Controlled Emancipation: 
Women and Hindu Nationalism

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In India, processes of economic development, urbanisation and mass education in the last few decades have created a very large group of educated working women, and an even larger group of educated housewives. Furthermore, poor, uneducated women have also become wageearners on an unprecedented scale. These tendencies have served to challenge conventional perceptions of women’s room of manoeuvre in the public sphere. They have also begun to erode restrictions on female sexuality and change the ways in which dominant constructions of femininity are imposed upon, and internalised by, women in different social locations.

The growing visibility of women in the public realm has proved to be a pertinent question for the Hindu nationalist movement in India. On the one hand, erosion of the joint family system and the growing visibility and assertiveness of women in the public realm have troubled large segments of the urban middle classes. The Hindu nationalist forces have discovered a considerable constituency for their programme of cultural revival and purification amongst these groups who are seeking security and respectability in a rapidly changing social world. On the other hand, women’s quest for greater emancipation and visibility has proved to be a growing challenge within the Hindu nationalist movement itself.

In this study, I wish to argue that the Hindu nationalist movement in India has tried to confront women’s quest for a greater visibility and autonomy in the public realm through a strategy of controlled emancipation. This strategy, I argue, is derived from the more general attempt on part of the Hindu nationalist movement to cope with modernity through recourse to various types of ideological and physical control. In the analysis, I identify two Hindu nationalist strategies regarding women: one asserts the primacy of motherhood with respect to women’s position in society; the other attempts to suture gender conflicts through the controlled emancipation of women under the protective canopy of Hindu nationalist organisation.

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Hindu nationalism, as with other forms of cultural nationalism, is constituted by a fundamental ambivalence vis-à-vis modernity. It is a way of coping with modernity. This means that the Hindu nationalists, like the German founders of cultural nationalism (Herder, Fichte and others), try to overcome the perceived dangers of fragmentation in a challenging modern world, and to live a full and meaningful life, by (re)constructing national genius and cultural roots so they can act as the basis for social life. Like many ethnic movements, cultural nationalism seeks to make sense of the world by constructing one homogeneous culture, and recognise one people as the core of the nation. Cultural nationalism in this sense can be seen as a politicised subspecies in the larger category of ethnicity, that is, where claims of community are made on the basis of an imputed shared culture.

The belief that the community shares a single national culture is central to cultural nationalism; so also is the idea that this popular community needs to be constantly rejuvenated and strengthened in order to prevent its dissolution at the hands of modernising forces. Cultural nationalism seeks to link the ultimate fate, Death, inextricably to the nation and does so by making national loyalty the ultimate and unquestionable identity of an individual citizen and expressing this through the rites and discourse of patriotic sacrifice. It seeks to suture and negotiate the discrepancy between modernity imagined as a state of strength, security and plenitude and the actual painful experiences of loss and conflict that have accompanied processes of modernisation.

One corollary of cultural nationalism’s obsession with control is discipline and tight corporate organisational structure. Another is the emphasis on physical strength and self control: the ability to control one’s desires and libido, and to sublimate these urges through an unconditional dedication and service to an elevated cause.

One of the most striking embodiments of this classic cultural nationalist design can be found in contemporary India. This is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (the National Volunteer Organisation), a tightly organised and disciplined organisation that started in Western India in 1925. Today, it has around two million activists based in thousands of branches all over the country. The organisation is the central body within a vast network of organisations and branches, of which the largest and most prominent are India’s second largest party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the revivalist organisation Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the World Hindu Federation. This entire conglomeration has been the prime mover behind the recent surge of Hindu nationalism. The cohesion and discipline of the RSS is premised on a simple device, the shakha, a ritual performed simultaneously throughout the country. Every evening 40 to 50 men, dressed in khaki shorts, meet at a train-
ing ground and perform a series of physical exercises and martial training with long sticks (lathis). After training they gather in front of a large map of Akhanda Bharat (pre-partition India), in assembly halls decorated with images of the god Ram, saffron flags, and a statue of the founder of the organisation. Here, they collectively recite a patriotic prayer in the ancient Sanskrit language, promising life-long selfless service to the regeneration of a pure Hindu Nation, while standing in rows with their hands stretched in front of their chests in a form of military salute.

The RSS and its associate organisations have, from the outset, sought to ‘recreate the pride and self-confidence of Hindu culture, humiliated through a millennium by Muslim invaders and colonialism’. In RSS cosmology, Muslims constitute the gravest danger to Hindu culture, and the greatest obstacle for the development of a modern Hindu nation. The large Muslim minority in India (130 million) is demonised as the ‘Other’, the disloyal, antinational element threatening the fabric of the nation; while Pakistan and other Muslim countries are accused constantly of hatching conspiracies against India. The discourse concerning the recuperation of cultural values has found many takers in the middle class; but in its populist form, the discourse centres on the fears, stereotypes and prejudices regarding the Muslim minority and has provided a mass base for the many different organisations in the RSS family.

Although the RSS family of organisations overwhelmingly organise men, a women’s wing, the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti (Patriotic Association of Voluntary Women) has been in existence since 1936. Its activities are similar to those of the RSS: physical training including martial exercises; samskara that is moral teachings on the duties and obligations of women, emphasizing their role as mothers and caretakers of the family; and baudhik sessions imparting Hindu nationalist ideology to the volunteers, the Rashtrasevikas. Another vital aspect of the organisation is the building of informal networks among women, extending mutual assistance and help in relation to family problems, childraising, and so on.

According to the ‘Founding Myth’ of the Sevika Samiti, the two women were disturbed by the general unrest in the country during the 1930s, particularly by the assertiveness of the Muslims and by the inability of Hindu men to defend Hindu women. The myth revolves around a single incident, which a young newly-wed bride was raped by bandits in a train in front of her husband who, like the other passengers, did not dare to resist the bandits. Given the weakness of the Hindu men (or Hindu society, as it is euphemistically referred to in the Sevika Samiti discourse) in the face of Muslim aggression and British domination, women felt they had to learn how to defend themselves physically and morally. It was decided not to incorporate women directly in the RSS, as presumably this would create confusion with the original organisation. According to Mrs Apte, one of the founding members, the
argument used was that since men and women are different, have different physical capabilities and occupy different positions in social life, it was better to establish a separate women’s organisation. Mrs Apte formulated the RSS view on gender in the following manner:

... the reason behind this is that a woman is one half of society and the man the other. For example, an eagle, as long as his wings are balanced he will be able to fly in the sky. If one wing is slightly damaged he will be unable to fly ... We are not asking for the same rights as men, but we should be strong enough to keep this balance ... then society will be stronger, everybody will be more generous and feel compassion for all and work for all, irrespective of caste, class and creed, but be a Hindu and a believer in Hindutva (Hinduness, TBH). Thus the bird will be able to rise up high ... We consider the woman to be the navigator of the chariot of life. The man steers/drives, whereas the woman navigates.  

Besides creating practical problems of etiquette and appropriate conduct, the direct inclusion of women would also have violated one of the fundamental theses of the RSS: the creation of a brotherhood of men held together by affection among peers and superiors, and based on the sublimation of sexual energy to patriotic devotion and work. Hence, the Sevika Samiti was organised as a parallel organisation to the RSS, as a sort of ‘character building’ organisation for women. It consisted primarily of wives, daughters and relatives of RSS men and maintained very close relations with RSS at the level of ideology, informal networks and hierarchies. In the early decades of its existence, Sevika Samiti worked as an auxillary force of the RSS, consolidating its overall strategy of creating the new Hindu nation as an alternative civil society. A central task for the Sevika Samiti in this venture was to ensure that the children and youth of RSS families continued to be loyal members of the larger RSS family.

STRATEGIES OF ‘CONTROLLED EMANCIPATION’

Women’s emancipation as a discourse and social practice constitutes a dominant problem for the Hindu nationalist movement. To the older generation of both men and women in the RSS and Sevika Samiti, images of the independent and sexually sovereign Western woman condense all the evils of Western modernity. Her independence breaks up family life, and she is, ultimately, rendered unhappy, lonely and abandoned by all. The challenge facing the Sevika Samiti is to combine and strike a balance between motherhood and nationhood: on the one hand, Sevika Samiti encourages women’s participation in civic life, and urges them to become active national citizens; on the other hand, the organisation emphasises the primacy of motherhood, and seeks to prevent
women’s access to education and careers from developing into a desire for individual independence and emancipation, which has become common among younger women in the metropolitan cities in India.

The response of the RSS family to this challenge is a strategy of controlled emancipation. This strategy takes two main forms: (1) recruitment and reconstruction of motherhood in the nationalist discourse, and (2) establishment of an internal institutional patriarchy within the Hindu nationalist movement itself.

**Recruitment of Motherhood in the Nationalist Discourse**

The Sevika Samiti maintains throughout that motherhood (and the concomitant responsibility for family affairs and child raising) is the primary duty of all women. What at first glance seems to be a mere repetition of a traditionalist discourse on motherhood is, however, articulated as a set of duties derived from a cultural nationalist discourse. Being a mother and looking after the family lies at the core of national life, and of the reproduction of cultural values in Hindu culture. Women’s performance in the public sphere should not be an impediment to motherhood. Education and work must be encouraged but should, simultaneously, be adapted and subordinated to the supreme goal of motherhood, whose rationale is derived from the nationalist discourse: raising children as patriotic citizens in the nation state as defined by Hindu culture.

This construction reflects the confluence of the two rather different currents which have inspired RSS’s ideology and organisation. One current was conservative cultural nationalism nurtured in the Western world from the time of its foundation in Germany, based on the institution of the family, and seeing the woman in her role as mother as the ultimate line of defence against the disruptive, immoral forces of modernity. Historically, this discourse has been articulated by Christian Democratic parties in the Western hemisphere, by Central European fascism, by Spanish Falangism, and by the moral major forces in contemporary USA.

Another current was the nationalist legacy inherited from the nineteenth century cultural renaissance in Bengal. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the fertile intellectual environment made up by an emerging national indigenous ‘parallel’ civil society in Calcutta’s middle classes, constructed a narrative on Indian history and culture which became ‘common sense’ knowledge in the twentieth century. As Partha Chatterjee [1993: 131] has pointed out in a recent work, this also included the construction of gender: ‘... the specific ideological form in which we know the “Indian Woman”... is undeniable a product of the development of a dominant middle class culture coeval with the era of nationalism’.

This construct, Chatterjee argues, was shaped under the pecu
circumstances of colonialism. The emergent nationalism made itself possible by bifurcating the social world into an external, material domain where the colonial power (the West) reigned supreme, and an inner, spiritual domain where the indigenous cultural tradition (the East) was superior. The external world, in which the males had to move, was one of immorality, impurity, erosion of the moral fabric, that is, modernisation/westernisation. The inner world, the home, religion, the family, was exclusively Indian and feminine, that is pure, virtuous, and essentially spiritual. In this new nationalist construction of a modernised and ‘classicism’ culture, from where the popular elements had been purged, the woman was constructed as a goddess, and as an upholder of tradition. But the ‘new Woman’ of the nationalist era was also enlightened, educated and disciplined, unlike the earlier generations of ignorant women, or the common lower class women who were ‘coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal physical oppression by males’ [Chatterjee, 1993: 127].

These two inspirations, the family as a bulwark against modernity and the construction of a modern nationalist femininity, were synthesized in the idea of patriotic motherhood. This comes out clearly in a collection of articles and speeches by the founder of Sevika Samiti [Kelkar, 1971]. Three themes run through her writings. First, women are first and foremost mothers. To be a good mother, to nurture the family, raise the children and serve the husband is the supreme duty of any woman. Second, motherhood is a supremely patriotic role, as women have upheld the traditional values of Hindu culture during one thousand years of foreign domination. Third, such patriotism does not entail that women must leave the house for reasons of education or work. On the contrary, the best way to serve the nation is to develop one’s skills and dedication as a mother and to take pride in preserving the family. Education makes women forget their true duties, and makes them individualistic and self-centred. It dissolves families and places, so that ultimately, women are left in a deplorable situation as ‘wage earning servants’, ‘objects of male desire’, and imprisoned in ‘mental slavery’. Forgetting oneself, discovering the pleasure of giving and serving rather than receiving, nurturing the virtues of forgiving and compassion, and putting the service of the nation above all else are the main themes in the ideology of the Sevika Samiti.

Like the other branches of the network of Hindu nationalist organisations, the Sevika Samiti attempts to go beyond its middle class ‘cocoon’ and mobilise poor and lower caste groups through various social welfare schemes. It is indicative of the condescending and socially conservative view of the women in Sevika Samiti that they are imbued with a commitment to instil ‘cultured habits’ in lower caste groups, in order to make them ‘become more aware, assertive and independent in their own way’. In fact, the upholding of caste and class barriers and continued domination by Brahmins are far more pronounced
features of the women's wing of the RSS family, compared to many of the other Hindu nationalist front organisations, striving to popularise themselves. This can, I believe, be explained by the obsession of the RSS and its high caste constituency with the protection of women (perceived as more vulnerable) against pollution of all kinds: caste pollution, moral pollution, pollution by excessive public exposure, and worst of all, pollution by contacts with males from other communities, for example, Muslims. Brahmin women, the argument goes, are best protected from pollution by birth; and by virtue of their education and nationalist devotion they are most capable of upholding women's chastity and purity, and are therefore the natural leaders of the Sevika Samiti. The control of an immoral modernity cannot, it seems, yet be left to non-Brahmins, still regarded as culturally less advanced.

Recruiting New Mothers

The Sevika Samiti leaders openly admit that recruitment of younger members is a major problem. The younger generation of women is either preoccupied with careers and education, or devotes all its energy to the nuclear family, a lifestyle which the older leadership disapprovingly call the 'mummy and daddy culture of modern families'. Although the Sevika Samiti has adopted a system of full-time workers and has become more public, the older dominant section of the leadership has serious doubts about the future role of women in the Indian society. They doubt the ability of the Sevika Samiti to stem what they see as unhealthy trends of 'self-centred consumerism', of 'depletion of family values', and of the deplorable impact of television. To this older generation, motherhood remains the supreme role and duty of women, a position of unsurpassed 'moulding power and influence, if carried out dutifully and in accordance with national traditions. The road to gender equality goes through the performance of maternal duties rather than through career and individual emancipation:

We are not saying that our husbands should start cooking always. But it depends upon us to make them realise that even they can do this work. If we don't then it is our mistake. Everything is in the woman's hand. She can influence her family and give them the right direction. Thus, she can become independent by performing her duties ... Family responsibilities are most important to a Hindu woman. The Hindu tradition asks for it and it is genetically present. We do not endorse old age homes, day-care centres, children moving away from the family, nor divorce.5

In a branch of the Sevika Samiti in Thane City, an industrial suburb in the Bombay region, the problem of recruitment of young girls is even more acute than in provincial and higher caste environments as in provincial cities like Pune. The problem is how to keep the girls attached to the organisation when they reach adolescence and start higher education. While many children are attracted to the Sevika Samiti, only those who come from families with a long-standing affiliation to the RSS remain attached to the organisation when they reach their teens. Others join affiliated organisations, but the 'Bombay culture' is difficult to cope with:

Although Samiti members or sympathisers bring their daughters to the organisation it is difficult to keep them attached if their friends attend other clubs, etc. Our society has become lethargic and the people do not want any discipline. Our camps are always held on holidays and nobody wants to get up early to attend these camps. Nobody wants to take any hardship and discipline ... Now we have to adjust our timings according to the TV programmes. We have started to hold shakha from 4 to 6 pm so that the girls can go back in time for their favourite programmes.6

The steep rise in real estate prices in Bombay's metropolitan economy have affected the Samiti's work among women in various ways. The expensive apartments make joint family living increasingly difficult, as only a very few families can afford big apartments. More and more young families live on their own, and more and more women have jobs. This gives women little time and it is harder for them to leave their house after work, the Sevikas explain. Some of the older Sevikas also complain that the breakdown of joint families prevents the older generation from inculcating good values and traditions in their grandchildren. They also find that their own children are not very keen on looking after their parents. Those living with a son and daughter-in-law find it increasingly difficult to get along 'as emotional attachments in families are getting weaker'. Interestingly, the younger working women in the organisation did not regard these transformations of the family structure as a major problem.7

CONSTRUCTING AN INSTITUTIONAL PATRIARCHY

The RSS family is a kind of 'political sect', a conservative, yet reformist subculture, in which the individual can live her full life in a sort of extended, societal family [Jaffrelot, 1988: 829–50]. The family metaphor and its concomitant elements of integration, emotional bonds, attachment, consensus rather than conflict, and undisputed hierarchy, pervades the entire RSS discourse.

Women's work outside the home, especially education and social work are encouraged by Sevika Samiti, but is also embraced and controlled by the many RSS front organisations in the workplace, in the campus, in the social field, in
the religious field and in politics. Transgressions of the normal limits of
women's activities, such as travelling around the country, going on demonstra-
tions, postponing marriage for the sake of work, are only tolerated as long
as they take place within the RSS family itself. Women can be full-time work-
ers for the Sevika Samiti, if they are looked after by decent and suitable fami-
lies (of the RSS) wherever the women are sent. Women can go to
demonstrations and even camp in the open if this is done under the auspices
and control of the RSS. And girls can marry late because of work or prestigious
education as long as they are loyal to the RSS.

There are, however, two exceptions to the limited role assigned to women
within the RSS family of organisations. In the student organisation, Akhil
Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the Undivided India Students
Organisation, young educated women are gradually questioning the legitimacy
of the internal institutional patriarchy in the RSS. According to the organisa-
tion, 30 to 40 per cent of its members are girls, and a good number of the girls
are activists or travelling much of the time around the country. The ABVP is
the branch of the RSS where the transformation of gender relations is most vis-
ible, and the place where young women opting for a professional career are
negotiating the moral, physical and social room of manoeuvre between career
prospects, parents and the peer group/surrogate family of the ABVP. The strategy
of the ABVP in this respect seems to be to contain and control this expanding
room of manoeuvre by offering, on the one hand, a certain protected space
for 'experiments with gender equality' within the organisational framework
proper, while, on the other hand, discouraging the girls from challenging the
authority of parents, joint family system, the traditional arranged marriage,
prospective husbands, and so on. The young women in the ABVP obviously
attempt to combine and accommodate these conflicting pulls without trans-
gressing the conventions on female chastity and decency:

The ABVP policy is that the sex of a person is never considered.
Everybody is always told that women should know technical things and
men should be able to cook. The leaders always insist that everybody
should be able to do all the basic work ... but we are aware of our lim-
its and do not wish to emulate the boys or do all that they are doing like
staying in the office after 8.30, moving around at night, sticking posters.
... We do not believe in communication through physical contact, and
we never indulge in public display of affection ... in the RSS everyone
is taught to respect women, to be friendly but within limits.12

However, the notion of the primacy of motherhood (over career) promoted by
RSS and the Sevika Samiti, is not openly contested. Instead, the girls differenti-
tate between the students' world (play) and the adult world (responsibility):

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We have spoken from our students' point of view, they (Sevika Samiti)
from a responsible adults' point of view. We endorse this totally. Every
woman is more attached to her house than the man. We are always
taught to maintain these attachments. We are never encouraged to leave
anything to follow ABVP ... Today a woman needs to work. But the
work need not be to earn alone. But if the family does not need the
money, then there is no need for her to work to earn.13

Hence, the contradictions between career and family, between the public and
the private, remain unresolved in the lives of the girls. They want a career, not
out of material compulsions (like poor women), but as an option. They want to
work and be independent and respected, but at the same time they endorse the
joint family system, oppose day care centres, and believe that women should
sacrifice some years of their lives for the children. They believe in the free
choice of marriage partners, but do not oppose arranged marriages. In other
words, ABVP is a place where some of these tensions can be played out under
the canopy of the organisational work and a playful student world, without
challenging the fundamental moral and social structures in which the girls'
lives are immersed.

The other exception is the militant outfit, Durga Vahini (Durga's
Batallion),14 which specifically recruits young girls to undertake more danger-
ous and physically demanding tasks of militant activism, including prospective
confrontations with the demonised Muslim enemy. The main activities are
karate classes, lathi training and ideological training. Durga Vahini aims at
organising young girls from poorer and lower caste families, but like other
front organisations of the RSS, it is built around a core group of young girls
drawn from families with long-standing affiliations with the RSS and Sevika
Samiti. One leader described the aim and strategy of the Durga Vahini in the
following way:

The main motive behind the Durga Vahini is physical training. Only if
we have strength can we have a say in society. We have decided to
emphasise physical strength in Durga Vahini. ... The motive behind this
organization is to strengthen Hindu society and not religious awaken-
ing. ... Such organisations are also important to keep the younger
generation occupied and to prevent them from falling prey to
narcotics.15

According to some activists, the response among lower caste groups not pre-
viously acquainted with the RSS, is far greater than among better-off upper and
middle class families, who, it is said, care little for patriotic issues, and are
more interested in entertainment and pursuing their careers. In line with the
general paternalistic spirit of the RSS, the organisers are convinced that the
Durga Vahini will become very popular among lower caste families because of
the latent desire among these ‘hitherto unenlightened sections’ to have (upper caste) cultural values and high culture inculcated in the girls and their families through the encounter with the RSS.\textsuperscript{16}

To the RSS the sanctity and protection of the female body from public exposure and physical danger is, obviously, less important in the case of lower caste women. While middle class and high caste women are controlled primarily through morality and ideology, lower caste women (more bodies than minds) are controlled and disciplined primarily through physical exercises.

As I have argued already in the case of Sevika Samiti, women’s education and access to the public sphere are encouraged, in so far as this does not question the fundamental structures of power and authority within society, and even less within the RSS family. Women in the RSS can do anything, except assert their individuality, challenge the wish of their families, have lovers or extramarital affairs, \textit{as long as it takes place within the RSS}. Women’s activities outside the extended family are regarded as dangerous, uncultured, indecent and immoral.

The RSS has thus constructed itself as an ‘institutional patriarchy’, to whom families otherwise anxious to control and delimit the outward activities of their daughters and wives, can entrust the chastity and purity of their womanfolk.

\textbf{CAN EMANCIPATION BE CONTROLLED?}

The processes of modernisation and discourses of equality have eroded older patriarchal forms in India and given birth to slow, but ostensibly irreversible processes of emancipation among women, lower caste communities and other hitherto marginalised groups in Indian society. These trends accelerated in the 1980s and dismantled sections of the middle classes, as well as poor but upwardly mobile groups, attracted to the Hindu nationalist promise of fullness, discipline, purity and a ‘controlled modernity’. RSS has systematically organised and institutionalised an embryonic parallel civil society in large parts of India. In accordance with the nineteenth century idea of the ‘new woman’, the feminine space in this parallel civil society is the inner, spiritual domain, that is, the family and the household. But in this construction lies probably also the historical weakness of the entire RSS project of cultural nationalist revival. It is stuck in nineteenth century images of national glory, the strong centralised state, and military strength. Sociologically, it is stuck in a sort of ‘middle class cocoon’, whose upper caste values in the longer run will probably prevent it from striking deeper roots in the still more assertive popular constituencies of lower caste and low income groups, always excluded from the nationalist rejuvenation of Hindu culture.

RSS also appears to be losing the battle regarding gender relations. Younger working women who have acquired a measure of independence in the public sphere are unlikely to give this up in favour of patriotic motherhood and maintenance of the joint family system. It is also doubtful that the institutional patriarchy of the RSS and its strategies of ‘controlled emancipation’ in the long run can retain its attractiveness \textit{vis-à-vis} younger urban women. It is noteworthy that all the organisations in the RSS family, the Sevika Samiti has been the least successful during the broad wave of Hindu nationalism in later years. The decisive momentum of this wave has been premised on a systematic campaign that seeks to reactivate the latent prejudices and fears of Muslim menace. The discourse of ‘communal populism’ appears, simply, to be the only popular idiom which the RSS family has really been able to master.

\textbf{NOTES}

1. The information and interviews upon which the following argument is built, were collected during almost one year of fieldwork in the state of Maharashtra in India during 1992–93. The argument put forward in this analysis is developed more fully and in greater empirical detail in my doctoral dissertation, \textit{The Saffron Wave}, Roskilde University, 1994 (forthcoming). All interviews and texts in Marathi and Hindi were translated into English by my assistant in Pune, Maharashtra, Ms Urmila Budhir. I wish to thank Fiona Wilson and Bodil Folke Frederiksen for comments on earlier drafts of this study.

2. Interview with Shripathy Shastri, the RSS chief in the state of Maharashtra in Western India, 5 Aug. 1992.

3. The RSS usually calls its network of organisation the RSS family (\textit{Sangh Parivar}), consciously evoking connotations of warmth, security and emotional attachment beyond ideology and reasoning. The family metaphor is central and highly operational as an instrument of recruitment and cohesion for the movement, which offers a sort of surrogate family to the activists. The family metaphor also refers to the authoritarian and paternalist authority structure which operates within the movement.

4. Interview with founder-member, Mrs Saraswatibai Apte, in Pune, 4 Sept. 1993.

5. \textit{Ibid}.

6. According to a reliable source the regular membership of the \textit{Sevika Samiti} is approximately 100,000, while the number of sympathisers is four to five times larger [Sarkar, 1993].

7. This was a version of the predicament of the Western woman which I was confronted with on innumerable occasions during my study of Hindu nationalist organisations. The real culprits in this narrative were Western men who, according to this line of reasoning, displayed a lack of respect for women, letting them become humiliated objects of male desire.

8. This trend is discussed in more detail in \textit{Hansen} [1993: 2270–72].


13. \textit{Ibid}.

14. \textit{Durga} is a powerful, protective mother goddess, engaging in violent combat against the evil. \textit{Durga} is especially popular in Eastern India.

REFERENCES