates to forest inhabitants. This linguistic shift is necessary for the Sangh's Hindutva ideology, which identifies the Hindus as the original inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, and cannot accommodate indigenous communities who predate the Hindus. The RSS's approach to this contradiction has been to indoctrinate India's tribal communities within the fold of Hinduism, absorb indigenous deities as incarnations of Hindu gods and goddesses, and introduce Hindu rituals into Adivasi traditions.<sup>99</sup>

Since the BJP came to power in 2014, it has also enabled a monopoly to Sangh organisations in tribal regions by cutting off funding for both secular non-profits and Christian missionary organisations through highly restrictive laws.<sup>100</sup> Through this process, RSS affiliates such as the VKA, Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation and Sewa Bharati are able to exercise a complete dominance in remote, tribal regions, allowing them to indoctrinate with ease and control.<sup>101</sup>

#### CORPORATE FUNDING, MINING CONGLOMERATES AND ADIVASIS

Perhaps the most direct consequence of corporate funding for Hindutva is felt by the Adivasi communities of India. The impact of the educational and service initiatives in these regions has already been emphasised in this chapter and the previous one of this report, in terms of religious indoctrination that can even take the extreme forms of kidnapping of tribal children with impunity. But yet another manner in which corporate funding affects these communities is through the funding and initiatives of large

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<sup>98</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton University Press, 2009)

<sup>99</sup> Angana P Chatterji, Thomas Blom Hansen, Christopher Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State* (Oxford University Press, 2019) 249–258

<sup>100</sup> Angana P Chatterji, Thomas Blom Hansen, Christopher Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State* (Oxford University Press, 2019) 249–258; Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi's India* (Princeton University Press, 2019)

<sup>101</sup> Manoranjan Pegu, *Operating in the Fault Lines: In Assam, the Sangh is slowly co-opting tribal identities into the Hindu fold*, *The Caravan* (1 February 2024)

mining conglomerates such as the Adani Group and the Vedanta Group. The Modi regime has introduced policies amending mining laws, forest rights and environmental protection regulations in order to allow private corporations to take over India's mines.

As noted earlier, Gautam Adani, the billionaire chairman of the Adani Group, is widely known and reported to be close to Narendra Modi, and has seen his stupendous rise in fortunes during the Modi years. One of Adani's massive infrastructure projects has been his coal mines. Adani has come under severe scrutiny for its activities in the Hasdeo Arand forest, a biodiversity hotspot in the state of Chhattisgarh, where the mining conglomerate operates its largest coal mine.<sup>102</sup> Indigenous residents of the area have used a veto under the forest laws to decline consent for the mine, but the BJP government overruled the community's forest rights in violation of the law.<sup>103</sup> Adani has not only circumvented laws, razed protected forest land and displaced local Adivasis to reap billions of dollars in profit from an illegal coal operation, his mining operations in the region are only set to increase, expanding to other coal blocks in the forest.<sup>104</sup>

Vedanta Resources is a mining conglomerate headquartered in London, with significant operations in India, which it conducts through its numerous subsidiaries, including BALCO, Sterlite Copper, Sesa Goa, Cairn India, and many others. Its chairman, Anil Agarwal, is also known to be an admirer of Modi, and has on multiple occasions publicly celebrated the prime minister and his policies.

A recent investigation by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project exposed how Vedanta ran a covert lobbying operation to weaken key environment regulations, such as a requirement for public consultations with local residents.<sup>105</sup> This severely impacted Adivasi communities, who are displaced

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<sup>102</sup> MS, N. (2018). *Coalgate 2.0. The Caravan.*

<sup>103</sup> Nihar Gokhale, 'How a massive Adani coal project in India's Hasdeo forests overcame all obstacles' *Adani Watch*. (15 Feb 2022)

<sup>104</sup> Ankur Paliwal, 'It was a set-up, we were fooled: the coal mine that ate an Indian village.' *The Guardian* (20 Dec 2022)

<sup>105</sup> Akshay Deshmane, 'Inside Indian Energy and Mining Giant Vedanta's Campaign to Weaken Key Environmental Regulations' *OCCRP* (31 Aug 2023)

without any hearing and forced to work in Vedanta's bauxite mines in unsafe conditions.<sup>106</sup>

The policies were introduced in early 2022, after lobbying efforts the previous year, and in the four preceding years—between 2016 and 2020—two Vedanta-linked trusts donated USD 6.16 million to the BJP. In 2022-23, Vedanta purchased electoral bonds worth INR 155 crore, approximately USD 18.73 million, though the opacity in the scheme hides the beneficiaries of that money.<sup>107</sup> In 2014-15, the year that BJP came to power, the Vedanta Group donated INR 22.5 crore (USD 2.71 million) to the party.<sup>108</sup> In March 2014, two months before Modi came to power, the Delhi High Court had delivered a significant judgment against political funding by the Vedanta Group, noting that its donations to the BJP and the Congress had violated the Foreign Contributions Regulations Act. After Modi came to power, his government retrospectively amended the law to overturn the judgment.

Adani and Vedanta have also both borrowed from the Sangh playbook and sought to push its agenda through educational initiatives. Both corporations have invested large sums of money into the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, which runs boarding schools exclusively for indigenous children. These schools have been widely criticised for being factory schools, conducting anti-tribal teaching that seeks to assimilate the indigenous communities and undermine their social, cultural and political movements.<sup>109</sup> The forced assimilation is made further possible by the fact that the state fails to provide accessible neighbourhood schooling for tribal communities, while corporations such as Vedanta and Adani use the façade of philanthropic initiatives to fund the education of indigenous children.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Hannah Ellis-Petersen, Aakash Hasan, 'We are powerless: Indian villagers live in fear of torture in fight against bauxite mine' (10 Nov 2023); India's tribal slaves to stone. (*Mines and Communities*, 26 July 2024)

<<http://www.minesandcommunities.org/article.php?a=13331>> accessed July 26, 2024,

<sup>107</sup> Sangita Mehta, 'Vedanta donated ₹155 crore to political parties in FY23' *The Economic Times* (21 June 2023)

<sup>108</sup> Mayank Mishra, N Sundaresha Subramanian, Satya Trust, Vedanta among top donors to BJP FY14 *Business Standard* (16 Feb 2015)

<sup>109</sup> Malvika Gupta, Felix Padel, 'The Travesties Of India's Tribal Boarding Schools' *Sapians.org* (16 Nov 2020)

<sup>110</sup> Sarita Santoshini, Uprooted, FiftyTwo (15 Oct 2022)

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a scoping paper, this report provides an overview of the vast ecosystem of transnational Hindu supremacist movements and the corporate funding behind it. It demonstrates the deep-rooted and foundational connections between Narendra Modi and corporations, and how his political rise has over the past two decades been linked to the mutually beneficial relationship of crony capitalism. It then studied the illicit routes through which corporate funding of Hindutva is made possible by the Hindu nationalist BJP and its policies, in particular looking at the millions of dollars that are channelled through the electoral bonds and electoral trust schemes. The report then provided a snapshot of the global Hindutva ecosystem, a few of the key organisations involved, their massive financial strength, and the ways in which they have funded Hindu supremacist movements. Finally, the report conducted an intersectional analysis to demonstrate how Hindu nationalist movements disproportionately impact minority communities, and examined the role of corporations in this respect.

As such, the report provides a holistic and comprehensive examination of illicit corporate funding behind Hindu supremacist movements across the world. Nonetheless, it is by no means an exhaustive study of the subject, and it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the report, to provide recommendations for further research, and to identify scope for intervention to combat illicit Hindutva funding. Accordingly, this paper makes five recommendations for the most important and effective interventions possible.

### **1. Empowering transparency**

The opacity built into the systems of corporate political finance in India create significant challenges to identifying the complete details of Hindutva funding. The most fundamental intervention necessary in this regard to identify the nature of transnational illicit funding is to support, amplify, and continue the advocacy of organisations such as the Association for Democratic Reforms, which has worked tirelessly to ensure transparency of political finance. ADR's strategic litigations in this regard led to the Delhi High Court judgment of 2014 that found Vedanta's political

funding to be illegal, and to the electoral bonds scheme being ruled unconstitutional. Its research has identified the massive scale of funding of electoral trusts.

Thus, it is necessary not only to support organisations like ADR and provide them with the means necessary to continue their fight for transparency, it is equally important to invest in parallel transparency efforts that can take the cause further. As the saying goes, sunlight is the best disinfectant, and while the executive seeks to ensure opacity, it becomes all the more important for civil society, researchers and journalists to pursue transparency.

## **2. Follow the money**

It is essential to invest resources and efforts into lifting the corporate veil on both Indian and international corporations, their funding for Hindu nationalist actions, and the illicit gains from this funding. With the Modi government's clampdown on civil society organisations, it is essential for global organisations to setup dedicated research teams that can investigate illicit corporate finance without fear.

As such, there is a need for independent, action-oriented research that shows how corporations are putting money into Hindutva movements. The institutional framework for this must exist outside of India and study the legal disclosures and compliances by the global web of companies involved in the financing of Hindu supremacist movements.

## **3. Tracing charitable funding and expenditure**

In a similar vein, it is essential to work towards creating systems of transparency when it comes to the global non-profits. This report shows how the Global Sangh has identified the benefits of the opacity built into charity funding models, and it is taking advantage of them same to hide in plain sight. The anonymity built into the funding models allows these non-profits to receive funds from corporations and transfer it to Hindu supremacist activities, while claiming to serve charitable purposes of education or disaster relief.

It is necessary to trace the finances of these Hindu nationalist non-profits and identify the corporations that fund them and the Indian organisations to which these funds are then sent, to understand the ultimate beneficiaries of this money. The charitable purpose of these organisations and their fundraising



efforts need to be scrutinised closely, which will demonstrate as it has previously that the charities serve as a facade for further Hindu supremacy, in India and abroad.

In this regard, it is crucial to invest research and resources into building transparency about the source of funding of charitable organisations, as well as the beneficiaries of the funding. This requires investigative research and reporting into the network of funding around charities affiliated to the Global Sangh.

The corporations behind the Global Sangh's charities also demand further scrutiny of their financials. Corporations such as Star Pipe Products and Park Square Homes are multinational corporations run by families responsible for routing millions of dollars into the American Sangh. As such, it is important to study the relations between their companies and their charitable activities and determine their compliance with corporate and non-profit laws.

#### **4. Awareness campaigns**

This report has shown the Global Sangh's connections to the RSS and its Indian affiliates. It is crucial that these connections are recognised by the institutions responsible for holding the global non-profits accountable. An illustrative example of the urgency behind this is the finding of the Charity Commission of England and Wales that HSS UK was not directly linked to the RSS.

The lack of direct linkages in terms of common members or direct transfer of funds cannot be deemed sufficient to escape scrutiny in this regard, as the evidence of their umbrella network operation is beyond doubt. The standard of proof to establish connections between the Sangh in India and the Global Sangh cannot be the same as those of corporate subsidiary structures. If the charity authorities across the world acknowledge the close connections of the RSS network across the world, it will go a long way in curbing the transnational funding of Hindutva movements.

In this regard, it would be valuable to initiate awareness campaigns about the Global Sangh, and highlight the Hindu supremacist connections of these global charities. By doing so, it will make it more difficult for these organisations to register as charities, and to find funders who would be willing to be associated with entities known to have extremist ties.

## **5. Lobbying and advocacy**

The opacity built into the funding systems of charitable organisations across the world is vulnerable to exploitation and extremist funding systems, and as such, there is a need to address these faults. A key intervention would be to lobby for the reform of these laws so that charities are obligated to disclose details of their donors and expenditures, imposing stricter regulations on their operation. Advocacy is needed to emphasise on the dangers of unregulated charities, which can be highlighted by demonstrating their ties and financing of Hindu supremacist activities.

There should simultaneously also be advocacy for the reform of India's political finance laws. While it is the BJP government that introduced key changes to the Indian legal framework that introduced significant incentives for unregulated political funding, all parties have benefitted from it and engaged in it. As such, any movement towards reforming the system must necessarily come from outside.

The advocacy about corporate donations can also be conducted at an international scale, holding sister companies or large corporate conglomerates responsible for the political finance of their Indian counterparts. In the UK, the Science Museum has come under severe criticism and boycotts due to a sponsorship deal with Adani Green Energy, taking note of its massive coal operations in India and its displacement of indigenous communities. In Norway, the Government Pension Fund Global, which is world's largest sovereign wealth fund, has put a list of Indian companies including three Vedanta subsidiaries on its exclusion list due to its human rights, environmental and climate actions. By mobilising global support against the corporations involved in Hindutva funding, they can be compelled to reconsider their priorities.

## **5. Strategic litigation**

Even under the existing legal requirements for charitable organisations and political finance for corporations, there are prohibitions against the funding of extremist activities. The use of strategic litigation can force charitable organisations and corporations to restrict their funding of Hindu supremacist activities, and even disclose details of the donors and beneficiaries that are otherwise kept confidential. Such litigations would therefore prove invaluable in the service of all the other interventions as well, by revealing information that can be used for awareness and advocacy.

Many organisations have used strategic litigations most efficiently, notably within the climate justice movement. Coalitions could be built with such movements to litigate against the extractivist corporations that fund Hindu supremacist movements, such as Vedanta and Adani.

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