

The BJP

and the

Compulsions of Politics
in India

edited by

Thomas Blom Hansen
Christophe Jaffrelot

DELHI
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
CALCUTTA CHENNAI MUMBAI
1998

Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford New York
Athens Auckland Bangkok Calcutta
Cape Town Chennai Dar es Salaam Delhi
Florence Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City
Mumbai Nairobi Paris Singapore
Taipei Tokyo Toronto
and associates in
Berlin Ibadan

© Oxford University Press 1998

ISBN 0 19 564638 X

Typeset by Excellent Laser Typesetters, Delhi 110 035
Printed at Pauls Press, New Delhi 110 020
and published by Manzar Khan, Oxford University Press
YMCA Library Building, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi 110 001

Contents

<i>Contributors</i>	vii
Introduction: The BJP After the 1996 Elections <i>Thomas Blom Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot</i>	1
I BJP AND THE CASTE BARRIER: BEYOND THE 'TWICE-BORN'?	
1. The Sangh Parivar Between Sanskritization and Social Engineering <i>Christophe Jaffrelot</i>	22
2. The BJP in Uttar Pradesh: From Hindutva to Consensual Politics <i>Jasmine Zérinini-Brotel</i>	72
3. Rajput Hindutva, Caste Politics, Regional Identity and the Hindu Nationalism in Contemporary Rajasthan <i>Rob Jenkins</i>	101
II A 'HINDI-BELT' PARTY OR A NATIONAL PARTY?	
4. BJP and the Politics of Hindutva in Maharashtra <i>Thomas Blom Hansen</i>	121
5. Southern Discomfort: The BJP in Karnataka <i>James Manor</i>	163
6. Bounded Nationalism: Kerala and the Social and Regional Limits of Hindutva <i>James Chiriyankandath</i>	202
7. The Akalis and the BJP in Punjab: From Ayodhya to the 1997 Legislative Assembly Election <i>Gurharpal Singh</i>	228

III DIVIDED THEY STAND

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 8. The BJP's Riddle in Gujarat: Caste, Factionalism and Hindutva
<i>Ghanshyam Shah</i> | 243 |
| 9. BJP and the Challenge of Factionalism in Madhya Pradesh
<i>Christophe Jaffrelot</i> | 267 |
| 10. The Ethics of Hindutva and the Spirit of Capitalism
<i>Thomas Blom Hansen</i> | 291 |
| AFTERWORD
Short Cuts to Power: From Lucknow to Delhi
<i>Thomas Blom Hansen, Zoya Hasan and
Christophe Jaffrelot</i> | 315 |

Contributors

JAMES CHIRIYANKANDATH is Lecturer in Third World politics and international relations at London Guildhall University since 1993. He has published widely on Indian politics and commented on South Asian affairs for British newspapers and BBC World Service radio and television.

THOMAS BLOM HANSEN is Associate Professor, International Development Studies, Roskilde University, Denmark. He has written numerous articles in Indian and Scandinavian journals.

ZOYA HASAN is Professor at the Centre for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her recent publications include *Quest for Power: Oppositional Movements & Post-Congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh* and *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State in India*.

CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT is Deputy Director of the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales (CERI) in Paris. Chief editor of *Critique Internationale*, he has recently published *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to 1990s*.

ROB JENKINS is Lecturer in Politics at Birkbeck College, University of London. He is the author of the forthcoming, *Democracy and the Politics of Economic Reform in India*.

GHANSHYAM SHAH is Professor in Social Sciences at Centre of Social Medicine & Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. He is the author of several books including *Caste Association and Political Process in Gujarat*, *Protest Movements in Two Indian States*, *Social Movements*, and *Public Health and Urban Development*.

GURHARPAL SINGH is Principal Lecturer in Politics at Simon De Montfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom. He has published *Communism in Punjab*, *Punjabi Identity* (ed. with Ian Talbot), and until 1997, was the editor of the *International Journal of Punjab Studies*.

their interest in supporting the government was very strong indeed.

These developments have proved that the Congress-style mobilization based on cooptation cannot operate anymore. Both the electorate and their representatives now expect material gains in return for their support.⁴⁵

The BJP's agenda for the 1996 general elections had exposed a noticeable move towards the 'middle-ground', which was later denied by the other parties in their rejection of the confidence motion on the 13-days old Vajpayee government. In the field of the Sangh Parivar's staunchest ideological commitment, the reappraisal of Hindu-Muslim relations, the more recent efforts at propagating issues in constitutional and rational terms mark a clear tendency to decommunalize and dedramatize UP's political norms.⁴⁶ However, so far playing down the Hindutva rhetoric remains a political manoeuvre aimed at levelling the playing field. The recent statements made by L. K. Advani during his Swarna Jayanti rath yatra show that the BJP is not backing down on the Sangh Parivar's founding principles.

Strategically speaking, decommunalizing the political field has become particularly important in UP where the electoral expression of Muslims' consternation at the destruction of the Babri Masjid has compromised the party's chances of ever reseizing power. In that sense, consensual politics has become a necessity for the BJP, all the more so as divisions inside the Hindu electorate are sharpening.

However, the close interactions between the Sangh Parivar's members make it impossible for the BJP to stray too far from the RSS's founding commitment to Bharat Mata or the VHP's claim to construct the Ram Mandir. Electorally, it might have to be more receptive to the demands and feelings of its upper-caste base without antagonizing its OBC and Dalit voters. Thus the field of options opened to the BJP and the other parties remains limited by caste and community issues.

⁴⁵ All defectors have been accommodated in the new BJP government.

⁴⁶ This was voiced by several chief leaders of the BJP during 1996, see Pramod Mahajan mentioning a 'Problem of Articulation' in *The Pioneer*, 2 July 1996, or more significantly L. K. Advani's formulation during his Swarna Jayanti rath yatra: 'from Ram Bhakti to Raksha Shakti', *The Hindu*, 4 July 1997.



Rajput Hindutva, Caste Politics, Regional Identity and Hindu Nationalism in Contemporary Rajasthan

ROB JENKINS

As in the late nineteenth century, a martial Rajput identity is being evoked only partly as a reassertion of caste unity; it is also being evoked as a rallying cry for all Hindus.¹

Contemporary analyses of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) efforts to broaden its electoral appeal tend to highlight two clearly identifiable developments. First, the party, in concert with the organizations that make up the Sangh Parivar, has been reaching out to Dalit, OBC, and tribal groups in an effort to dispel its image as a movement dominated by the upper castes. Its grassroots developmental activities in this area,² spearheaded by specialized

¹ Radhar, Kumar, 'Gender, Politics and Identity at Times of Crisis: The Agitations Around Sati-Daha in India', *Discussion Paper 309* (Brighton, U.K.: Institute of Development Studies, 1992), pp 17-18.

² These have been extensive in Rajasthan, particularly in those southern portions of the state which have large tribal populations. The social-welfare work of organizations like the Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad (VKP), a tribal welfare council run by the RSS, was seen to have yielded electoral dividends for the BJP in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections. Operating in collaboration with like-minded local groups and sympathetic individuals, the VKP has in recent years become highly organized and extended its sphere of influence considerably. For instance, in the run up to the 1996 elections, the chairman of the Rajasthan Sports Council (an RSS man), with the help of VKP volunteers, organized massive sporting meets in tribal areas, partially at state expense. These became important occasions for electioneering. Along with the Hindu Jagran Manch (HJM), which also has a long history of social work in tribal areas, the VKP organized campaign tours

front organizations, have been accompanied by a set of broad ideological adjustments. These have centred on denunciations of caste divisions in society, equating them with a corrupted form of Hinduism that weakens Hindu unity. At the same time, the BJP is pursuing a second strategy, consisting of a series of region-specific mobilization campaigns. This represents an attempt to customize both the movement's message and its mode of organizing the wide variety of social and economic circumstances prevailing in India's states.³ This second strategy (of regionalization), however, has not in general been accompanied by the type of ideological realignment one finds in relation to the party's efforts to woo subaltern communities, despite the very important fact that caste configurations vary widely from state to state (as well as between regions within states). The failure to supply the regionalization strategy with a complementary set of ideological underpinnings is attributable to a widespread belief within the Sangh Parivar that regionalization must proceed *sub rosa*, lest the Hindu nationalist movement should become fragmented along regional lines.⁴

Rajasthan represents an exception to this pattern. Both strategies (of social broadening and regional specificity) are not only in effect, but also supported by the elaboration of a set of corresponding ideological justifications. This is possible in Rajasthan because its history provides ample scope for strategists within the Sangh Parivar to wed nationalism to regionalism, and regional identity to a broadly (though not entirely) inclusive form of caste politics. The skillful exploitation of these historically contingent correspondences may explain why the BJP has had more consistent electoral success in Rajasthan than it has in other states. Of the four state governments dismissed in the wake of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, it was only in Rajasthan that the party

throughout tribal areas which featured fiery orators from the VHP and the Durga Vahani, the Parivar's women's front. All of these activities were funded with what, in American political parlance, is called 'soft money'—funds that do not figure into the election commissioner's campaign spending limits.

³ This is, of course, a complicated issue. To be sure, a large part of this process is a result of changes at the grassroots level. But we must also acknowledge the active role of the BJP party élites in crafting a strategy for 'regionalizing' the party.

⁴ Interview with a senior politician who is active in the RSS lobby, 3 September 1996, Jaipur.

returned to power when fresh elections were held in November 1993.⁵ While the party's fortunes have ebbed and flowed in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and more recently in Gujarat, the BJP has maintained power at the state-level in Rajasthan, consistently captured half of the state's parliamentary seats, and continued to increase its share of the popular vote.⁶ Unlike in Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, or Bihar the BJP in Rajasthan does not rely on a regional party as an ally. Because of the state's unique social structure and experience with democratic politics, *the Rajasthan BJP itself functions like a regional party.*

Whether a similar dynamics could take place in other states—subject to modifications tailored to each region's historical peculiarities—is an empirical question. By examining the Rajasthan experience, however, we can take the issue with arguments, put forth by usually very astute political analysts, that the rise of *regionalism* may presage the demise of the Hindu *nationalist* political force represented by the BJP. Like many other commentators, *Maharashtra Times* Editor Kumar Ketkar has extrapolated from the failure of regional parties to support the BJP's bid to form a national government following the 1996 general election, to argue that regionalism itself will cause a further unraveling of the BJP.⁷ The *Economic Times*' Narendar Pani appears to have arrived at a similar equation. Like Ketkar's, Pani's analysis is unreceptive to the notion that the BJP might respond creatively to these trends, which themselves vary in intensity and character from region to region, by regionalizing its ideology, rather than making a few adjustments on points of policy:

[T]he ability of either the Leftist or Hindutva ideology to reach beyond their current allies to all the local groups that are now emerging must be in some doubt. Both ideologies tend to be preoccupied with just one aspect of Indian

⁵ For an analysis of these elections, see Jenkins, Rob, 'Where the BJP Survived: Rajasthan Assembly Elections, 1993', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XXIX, no. 11, 12 March 1994, pp 635–41.

⁶ The BJP vote share rose from 41 per cent in 1991 to 47 per cent in 1996. While much of this may be due to the virtual elimination of the Janata Dal and other centre-left parties from the state's electoral scene, it is still impressive, especially as the Congress was expected to be the major beneficiary of this development, having absorbed most of the important Jat leaders from the Janata Dal. In fact, the increase in Congress' popular vote was no greater than the BJP's: a 6 per cent gain, from 44 per cent in 1991 to 50 per cent in 1996.

⁷ Ketkar, Kumar, 'Regionalism Will Do BJP in', *Economic Times*, 20 May 1996.

society, whether it is class or religion. Other aspects of Indian society like caste or regional identities are brushed under the carpet. And, whether we like it or not, the politics of some of the emerging local forces centres around caste and regional issues.⁸

And yet, because the BJP in Rajasthan has managed to link region, caste, and Hindu nationalism in a very compelling set of political narratives, we must not discount the prospects for similar developments in other states. Pani argues that the *ad hoc* way in which during the 1996 general election all-India parties went about 'wooing regional parties of all shades' indicates the poor likelihood of national parties adapting coherently and effectively to regional political forces. The problem with this view is that—again, like Ketkar's—it pays too much attention to indications emerging from national parties' strategies for building *alliances* with regional parties, and too little on changes within national parties themselves at the state level. The fact is that we do not know what the impact of regionalization on all-India parties will be, let alone what effect it will have on specific parties in specific regions at specific times. Once upon a time the Congress 'regionalized itself'. And clearly, at distinct historical conjunctures, certain regional parties have applied various degrees of saffron to their images, most notably the Shiv Sena, but in a very different way the AIADMK (All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) in Tamil Nadu under a Brahmin chief minister Jayalalitha. Only additional detailed research will enlighten us on this question.

The Sangh Parivar in Rajasthan does not rely upon obscure points of theological doctrine or scriptural authority to denounce caste distinctions as a way of unifying the Hindu community. Instead, the emphasis is on exploiting a pre-existing regional identity—one heavily imbued with what has been called the Rajput ethic—and reinventing it for its own purposes. Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph define the Rajput ethic as 'valour without regard to consequences.'⁹ The attributes of martial acumen and valour

⁸ Pani, Narendar, 'Regional Nationalism: Challenge to National Parties', *Times of India*, 16 May 1996.

⁹ Rudolph, Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *Essays on Rajputana: Reflections on History, Culture, and Administration* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1984), p. 4. It is also worth noting that the Hindu nationalist projection of the Rajput ethic in Rajasthan is not uncontested. As the Rudolphs note, there is at least one competing 'practical norm of conduct' also existing in Rajasthan (p. 44).

associated with Rajput warrior/princes¹⁰ are not only venerated by all communities in Rajasthan, but they also conform closely to the sort of assertive nationalism that the Sangh Parivar is attempting to project as a homogenized form of Hinduism. The BJP's tendency to privilege the symbol of Ram, a deity by no means dominant in practices of worship in Rajasthan, nevertheless accords with the prevailing status yardstick of martial honour. It is not particularly relevant to many followers of the Hindutva movement in Rajasthan that the privileging of the Ram myth, particularly its martial aspect, runs contrary to the doctrinal diversity that is seen by many to define Hinduism. That the BJP is 'semiticizing' Hinduism is not a rebuttal that finds favour with the vast bulk of Rajasthan's people.

Of far greater concern to those activated by the emotive mobilization tactics of the Sangh Parivar is the extent to which Rajasthan is accorded a special role within this purported nationalist renaissance. In this construction, Rajasthan is cast as the preserver of the true faith, of the assertive, self-confident, martial tradition of Hinduism. Other regions, according to this interpretation, have seen this tradition subverted under the influence of foreign ideologies, both Muslim and Western. In Rajasthan the flame of honour has not yet been snuffed out. It is the 'sacred fire' from which the rest of India can reignite its sense of lost strength and vitality.

This narrative is a potent source of political mobilization for the Sangh Parivar. It is a manifestation of regional pride, but, crucially, one that does not rely upon regional exclusivism. Its specific character—in contrast to some other regionalist ideologies, like the Telugu movement in Andhra—need not pose problems for its integration into the nationwide organization, which is one reason why the BJP Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, is given a relatively free hand in running both state and party, despite his conflicts with the more doctrinaire elements in the RSS. This interpretation of the Rajput ethic is born of a belief in the special contribution of Rajasthan's history to a larger nationalist reawakening. The idea of Rajasthan as a repository of traditional values also has the merit of being able to appeal, in

¹⁰ See Hitchcock, John, 'The Idea of the Martial Rajput', in Milton Singer (ed.), *Traditional India* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1959), especially pp 8–10.

theory, to all sections of the electorate. However, in operation, as we shall see, it does bring to the surface conflicts within Hindu society, to say nothing of its effects on Hindu-Muslim relations.

RAJPUT HINDUTVA AND REGIONAL IDENTITY

The chain of reasoning through which communalist ideology links nationalism, regional identity, and caste politics tends to shift over time in response to the unfolding of political events. The spin also varies according to who is speaking and who is listening. But the basic story is fairly consistent, and is able to draw on the richness of Rajasthani history, with all of its ambiguities and contradictions. The central element is the Rajput community itself. The ideology runs something like this: Rajputana, by maintaining the ideal norm of Kshatriya rule, has always been the protector of traditional Hindu values. Preserving these against foreign influence—especially from holders of power in Delhi—has been and will remain a priority.¹¹ Congress rule in Rajasthan has been characterized by the subversion of Rajasthan's interests and distinctive identity to a form of pseudo-secularist nationalism that benefits insidious enemies of the Hindu people.

Hindu nationalist forces were greatly assisted in their efforts to portray Rajasthan as the preserver of traditional Hindu values by an incident that occurred in Deorala village of Sikar district on 4 September 1987. Roop Kanwar, a grieving young Rajput widow, performed Sati by, according to conflicting accounts, either jumping or being pushed onto her husband's funeral pyre. While the almost-extinct practice of Sati has never been unique to Rajasthan, the widely recounted (and highly romanticized) tales of devoted princesses hurling themselves to fiery deaths in times of war have helped to associate it with the region in general, and (even more significantly) with the Rajput caste in particular. Three-fourths of

¹¹ Most Rajput states, of course, were by most reckonings far from independent under both Mughal and British rule, and the degree of resistance of many rulers is open to question. The Sangh Parivar has focused its activities on two figures popularly associated with valiant military efforts to oppose 'the Muslim invaders': Prithviraj Chouhan and Maharana Pratap. The latter's 400th death anniversary in 1997 has spawned numerous public celebrations, including several organized around L.K. Advani's 900 kilometre yatra through Rajasthan in June. (See Sebastian, Sunny, 'Good Response to Rath Yatra in Rajasthan', *The Hindu*, 11 June 1997.)

all reported Sati-Dahas since Independence have occurred in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan, comprising the districts of Sikar and Jhunjhunu. Sati is in many ways the supreme manifestation of an ethic which prizes honour above all else, and is cited frequently by Rajasthanis when discussing the unique features of traditional Rajput rule. Though the Congress state government of the time was widely criticized in the national press and the Parliament for allowing the traditional *Chunati-mahotsva* that marks the conclusion of the Sati ceremonies to go ahead twelve days after the Sati, in the eyes of many rural Rajasthanis its non-committal attitude marked it out as just the sort of pseudo-secular organization that the Sangh Parivar in Rajasthan had been making it out to be. The Deorala Sati galvanized the Hindu nationalist movement in Rajasthan, spawning pro-Sati organizations, such as the Sati Dharma Raksha Samiti. These and other offshoots continue to function to this day, organizing commemorative celebrations for well-known Sati episodes in Rajasthan history, making donations to temple trusts, and supporting educational activities.

There are several caste-related aspects to this particular form of reconstituted tradition. First, according to Shail Mayaram, the Samiti 'was a much needed excuse for a tightening of Rajput solidarity between lineages.'¹² The coming together of Rajput leaders across divisions of party, region, and clan was a clear political correlate of this process. A line-up of speakers at a public meeting organized by the Samiti in Jaipur the following month denounced an ordinance, hastily passed by the state legislature the previous week, designed to prevent Sati more effectively in the future. The Rajput leaders who spoke at the meeting all espoused the cause of Sati, while one political heavyweight from the Jat community who addressed the rally, Lok Dal leader Nathuram Mirdha (later of the Janata Dal, and then a Congressman until his death in 1996), stated that 'the institution of Sati had no relevance in the present age.'¹³ Whether he supported the practice or not, Mirdha's assessment of irrelevance was clearly off the mark, for it had (and continues to have) an important place in the popular imagination and in the rhetorical armoury of the Hindu nationalist

¹² Mayaram, Shail, 'Communal Violence in Jaipur', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13–20 November 1993, p. 2534.

¹³ Pangariya, B. L., *State Politics in India* (Jaipur: National Publishing, 1988), p. 163.

movement in Rajasthan. (We shall return to the question of Jat-Rajput rivalry, and its connection to the unfolding of the ideology of Rajput Hindutva, in due course.)

Second, Sudesh Vaid has argued that a somewhat hidden dimension of this process has been the use of Sati by Shekhawati Rajputs, traditionally not a very influential or respected clan, as a vehicle for forwarding their claim of increased stature.¹⁴ The basis of this claim lay primarily in their successful participation in electoral politics and the state services, both police and administrative, since Independence. Their association with Sati was, in this view, a symbolic accompaniment—one designed to bring their political and ritual status into better equilibrium. How effective this has been is open to debate, and will require further research, but Vaid's point helps to convey the close association between the political aspirations of specific subcastes and the mobilizational strategies of the Hindu nationalist movement.

The third caste-related aspect to this process concerns the role of trading communities as financial backers of these Rajput-orchestrated Sati mobilizations. The Rajput-Bania axis (in Rajasthan, sometimes called the Rajput-Mahajan or Rajput-Jain axis) has a long pedigree in Rajasthan. According to Kumkum Sangari, this has been revitalized and restructured through their collaboration in staging the Deorala Sati.¹⁵ The implication is that the increasing influence of money-power on political conflict (and not just of the electoral type) has been sanctified in the form of a closer alliance between Shekhawati Rajputs and the state's many trading communities, including (interestingly) Jains and non-resident Rajasthani business figures (primarily Marwaris). Thus, politics both within the Rajput community and between Rajputs and other communities is represented within this particular cultural practice, which as we have seen also serves to link the region of Rajasthan to a particular conception of pan-Hindu identity.

According to the ideological construction promulgated by Hindu nationalists in Rajasthan, the defining feature of Rajputana—the special gift of the land of the Rajputs to the Hindu nationalist reawakening—has been its preservation of a stable social order

¹⁴ Vaid, Sudesh, 'Politics of Widow Immolation', *Seminar*, no. 342, February 1988.

¹⁵ Sangari Kumkum, 'Perpetuating the Myth', *Seminar*, no. 342, February 1988.

through Rajput rule. But, as is often stressed in communalist discourse, this social order is tolerant and accommodating, not exclusivist. Though divided by clan rivalries, the Rajput community, and the social relations in which it is embedded, are the embodiment of an ideology which uses the traits of honour and shame as yardsticks against which to measure social prestige. To the extent that this contrasts with the more prevalent scale of social status, which dichotomizes purity and pollution, the Rajput ethic provides for a more *just* social order. Because Rajput rule tended to enforce meritocratic standards in the realm of politics—a sphere which was elevated above both spiritual and material affairs in traditional Rajasthani society—it also helped to unleash human endeavour and undermine the insidious ideology of renunciation and passivity to which the Hindu nation has elsewhere been subjected.

The tolerance of the social order under traditional Rajput rule is a point that is stressed often by those sympathetic to Hindu nationalism in Rajasthan. 'Why are the Jains so rich in Rajasthan?' asked an editorial staff member of the heavily BJP-oriented *Rajasthan Patrika*, the state's leading daily newspaper. 'They have done so well here that we have become a major exporter of Hindu Banias [i.e. Marwari businessmen]. There has never been persecution in Rajasthan for any group that is loyal and plays by the rules. Only those that are out to harm the Hindu way have met with difficulties.'¹⁶

To summarize a view put forward by Iqbal Narain and P. C. Mathur, Rajputs in Rajasthan stand as the embodiment of martial values and perform the functional role played by Brahmins in other parts of India.¹⁷ Instead of Sanskritization, lower-status groups in Rajasthan sought upward mobility engaged in a process of Kshatriyanization.¹⁸ Thus, today in Rajasthan a range of Dalit, tribal, OBC, Christian, and even Muslim groups claim descent

¹⁶ Interview, 22 October 1993, Jaipur.

¹⁷ See Narain, Iqbal and P. C. Mathur, 'The Thousand Year Raj: Regional Isolation and Rajput Hinduism in Rajasthan before and after 1947', in Francine Frankel and M. S. A. Rao (eds), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*, vol. II (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp 1-58.

¹⁸ For a succinct description of this concept, see Frankel, Francine, 'Introduction', in Francine Frankel and M. S. A. Rao (eds), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*, vol. I (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp 1-20.

from, or intimate historical association with, Rajput clans. As Raymond Jamous¹⁹ has pointed out, Meo Muslims in Rajasthan view some of their adopted rituals (in marriage ceremonies and rules governing marriage alliances, for instance) as distinctively Rajput.²⁰ Interestingly, they do not consider these practices as possessing a particularly Hindu dimension. The implication is that 'Rajput' is an ideal, rather than a subset of Hindu society. It exists as a code of conduct which cuts across religion, class, and caste. Its *structural role* as a mechanism which provides a common yardstick for social behaviour, and which therefore upholds a stable, though by its own reckoning more just, social order, qualifies it for the more evocative term, the 'Rajput ethic'.

The self-identification of some segments of Rajasthan's Muslim community is just one reflection of the predominance of the Rajput ethic. The way in which historical events are reconstructed in political oratory and in the education of the RSS cadres reflects a distortion of this phenomenon. One example concerns the prominent role played by Muslims in high politics in the conflicts of the late eighteenth century between Rajput rulers and the Rajput nobility. Envious of the imperial prerogatives found in the more centralized Mughal model, a number of Rajput princes wished to escape the constraints of feudal rule, with its constant headache of disputed land rights and wars of succession. Standing in their way was the traditional reliance upon clan nobles for military services. To avoid this constraint, rajahs of a number of important states entrusted Muslim military commanders to recruit and lead mercenary armies. Arsi Singh of Mewar (Udaipur) gave one such commander, Abdul Rahim Beg, a status equal to that of the Salumber Chief in his court.²¹ The Maharajah of Kota engaged in similar tactics, placing a fairly large army under the command of Dalel Khan and Mehrab Khan. The use of Muslim military men was not unusual in many parts of India ruled by Hindu sovereigns

¹⁹ Jamous, Raymond, 'The Meo as a Rajput Caste and a Muslim Community', in C. J. Fuller (ed.), *Caste Today* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp 180-201.

²⁰ See also Sikand, Yoginder, 'Meonis of Mewar', *Economic and Political Weekly*, (11 March 1995), pp 490-2.

²¹ Singh, M. S., *Emergence of Modern Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Wishwa Prakashan, 1993), p. 11. The text of the grant is reproduced in James, Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), pp 233-4.

during this and earlier periods. But the niche that they occupied in these cases, as instruments of political conflict within existing feudal hierarchies, and thus amounting to a challenge to the traditional order, has been exploited by communal forces in Rajasthan—and not only those officially linked to Sangh Parivar organizations.

In one interview, a prominent BJP politician mentioned the Muslim mercenary tradition, as an aside, when referring to a particular Muslim Congress MLA as a 'hired gun'.²² This self-proclaimed party intellectual, who was not a Rajput, argued with a hint of irony that it was only 'the Jat-Brahmin axis in the Congress' that would engage in the hiring of mercenaries any longer. When pressed to explain, his revisionist view of the eighteenth century Muslim mercenaries was that they took advantage of the Rajput princes' 'distress', offering their services in an effort to undermine the traditional order. They were, he continued, 'mischievous agents of other forces', just as today's Muslims 'held secret allegiances to foreign powers'.

This may all seem a far cry from the day-to-day organizing of political movements in contemporary Rajasthan. But the point is that these historical fragments leave uncertain imprints that prove convenient in justifying political attitudes. They are in the air at the level of the political leadership. These are often not the hardline RSS men, but those of a more accommodating, moderate ilk in their style of political action. The committed activists are more systematic in disseminating such historical reconstructions, embellishing their accounts with loving details.

The Hindu nationalist movement's foot soldiers in Rajasthan, the grassroots workers in Parivar organizations (including the BJP itself), constantly invoke fragments of history for partisan purposes. Though not everyone in the Rajasthan BJP is content with projecting the party as a Rajput-dominated organization—and in many respects it is not one—the Rajput *ethic* is a legacy its members are willing to use as a tool in attracting political support. This takes many forms. When attempting to appeal to lower-caste groups, BJP politicians and party workers make much of the links between the former princes and their lower-caste lieutenants. During the November 1993 state assembly elections, campaign managers

²² Interview with a former BJP MP, 9 December 1993, Jaipur.

waiting for an audience with party leaders at the BJP headquarters in Jaipur said that historical references were used routinely in candidates' campaign speeches. One episode that they felt was particularly effective as a rhetorical device in low-caste *mohallas* was the well-known story that Jaipur princes in the late eighteenth century had elevated members from lower castes, including barbers and elephant drivers, to important posts in their administrations. Though often crudely packaged hagiography, the essential message conveyed in these political parables was that traditional Hindu rule, under benevolent Rajputs, had been, and will continue to be, based upon a distinct sense of fair play and respect for innate talent. 'It is to spread the idea of equality to the rest of India that they must vote BJP, we tell them', said one of the waiting pair of campaign workers, both from Jodhpur district.²³

In Rajasthan, the local BJP makes little effort to sell (or even to defend) the national BJP line stressing the need for a casteless society—that divisions of caste and sect have weakened the Hindu community and made it vulnerable to Muslim incursions. The emphasis is on the benefits of the traditional order, the reciprocity inherent in the practical functioning of hierarchical relations, and the flexibility displayed by traditional rulers. The selective version of history on which these notions rely may not reflect the complex reality of the past; but the sense of uncertainty found in contemporary social relations provides them a powerful resonance.

REACTIONS TO MIDDLE-CASTE ASCENDANCY: THE STALLING OF MANDALIZATION

One of the characteristics of the current political dispensation that lends strength to this rosy interpretation of the beneficence of traditional Hindu (i.e. Rajput) rule is the position of the Jat community. Indeed, the construction of Hindu nationalist ideology in Rajasthan has not only drawn selectively on history to support its claims, but has also *reacted* to other patterns of socio-political development, some of which have themselves been historical reconstitutions. The most important of the latter have been attempts by the Jat community of Rajasthan to 'reinterpret

²³ Interview with two party workers from Jodhpur district, 30 October 1993, Jaipur.

its traditional status in society to buttress its contemporary aspirations and develop a mythology about the same.²⁴

These efforts are most clearly evident in the Jat Krishak Sudharak, a social reform movement which began in the late 1930s. This movement, which ultimately fed into the Kisan Sabha organizations which fought exploitation by Rajput jagirdars, 'involved attempts at *achieving social mobility by subscribing to value orientations found outside the traditional order*. Emphasis was placed upon change and progress, participation in and adaptation to the wider world of social action.²⁵ While extremely successful at gaining entry for large numbers of Jats into the police and administrative services of various princely states, these reform movements nevertheless failed to result in material or psychic benefits for other non-élite castes. This has provided communal political forces in Rajasthan additional ammunition with which to portray Jats as both the major cause and the selfish beneficiaries of the broader malaise represented by the decline of the traditional social order. The success at associating the Rajput ethic with Hindu nationalism is, in many ways, merely the reverse side of the failure of Jat political élites to build strong vertical or horizontal alliances with other castes and communities.²⁶ Having successfully reformed internal practices, and having reoriented the self-perception of a large portion of those in the community, the Jat leadership neglected the task of building an ideology that could draw other communities into an alternative to the Rajput ethic. While many Jats have demonstrated their skill at dispensing material patronage to other communities, as a group they have not constructed a competing vision of common historical purpose.

²⁴ Kothari, Rajni, 'Introduction', in Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970), p. 10.

²⁵ Sisson, Richard, 'Caste and Political Factions in Rajasthan', in Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970), p. 181, emphasis added.

²⁶ Indeed, the other side of the Sangh Parivar's successful mobilization campaign is the unconstructive behaviour of the Congress, which has been alienating Muslims for years, both before and after the destruction of the Babri Masjid. In 1993, for instance one of the few Muslim leaders of a Congress front organization was sacrificed at the altar of petty factionalism, despite being an active organizer and relatively uninvolved in political infighting. *The Hindu*, 20 August 1993.

Indeed, Jats are viewed with more suspicion by other communities now than are Rajputs. One manifestation of this was the high level of speculation during the 1993 assembly election that Congress' reliance on Jat leaders (and hence the Jat vote) might lead to apprehensions among other communities who see Congress' social base as too narrow, and (for many) outright fear of what Jat rule might bring. Throughout the campaign, Congress leaders made it clear that if the Congress came to power a Jat would for the first time be made the Chief Minister of the state. This was openly stated by many leaders, though only tacitly acknowledged by others. As one journalistic analysis put it, 'the probable danger the Congress-I may face from this kind of Jat consolidation [among the state's prominent leaders] is the ire of the rest of the people. If there is a backlash from other communities, the Congress-I may suffer to some extent...'²⁷ In contrast to the 1960s, Rajput dominance within the BJP is seen as less troublesome now because *overt* Rajput social power is less in evidence. And where it is on display it is viewed as exemplary—a sort of cultural expression, something with which all types of communities can identify. The acquisition of Jat social and economic power is seen to have come too rapidly, and now voters are apprehensive about the prospect of their dominating the highest levels of state politics as well.

There are three main sources of this widespread antipathy, each of which has been used by the BJP to build solidarity within the chronically divided Rajput ranks.²⁸ First, Jats are seen to have cornered a disproportionate share of the benefits of the massive Indira Gandhi Canal project, which has irrigated large tracts of the Thar desert in northern and western Rajasthan. In 1992, Chief Minister Shekhawat capitalized on this perception by putting forward a controversial proposal to amend the Land Revenue Act.

²⁷ *The Hindu*, 3 October 1993.

²⁸ Rajputs tends to be divided not only along lines of region and segmentary kinship, but perhaps most important politically, between aristocratic and non-aristocratic lineages. Bhairon Singh Shekhawat hails from a non-aristocratic lineage, and uses this status to blur the edges between elite and non-élite groups, making himself the link between the Rajput aristocracy and humbler peasant castes. For an interesting account of the importance of these divisions in one region during the transition to democratic rule, see Singh, Hira, 'Kin, Caste and Kisan Movement in Marwar: Some Questions to the Conventional Sociology of Kin and Caste', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, October 1979, pp 101–18.

It was immediately and savagely attacked by the Congress. Former Congress minister Surendra Vyas lodged a petition with the Governor, urging him to withhold his assent to the bill because of the *mala fide* intentions of the state government. His contention was that it favoured the former jagirdars and ex-rulers of Rajasthan, and that it would cost the state's exchequer Rs 10,000 crores. Most of all, Vyas argued, it was a blatant attempt by the Chief Minister to curry favour among Rajputs. While contesting the figure of Rs 10,000 crores, most observers agree that caste solidarity was indeed the motive behind the amendment.²⁹ Rajput leaders in the regions surrounding the Indira Gandhi Canal were able to appeal to local resentment against prosperous Jat farmers from the neighbouring states of Haryana and Punjab who had moved in and squeezed out deserving recipients of land grants. These sentiments regarding Jat assertiveness, which blended issues of caste and region, resonated deeply with people in other parts of Rajasthan. Associating Jats with the Congress and Janata Dal, the Rajput leaders projected the BJP as the only bulwark against the threat of increasing Jat hegemony.³⁰

This on-again-off-again strategy of fomenting distrust of the Jats and Jat leaders is a thread that runs through the recent history of BJP-politics in Rajasthan. It has provided an important context to major events. As Shail Mayaram has argued, the 1990 riots in Rajasthan could not be understood without reference to the anti-Mandal agitations that preceded them in the autumn of that year.³¹ While the protests against the implementation of the Mandal Commission's policy recommendations on positive discrimination served largely to galvanize the upper castes politically, full-scale polarization on this issue was avoided by casting the Jat community as the villain of the piece. The BJP and other organizations spread the word that the Rajasthan Janata Dal's support for the Mandal recommendations was motivated primarily by a desire to place Jats in the OBC category. This, they argued, was a way of depriving the deserving Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and OBCs of their rightful share of reservations in government

²⁹ Interview with Sanjay Srivastava, *Indian Express* correspondent, 16 December 1993, Jaipur.

³⁰ Interview with Surendra Vyas, 22 April 1994, Jaipur.

³¹ Mayaram, Shail, 'Communal Violence in Jaipur', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13–20 November 1993, p. 2534.

employment and government educational institutions. While there is a kernel of truth in this, it largely ignores the fact that the Mandal recommendations represented an *overall* increase in the share of reservations which would not in theory have adversely affected the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. Whether they would have negatively impacted upon other OBC communities is less clear, since it was not clear that demanding the inclusion of Jats within the OBC category was an official policy of the Janata Dal in Rajasthan.

That the BJP's rhetorical campaign achieved substantial success in the court of public opinion speaks volumes about the extent to which the Scheduled Castes in particular were mistrustful of the Jat community. One reason why this mistrust was so widespread was the ongoing conflict between Jats and Jatavs, a Dalit caste which had suffered humiliation and violence at the hands of both individual Jats and organized gangs. The latter were notorious for sowing terror in Jatav colonies. The complicity of many local police officers and Congress organizations further ingrained the impression that Jats in control of political power would provide the worst of both worlds: a decline in civility and the basis for regional pride, but without the sort of compensation in terms of social empowerment which might otherwise have justified such costly alterations to the traditional order.

Yet, politically shrewd Shekhawat understood the limits of the strategy of Jat vilification. He has always been a pragmatist, one of the qualities that makes him suspect in the eyes of the state's RSS lobby. In 1953, for instance when six of the Rajasthan Jana Sangh's eight MLAs opposed the party's support for the abolition of the jagirdari system, Shekhawat was one of the two who refused to join the revolt.³² This served him well in his subsequent efforts to build a political following beyond the Rajput community. Thirty-five years later his pragmatic streak made him similarly unwilling to write off a community as large, prosperous, and vocal as the Jats. The BJP (during its time on the opposition benches in the late 1980s) played upon divisions within the Jat community in order to court those sections which, in its opinion, had reason to be disillusioned with Congress rule. One of the BJP's most consistent efforts of this type was the wooing of the Jats of eastern

³² *India Today*, 31 October 1995.

Rajasthan. Time and again it was emphasized by party managers that the Jats of the western part of the state had gained at the expense of their caste fellows in the east. 'What have Marwar [Jodhpur] Jats done for our people?' was the refrain of one BJP leader, a Jat from Dausa district.³³ Betrayal, particularly at the hands of the Congress, is a theme that has paid rich dividends for the BJP in selected eastern regions. The party's grassroots campaigns continue to stoke up the memory of a 1985 incident in which a police deputy superintendent shot and killed Man Singh, an Independent MLA and member of the erstwhile royal family of Bharatpur, which had been a Jat-ruled state. The shooting came a day after a reportedly inebriated Man Singh rammed his jeep into the Congress Chief Minister Shiv Charan Mathur's stationary helicopter and, soon thereafter, into the makeshift platform from which Mathur was to address a political rally. Mathur was blamed by the local community for ordering the shooting of this unlikely symbol of Jat pride, causing much damage to the party's fortunes in the region. Man Singh's daughter was elected first as the local MLA, and later as a BJP Member of Parliament, unseating Congress stalwart (and Union Minister for External Affairs under Rajiv Gandhi) Natwar Singh in 1991. The BJP recaptured the seat in 1996, again defeating Natwar Singh.

CONCLUSION

Rajput Hindutva, then, is that form of 'Hinduness' that idealizes martial acumen and personal courage and recognizes the virtues of the Rajput rule. The Rajput ethic, on which it is based, is a cognitive as well as a structural category, one that for many groups transcends its roots in the Hindu-caste hierarchy. There are, however, several conceptual tensions inherent in this ideology, that is, in this politically motivated reading of tradition. Three of them are worth mentioning. First, it is, as stated above, a regional nationalism. Though attempting to evade this contradiction through a narrative stressing the region's role as a preserver of the nation, the Sangh Parivar is not immune to the divisive effects of this tension. Second, to the extent that Rajput Hindutva represents an ideal of a traditional social order, the values of which are applicable

³³ Interview, Bharatpur, 14 November 1993.

to groups outside the Hindu community, it is a sort of ecumenical manifestation of religious orthodoxy. This can sometimes serve to bring members of different communities together, thus undermining the efforts of strident Hindu nationalists to keep them apart.

While it may be possible to characterize the first two conceptual tensions as paradoxes, the third is more of a contradiction, one that arises in the course of the communalists' reconstructions of the history of Rajasthan, as well as in their portrayal of the relationship between that history and the current Hindu nationalist movement. In the communalist narrative, Rajputana is somehow cast as both the preserver of ancient values, and yet a place in which the ancient social order has been upset—by (certain) assertive Jats, by Congress, by Muslims, and by other unnamed nefarious forces. Again, this is not an insuperable political obstacle for the mobilizational strategies of the Sangh Parivar: while it may be *logically* difficult to project traditional Rajput rule as impervious to foreign subversion and yet also the victim of enemies from within and without, this combination is ideologically very potent.

This brief overview of how a Hindu nationalist ideology is being constructed in Rajasthan raises four further issues worth pondering as we assess similar processes in other states. The first is that we must consider carefully what constitutes a 'religious symbol'. Surely, there is more to this than images of Ram and Bharat Mata. Indeed, it is worth asking whether an entire social and political order and the interpretation of its historical role can be considered a symbol around which an assertive nationalist political mobilization can in fact take place. The Rajasthan experience suggests that it can, but perhaps only when this order is centred around a community (such as the Rajput) which can credibly claim to embody virtues to which a broad range of communities might aspire.

Second, the issues raised in this paper may serve as a corrective to the dominant mode of thinking about political mobilization of religious identities in India, in which the Sangh Parivar and its many informal allies are portrayed as the only political actors mining the rich and complex seam of popular consciousness that exists in India. In fact, everyone from Gandhi to the local leaders of today's Congress have invoked religious symbolism to build a political following and cement intercaste alliances—though some

have done so with a greater sense of thought and understanding than others. In parts of Rajasthan, the symbolic, material, and organizational resources of the Bishnoi sect are employed by enterprising politicians in order to construct and nurture political machines. The competitive nature of religious mobilization is as true of India as it is of the United States, where the 'religious right' is not the only political movement to draw on religious imagery and narrative in an attempt to construct a new popular understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition. African-American civil rights leaders, in the tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr., appeal to Christian values of tolerance and brotherly love,³⁴ as do (in a different way) Bill Clinton and many other mainstream American politicians. The point of this caveat is not to equate all forms of religious mobilization—some are clearly more invidious than others—but rather to highlight the competitive context within which Hindu nationalism takes place, particularly in Rajasthan.

Third, there is ample reason to take issue with the argument put forward by Sudipta Kaviraj that 'fundamentalist' religion as a mobilizing strategy relies upon a 'thin' version of religion,³⁵ and that, ironically, this dilution hastens the process of disenchantment and tends ultimately to pave the way for a proliferation of secular attitudes. Clearly, the process of 'fundamentalizing' Hinduism in Rajasthan glosses over many of the nuances of doctrine and worship in an effort to forge a movement capable of maintaining solidarity and competing for political power. But in the process of reconstructing the historical fragments of the region's dominant religious tradition there is a countervailing tendency to generate (unwittingly, perhaps) further complexity. That the unsavoury politicization of the Deorala Sati, for instance will result in the demystification of Sati as a practice throughout the state is by no means clear. The visits of BJP politicians to Deorala to pay homage to the deed have created a new layer of local mythology over which neither the communalists nor the secularists will be able to exercise

³⁴ For a good account of the role of stories that are both recounted and embodied by leaders, see the chapter on Martin Luther King, Jr., in Howard Gardner, *Leading Minds* (New York: Macmillan, 1995).

³⁵ Kaviraj, Sudipta, 'Religion, Politics and Modernity', in Upendra Baxi and Bhikhu-Parekh (eds), *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1996), pp 307-10.

control as it multiplies and informs new understandings of the meanings behind the practice of Sati.³⁶

The fourth and final point worth considering is the extent to which Hindu nationalism in Rajasthan, as in a number of other states, has in fact taken on a local flavour, and the impact of this dynamics on other social processes unfolding in the state. Because what it is to be a Hindu varies from region to region (as well as between sects), local idioms are the vehicle through which notions of the good and the right are promoted by political movements. While it is possible to invent traditions, such efforts are more likely to meet with success when they build upon the raw material that is most accessible to the local political consciousness. Their fuel is the substratum of historical associations that lay dormant within the collective memories of diverse communities. In Rajasthan, this process has been taken to an even more complex level. Local beliefs, traditions, and patterns of social relations have not only been mined by various movements; they have been used to fashion a compelling narrative of Rajasthani culture's rôle in the renewal of the Hindu nation throughout India. To the extent that this can be portrayed as exemplifying a social order that is both more stable and more just—as well as resistant to the pernicious influence of outside forces—it tends to undermine the potential of competing social movements, particularly those based upon assertive lower-caste identity.

In this sense, the promotion of Rajput Hindutva can be considered the preventive antidote to Mandalization, which has been slow to penetrate Rajasthan. Cracks in the organizational armour have, however, become visible of late: the purported OBC elements involved in Gopi Chand Gujar's abortive leadership coup against Shekhawat and tribal demands for sixth-schedule status in southern Rajasthan, to name but two. The electoral sphere has thus far remained largely immune to such developments. The 1998 assembly elections, especially if Shekhawat departs the political scene, may open a new chapter in the Rajasthan politics.

³⁶ Pangariya, B. L., *State Politics in India* (Jaipur: National Publishing, 1988), p. 162; and interview with Mr. Pangariya, 16 December 1993, Jaipur.

PART II

A 'HINDI-BELT' PARTY OR A NATIONAL PARTY



4

BJP and the Politics of Hindutva in Maharashtra

THOMAS BLOM HANSEN

INTRODUCTION

In the light of the overall evolution of Hindu nationalism in India, the political-ideological formations in Maharashtra presents an interesting *paradox*. While the state historically has given birth to a persistent, if limited, constituency for a variety of Hindu communalist organizations and discourses, its diverse and rich range of non-Brahmin and lower-caste assertions, as well as the dominant Congress party in the state, have until recently prevented the Hindu nationalist forces from attaining political power.

To the strategist in the Sangh Parivar, Maharashtra remains a major irritant. The BJP only could win power in this important state by becoming the political junior-partner to a movement, the Shiv Sena, whose public style and political practices have more affinities with the 'Congress-culture' than with the ideals of austerity, discipline and ideological devotion nurtured in the RSS. Seen from a national perspective, the resilience of Congress' political machine in Maharashtra and the mounting strength of the Shiv Sena is, undoubtedly, an obstacle to BJP's further national expansion.