

# Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (*RSS*) Network in Canada



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# Organizations Behind the Report

## National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM)

The National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) is an independent, non-partisan, and non-profit organization. Built from within the Canadian Muslim community, NCCM is a leading voice for Muslim civic engagement and the promotion of human rights.

Its goal is to protect Canadian human rights and civil liberties, challenge discrimination and Islamophobia, build mutual understanding, and advocate for the public concerns of Canadian Muslims.

Working in partnership with grassroots communities, NCCM engages in professional activism and develops strategies in anti-discrimination, community education & outreach, media relations, and public advocacy. As a long-standing Canadian organization, NCCM has an exemplary record of defending rights and liberties, promoting active citizenship, and upholding Canadian pluralism.

## World Sikh Organization of Canada (WSO)

The World Sikh Organization of Canada (WSO) is a non-profit organization with a mandate to promote and protect the interests of Sikhs in Canada and advocate for the human rights of all.

Founded in 1984, the WSO has defended the civil liberties of Sikhs and their right to practice their religion freely, shaping both legal precedents and public policy. It has also represented the community at the Supreme Court of Canada on numerous occasions defending the Canadian Charter.

As Canada's only national Sikh advocacy organization, the WSO leads media, stakeholder, and government relations for the community, building upon a long record of public advocacy. The WSO also empowers the community through various initiatives such as the Sikh Youth Leadership Institute, the Sikh Family Helpline, and the Sikh Mentorship Program.



# Executive Summary



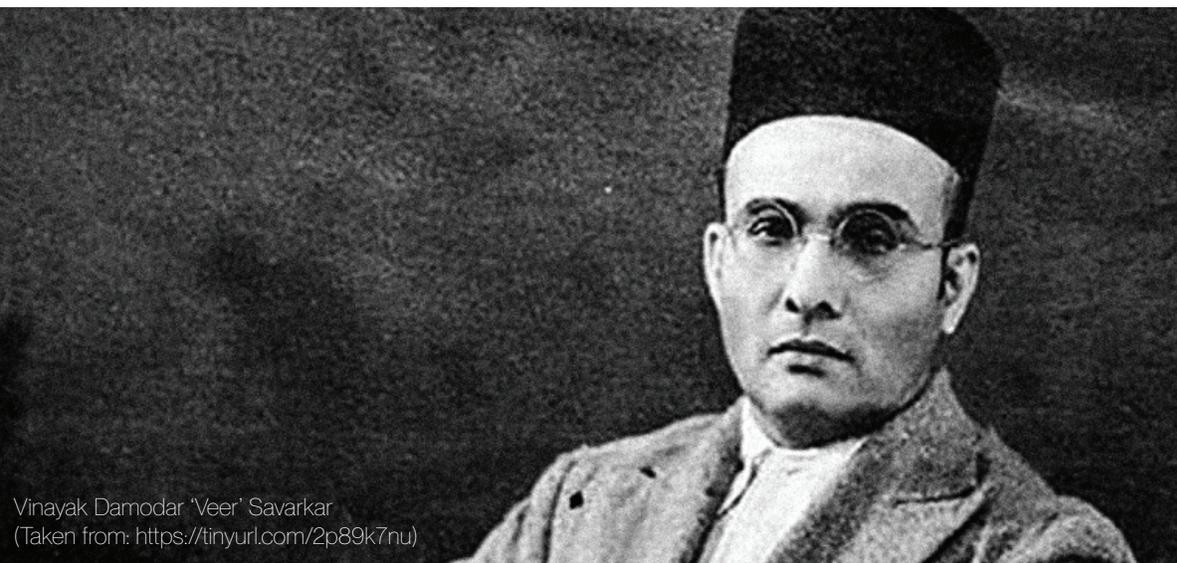
The image above of visibly Muslim men being lynched is a tweet posted on an RSS official account. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is an India-based organization that sits at the core of a large network of groups seeking to remake India into a country run by and for Hindus first at the expense of the country's dizzying slew of minority groups. It has domestic and international organs that seize political power, perpetuate its supremacist ideologies, and actively participate in communal violence. This outlook is commonly known as **"Hindutva."**

But it's vital to remember that the RSS's modernist and ideological summation of thousands of years of Hindu practice and thought in no way represents the diversity of the hundreds of millions of Hindus who have no interest in adopting the Hindutva ideology. The RSS, which presents itself as the authentic unifying voice of the Hindus, is just one fundamentalist group that seeks to justify its exclusionary vision and communal violence against India's minority groups.

This exclusionary vision is grounded in ideological frameworks propagated by founding RSS figures such as Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, and Madhavrao Sashivrao Gowalkar, whose works cite Nazi Germany as an aspirational example:

**“If we Hindus in India grow stronger, in time these Moslem friends of the league will have to play the part of German-Jews.”**

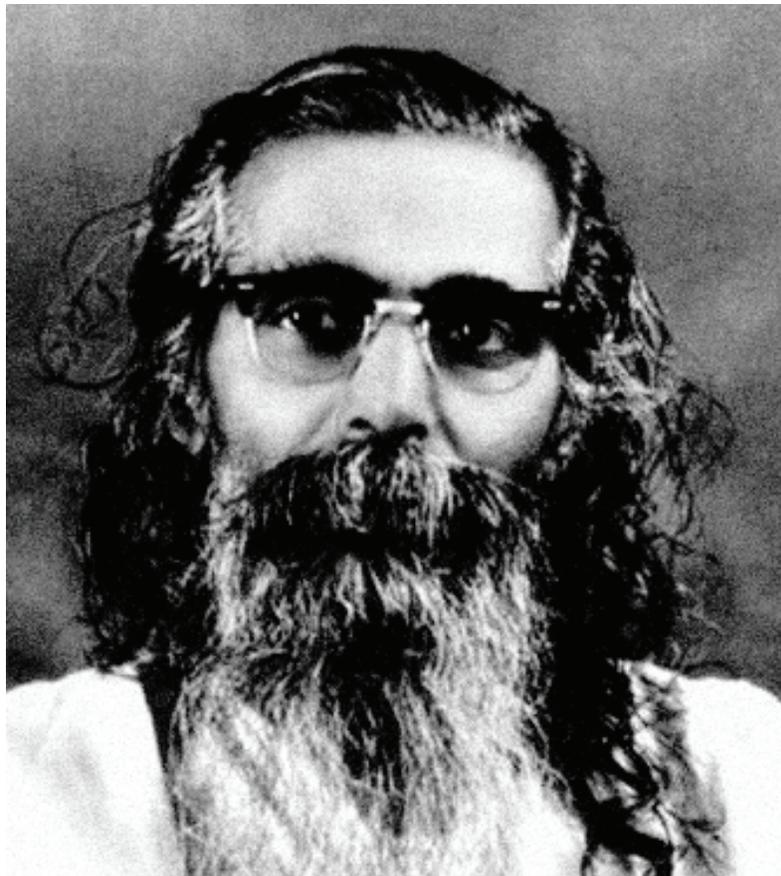
**— V. D. Savarkar**



Vinayak Damodar 'Veer' Savarkar  
(Taken from: <https://tinyurl.com/2p89k7nu>)

“To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races – the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated to one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by.”

— M. Z. Gowalkar



Madhavrao Sadashivrao Golwalkar, Hindutva ideologue and second ever chief of the RSS. (Wikimedia Commons, taken from: Indian Express <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/m-s-golwalkar-gurujirss-6272945/>)

Though India's largest religious minority is Muslim, the RSS network has victimized a host of other non-Hindu groups such as Sikhs and Christians, along with members of Dalit communities (pejoratively known as "untouchables"). Although Muslims are a central target of the RSS's supremacist actions, they are, as this report shows, by no means the network's only target in India and across the world.

It is therefore vital that law and policy makers around the world who guard the stability of liberal, multicultural democracy, become aware of the RSS's global machinations and networks, as well as how its overall apparatus extends into Canada while posing challenges to our commitment to tolerance, understanding, and peace.

This paper raises concerns about the following aspects of the RSS's activities in Canada:

**Humanitarian Relief, Social Services, and Fundraising :** The RSS is the core, parent member of a network of related organizations known as the Sangh Parivar. A significant segment of the network is devoted to "sewa," (sometimes written as "seva") or service, the term used for both humanitarian relief efforts abroad as well as social and health services provided within India, particularly in its remote and tribal regions. These sewa-related organs help legitimize and perpetuate the RSS's ideologies, while entrenching its wider presence under the guise of an ideologically neutral humanitarian network. Various sewa organizations abroad exist primarily to fundraise for efforts linked to the RSS in India. (Many groups outside of the RSS and Sangh Parivar perform legitimate and non-politicized sewa, including many Sikh relief agencies who also use the term to describe their own aid efforts. Our focus here is on the RSS's use of sewa to further its Hindutva ideologies.)

**Education, Ideology, Shakhas:** Various Sangh (RSS-related) organizations are operational in countries across the world, including Canada. Chief among this effort are educational chapters, or shakhas, that prepare both youth and adults through ideological training, ceremony, and religious instruction—all linked to the supremacist ideas of the RSS's founders and ideologues.

**Global Political Influence:** Much of the RSS's progressive drift from the margins of Indian and Hindu society towards the mainstream has to do with its main political organ, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s two successive federal election wins in 2014 and 2019, when the Hindu nationalist party captured majorities in Parliament. The BJP also projects its interests abroad through a network of lobbying organizations called the Overseas Friends of the BJP (OFBJP), among other strategies and tactics.

**Islamophobic, Anti-Sikh, and Casteist Rhetoric:** Sadly, yet predictably, the presence and entrenchment of the RSS and its affiliates in Canada has already resulted in a litany of Islamophobic, anti-Sikh, and casteist incidents that resemble the communal tensions being exploited and exacerbated by the RSS in India. This report includes a detailed list of these incidents, which represent only a sampling of a disturbing trend that illustrates the effects of RSS ideology in Canada, as well as those who these ideologies seek to victimize.



# Introduction



In the spring of 2020, the world was grappling with the peak of a pandemic and the unprecedented reality of a global lockdown due to the COVID-19 virus. It was during this global lockdown that Muslims around the world observed the holy month of Ramadan, a time for fasting, worship and charity. In Canada, mosques were closed and communal worship—for many a central part of Ramadan—made impossible.

To ameliorate the isolation felt by many Muslims in this absence, many city councilors across Canada agreed to let local mosques publicly broadcast the adhaan, the Islamic call to prayer, once a day, during the holy month.

While many Canadians stood behind this gesture of inclusivity, others voiced a discomfort, including some voices that called the permission to broadcast the adhaan a violation of Canadian freedoms and values by favouring one religion over others

Such voices also used this controversy as an opportunity to castigate the Muslim community in general, often with very charged and offensive language. This rhetoric was epitomized in the public tweets by a real estate agent in the Greater Toronto Area, Ravi Hooda, responding to the Mayor of the City of Brampton, Ontario's announcement to allow the adhaan broadcast with the following:

“What's next? Separate lane for camel and goat riders, Allowing slaughter of animals at homes in name of sacrifice, By law requiring all women to cover themselves from head to toe in tents to appease the piece fools for votes”(sic)<sup>1</sup>

Hooda, for instance, is associated with the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS),<sup>2</sup> the international arm of the RSS<sup>3</sup>. This report will show that he is by no means alone in using such rhetoric to attack the Muslim community while being connected to the RSS network, a network that has victimized not just Indian Muslims, but various ethno-religious minorities as well as members of Dalit groups.

Dissent and the right to disagree are fundamental to a free and democratic society where citizens can openly express their opposition to government policies and actions without fear of reprisal. However, as this report aims to demonstrate, the charged, sectarian rhetoric that emerged out of the adhaan controversy is symptomatic of a larger challenge to Canada's social and communal mosaic of tolerance and multiculturalism.

In December 2021, a far-right Hindutva political party called the Hindu Mahasabha, closely related to the RSS, held a three-day conference in the city of Haridwar, Uttarakhand province where attendees took a collective oath to turn India (a secular, constitutional democracy) into a “Hindu nation” through violence against Muslims, if need be.

As reported by the New York Times:

“If 100 of us are ready to kill two million of them, then we will win and make India a Hindu nation,” said Pooja Shakun Pandey, a leader of Hindu Mahasabha, a group that espouses militant Hindu nationalism, referring to the country’s Muslims. “Be ready to kill and go to jail.”<sup>4</sup>

This kind of anti-Muslim sentiment has been on the rise recently throughout India. And like most things, such escalating ideological rhetoric does not respect physical borders. Ideas associated with the RSS or the Hindu Mahasabha has travelled throughout the world via diasporic networks and the Internet.

Hooda’s words and actions are consistent with this much larger system of Hindutva supremacist ideology that’s currently being projected and propagated by various interests not just in India, but across the world, including in Canada. All such interests have their ideological and often organizational roots in the RSS.

The presence of this supremacist ideology in Canada is deeply concerning for several reasons:

- 1) RSS connected initiatives are drawing financial support from groups that have charitable, tax-exempt status in Canada.
- 2) Groups with open and explicit connections to the RSS are systematically propagating their ideologies and are organizing on Canadian soil.
- 3) Voices either connected to or allied with the RSS vision are spreading hateful ideas and rhetoric against other minority groups in Canada as a predictable function of their Hindutva-inspired ideas.

It is thus time for Canadians to carefully study and track the growth of a movement that disseminates hate here in Canada. This paper represents one of the first of such efforts.

# What Is The RSS?



According to Georgetown University’s Bridge Initiative which focuses on the nature and effects of global Islamophobia, the India-based Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sang (RSS), or “National Volunteer Organization,” is an “Indian right-wing, Hindu nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organization.”<sup>5</sup>

Founded in 1925, the RSS’s philosophical and political outlook is steeped in the ideologies of Hindutva (literally “Hindu-ness”), which is animated by the notion that India as a country should be run by and for Hindus first and foremost, while non-Hindu minorities can only be tolerated if they accept this reality.<sup>6</sup>

Galvanized by this exclusionary and supremacist outlook, the RSS has consistently been linked over the years to incidents of mass exclusion and violence against India’s minorities, including Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians, but also towards Dalits and other marginalized groups<sup>7</sup>

Among such incidents have been waves of large-scale sectarian violence in India, such as the 2002 anti-Muslim riots and pogroms in Gujarat, which ended in thousands of deaths.<sup>8</sup> Or the anti-Muslim killings of New Delhi in February 2020, which resulted in dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries.<sup>9</sup> The RSS and its affiliate groups have been connected to both instances of mass violence.

It is vital to state at the outset that not all followers of Hinduism subscribe to the modernist Hindutva ideology and the RSS’s supremacist outlook. Hinduism is an ancient, sprawling world religion and one of the world’s oldest faiths. As pointed out by McGill University’s eminent scholar on religion, Arvind Sharma, Hinduism itself simply cannot be captured or represented by the narrow and political “fundamentalism” of a 20th century nationalist movement (“thin in terms of religious content”) like the RSS and its affiliates.<sup>10</sup>

The RSS is the core member of a network of dozens of organizations that espouse the Hindutva ideology that have their roots in the RSS. This network includes relatively well-known organizations like the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Sewa Bharati, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—each of which are focused on a different area of activity and will be discussed accordingly in this report.

Collectively, the RSS and these sister organizations are known as the “Sangh Parivar.” Through it, the RSS can recruit, organize, train and indoctrinate millions of Indians at home and abroad with its supremacist ideology, which further enables it to mobilize and execute exclusionary and often violent attacks on minorities.

The Gujarat anti-Muslim pogroms of 2002 best illustrate this horrifying reality. One report about the massacres by Human Rights Watch in 2003 describes how various Sangh Parivar groups incited and committed mass violence:

“[...]training camps were conducted by the Bajrang Dal and the VHP, backed by the RSS and supported by democratically elected representatives from the ruling BJP. The camps were often conducted in temples. The aim was to generate intense hatred against Muslims painted as ‘the enemy’, because of which violence was both glorified through the distribution of trishuls [tridents] and swords, and justified as the legitimate means to self-defence.”<sup>11</sup>

The HSS, VHP and other various organizations (often with charitable status) with links to the Sangh Parivar are currently operational in Canada.



Photograph of early RSS meeting, 1939 (Wikimedia Commons) <https://thewire.in/politics/benjamin-zachariah-fascism-sangh-parivar> (Taken from: <https://tinyurl.com/2p89k7nu>)

# Historical Background



The history of India's broader Hindutva movement goes back over a century to the formation of the All Indian Hindu Sabha in 1915 (renamed The Hindu Mahasabha in 1921), a nationalist political party that explained India's subjugation at the hands of the British Empire's as a result of the country's "steady decline from a glorious Hindu past."<sup>12</sup> This is the same group that organized the aforementioned Hindutva conference in Haridwar, calling for the mass execution of Muslims.

One of those involved in the Mahasabha was Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, who broke away to form his own group, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), in 1925. Primarily, Hedgewar's move was in response to how "Indian Muslims had proved themselves 'Muslims first and Indians only secondarily...'"<sup>13</sup> Hedgewar is a revered figure of the RSS today, but he's not the only ideologue of an even more exclusionary Hindutva emerging in the 1920s—a movement that many scholars have called "fascist."<sup>14</sup>

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, one of the most important early theorists of Hindutva, wrote the seminal pamphlet, *Hindutva: who is a Hindu?*, which "provided an ideological foundation for Hedgewar's prejudices."<sup>15</sup> Savarkar was also the one who, with the idea of a pure "Hindu" India in mind, helped push the "two nations theory" that cast India's Hindus and Muslims as two separate and irreconcilable nations.<sup>16</sup> India for him had to conform with the unifying idea of a single Hindu identity, an attitude that continues to animate the RSS and the Sangh Parivar.<sup>17</sup>

Referring to supporters of the Muslim League, the only Muslim political party in India during the years leading up to the devastating partition of India in 1947, Savarkar infamously evoked Nazi Germany's Final Solution<sup>18</sup>:

"If we Hindus in India grow stronger, in time these Moslem friends of the league will have to play the part of German-Jews."

In addition to Savarkar, Madhavrao Sadashivrao Gowalkar, who succeeded Hedgewar as the head of the RSS in 1940, also went on to help crystallize and reiterate the Hindutva ideology which casts India as a "Hindu-first" nation both racially and religiously, a supremacist vision he laid out clearly in his 1939 work, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*:

"the foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment - not even citizen's rights."<sup>19</sup>

Gowalkar, like Savarkar, also openly drew inspiration from Nazi Germany's vision in keeping racial purity. He went on to state:

“To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races – the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated to one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by.”<sup>20</sup>

In this vein of ethno-racial purity, the RSS's public health wing, the Arogya Bharati, established the Garbh Vigyan Sanskar project, which pushes for “customized babies” made to be born fair and tall through “‘shuddhikaran (purification)’ for parents, intercourse at a time decided by planetary configurations, complete abstinence after the baby is conceived, and procedural and dietary regulations”<sup>21</sup>—ideas that one Indian critic describes as “straight out of the Nazi play-book.”<sup>22</sup>

The RSS is also committed to entrenching the discriminatory and often violent caste system which maintains dominant upper caste privilege. One of the early ideologues of the RSS, Balakrishna Shivram Moonje, said “...any money spent on untouchables is like feeding a garden-serpent with milk. We must leave the untouchables most severely to themselves.”<sup>23</sup>

In recent years, various Dalits who have joined the RSS and tried to rise up its ranks end up quitting due to the systemic casteism they encounter. Some have even written about their experiences in memoirs while transitioning into activists against the RSS. One such chronicle by Dalit activist Bhanwar Meghwanshi recalls various episodes leading up to his exit, including one instance where RSS workers refused to eat at his home but took his food and secretly dumped it on the road in a well-known gesture to uphold upper caste purity by not eating the food of lower castes.<sup>24</sup>

Human Rights Watch has also consistently noted how the RSS network “have disseminated propaganda targeting both Dalits and religious minorities,” while calling the overall oppression of Dalits in India a “hidden apartheid.”<sup>25</sup> It's thus vital to keep in mind that the ideal nationalism projected by the RSS network victimizes not just ethno-religious minorities like Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians, but also members of India's Dalits community.

In all, the RSS today openly asserts that it “believed from the day one that [India] belonged to the Hindus,” that “Hindu” as a term “defines the national identity,” and that the “national identity of the people of [India] is essentially Hindu.”<sup>26</sup>

Crucially, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which currently rules India, is a major part of the RSS-led Sangh Parivar. Founded in 1980, the BJP grew out of an earlier party called the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), co-founded in 1951 by Syama Prasad Mukherjee (himself an RSS member), “[a]fter consultation with Shri Golwalkar Guruji [aka. MS Golwalkar] of the RSS.”<sup>27</sup> India’s current Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also a lifelong member of the RSS.<sup>28</sup>

But the Indian state has not always supported the RSS and Hindutva. Since its inception in 1925, the RSS has been banned three times in India:

1)

1948, when a former member of the RSS, Nathuram Godse, assassinated Mahatma Gandhi (Godse is widely revered by the RSS, with some wanting to erect a statue in his honour).<sup>29</sup>

2)

1975, under Indira Gandhi’s government

3)

1992, after its members took part in demolishing the historical 16th century Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh (sparking mass communal violence across India)<sup>30</sup>, which in 2020 became the site of the RSS-supported Ram Mandi.

Due to the Sangh Parivar’s consistent participation in or linkage to mass communal and sectarian violence across India, even the CIA once listed the RSS as a “nationalist organization,” while designating Vishnu Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal—both Sangh Parivar groups—as “militant religious outfits.”<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, both British and American governments imposed diplomatic boycotts of Narendra Modi when he was Chief Minister (governor) of the state of Gujarat in 2002 as massive anti-Muslim violence broke out, implicating both Modi himself as well as the RSS.<sup>32</sup>

Hindutva-inspired activists celebrate the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya on December 1992. AFP/AFP/Getty Images (Taken from NPR: <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/03/706808616/the-powerful-group-shaping-the-rise-of-hindu-nationalism-in-india>)



# Humanitarian Relief, Social Services, Fundraising



The broad family of groups existing under the RSS umbrella (Sangh Parivar) include a large humanitarian wing that provides disaster relief, rehabilitation, and social services to the underprivileged both inside and outside of India, albeit steeped within the exclusivist ideals of Hindutva.

Active in dozens of countries, this expansive humanitarian apparatus projects a benign face of RSS-inspired beliefs and structures across the world, particularly to those who are unfamiliar with the group's troubling ideologies and track record of anti-minority supremacism.

### **Politicizing “service”**

The core of the RSS's relief wing is the India-based NGO known as Seva Bharati. Domestically, the Seva Bharati ostensibly operates up to tens of thousands of free healthcare units (eg. blood donations, ambulance services, etc.), disaster relief efforts, and counseling or education units across India's most underserved areas.<sup>33</sup> Overseas, Sewa International helps provide or fundraise for these services in 25 countries across the world.<sup>34</sup>

In 2003, Seva Bharati's VP in New Delhi DV Kholi said, “We make no secret of the fact that we are members of the RSS.”<sup>35</sup>

According to a detailed 2004 report by the secular watch dog group Awaaz-South Asia Watch, which drew on Sewa International's own online self-descriptions, the RSS politicizes its relief efforts by using humanitarianism and free education in underserved areas as vehicles to spread the teachings and ideas of Hindutva.

The report includes descriptions of how such ideologies had converted, “strangers into friends, friends into Swayamsevaks [RSS volunteers], and Swayamsevaks into karyakartas [RSS activists]...”<sup>36</sup> It also points out that Sewa groups and units “openly engaged in political activity with the RSS and the VHP,” which coordinated together to draw more people in the outskirts into the Hindutva fold.<sup>37</sup>

### **A Global Money Network**

This global network of seva/sewa<sup>38</sup> organizations also includes SEWA Canada (CRA charitable status since 1999), which, among other things, raises money for activities both inside and outside of Canada.

According to CRA filings and returns, in 2020 alone, SEWA Canada transferred tens of thousands of dollars to chapters of Seva Bharati throughout India.

This kind of international money transfer isn't new for SEWA Canada. A 2007 paper in the academic journal *International Political Sociology* noted how SEWA Canada founder Sat Wadhwa sent a \$150,000 cheque marked for several projects in India, some of which were managed directly by RSS groups like Seva Bharati.<sup>39</sup>

Another humanitarian aid organization with demonstrated ties to the RSS is the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF), which denies that it has any Hindutva ties. Yet in a widely discussed 2002 report by the South Asia Citizens Web (SACW), an independent and secular watch dog group that monitors social violence in India, the IDRF's earliest applications to the US's Internal Revenue Service for tax-exempt status included a form that named several groups with clear RSS connections—including Seva Bharati—as the kind of organizations it aims to help in India.<sup>40</sup>

2002 was also when the RSS started to receive increasing international scrutiny for its role in the anti-Muslim riots by Hindu supremacist mobs in the state of Gujarat. This famously led to the resignation of Lord Adam Patel, then a peer in the UK Parliament, as a patron of Sewa International, calling it a “racist organization.”<sup>41</sup>

Media scrutiny at the time prompted the IDRF to release a defense of its affiliations, which includes praise for what it argues were the RSS's positive humanitarian and educational contributions, like how some local populations met the RSS's efforts with “exhilaration and relief.”<sup>42</sup>

Another report released by the SACW in 2014 made waves in the Indian media partly for revealing that the IDRF gave more than \$17.3 million to hundreds of organizations in India between 2002-12, which included RSS-connected groups like Sewa International.<sup>43</sup>

Though based in Maryland, the IDRF's international connections to the RSS humanitarian apparatus shows the interconnectedness of various relief groups that support each other via fund transfers regardless of national borders. But this exclusionary and ideological colouring of international relief hasn't stopped various prominent philanthropists or groups from donating to the RSS-Sewa network, including to Sewa International.

A recent report noted that Sewa International managed to collect “over US \$22 million in assistance to offer aid to India in the wake of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.” This includes a \$2.5 million injection by former Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey.<sup>44</sup> An exclusive report by Slate also alleges that “Microsoft and Google encouraged their employees to donate to Sewa and offered matching funds, in Microsoft's case through the donation-management platform Benevity.”<sup>45</sup>



The third ever head of the RSS, Balasaheb Deoras, watches Indian author and economist Arun Shourie speak during RSS Founders Day, October 5, 1992. Courtesy: Lalit Vachani (Taken from: The Wire: <https://thewire.in/communalism/rss-sangh-parivar-babri-masjid>)



K.S. Sudarshan (the fifth ever head of the RSS) at the RSS headquarters in Mahal Karyalaya, Nagpur. September 28, 1992. Courtesy: Lalit Vachani (Taken from: The Wire: <https://thewire.in/communalism/rss-sangh-parivar-babri-masjid>)

# Education, Ideologies, *Shakhas*



The RSS has developed via the establishment of civil society groups across the world that prioritize the perpetuation of the RSS's openly Hindutva ideologies in the Indian diaspora, including in Canada, the US, and Europe. Historically, this major task has fallen firstly to the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, or HSS, the RSS's most prominent overseas organ.

### **Pushing Global “Pan-Hinduism” Ideology**

According to the HSS in Alberta, Canada, as of 2019, the group existed in 45 countries (over 700 branches).<sup>46</sup> The HSS Canada website lists 17 chapters in operation<sup>47</sup>, while the US site indicates over 220 branches.<sup>48</sup> The 17 listed chapters on the Canadian website are all located in Ontario, but the site also notes that chapters are spread across “Ontario, Quebec, Greater Vancouver Area (GVA), Alberta, and Saskatchewan.”<sup>49</sup>

The HSS Canada, whose chapters are known as shakhas, organizes Indo-Canadian communities according to their more politicized ideals of Hinduism. It has been a tax-exempt registered charity in Canada since 1991.<sup>50</sup>

According to the HSS website, shakhas have a particular focus on children “learning in the balagokulam,” the specific kids’ program and training that the HSS prepares. “A well-structured syllabus for different age groups is used at the Balagokulams,” the website’s “Activities” section reads.<sup>51</sup> “In addition, 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.”

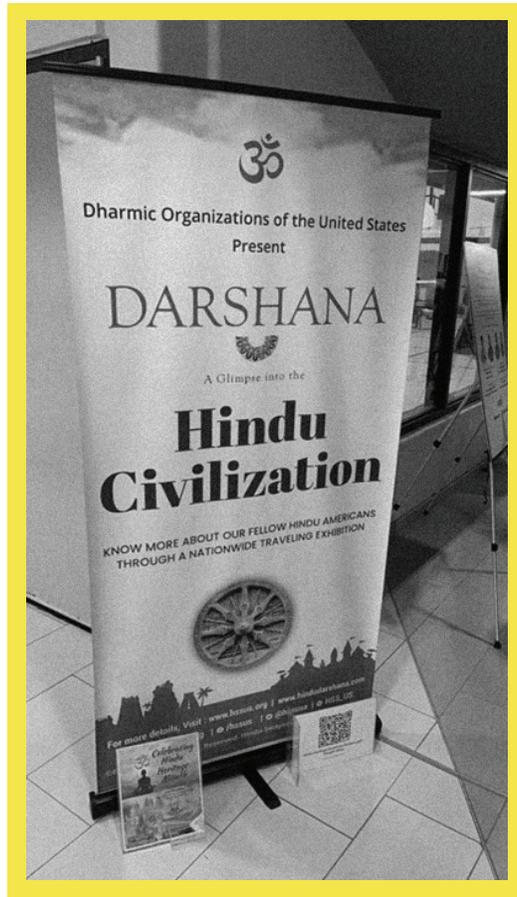
The HSS Canada’s Facebook page includes numerous photos of children and adults either sitting together listening to a talk or participating in various forms of communal activities. Most strikingly, several photos show them venerating the RSS’s earliest leaders, whose portraits are placed on a table, often strewn with flowers. Two figures are featured prominently this way: RSS founding chief KB Hedgewar and its second chief MS Golwalkar (recall that Golwalkar draws inspiration from Nazi Germany).<sup>52</sup>

The listed shakhas on the HSS Canada website also include the addresses of each chapter. Many of these locations are also the exact addresses of public schools in Ontario, particularly Toronto, Peel, and Durham.

Shakha Name	Municipality	School and School Board
Manu Shakha	Scarborough	Beverly Glen Junior Public School (TDSB)
Madhav Shakha	Scarborough	Woburn Junior Public School (TDSB)
Lakshmibai Shakha	Ajax	Vimy Ridge Public School (DDSB)
Amrut Shakha	Mississauga	Clifton Public School (PDSB)
Maruti Shakha	Mississauga	Britannia Public School (PDSB)
Nlvedita Shakha	Brampton	Castle Oaks Public School (PDSB)
Shri Krishna Balgokulam	Brampton	Hilldale Public School (PDSB)
Deoras Shakha	Brampton	Queen Street Public School (PDSB)
Mahadev Shakha	Brampton	West Humber Collegiate Institution (TDSB)
Rudra Shakha	Etobicoke	West Humber Collegiate Institute (TDSB)

For example, the “Manu Shakha” in Scarborough, Toronto shares the same address of the Toronto District School Board’s Beverly Glen Junior Public School. The “Maruti Shakha” of Mississauga, Ontario shares the same address as the Peel District School Board’s Britannia Public School.

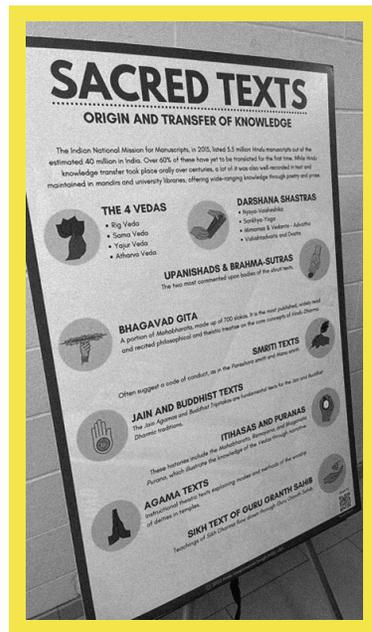
The HSS has also made strides into the Halton District School Board (HDSB) during Hindu Heritage Month in Canada, held for the first time in November 2022. Photos surfaced of an HSS banner and materials being used at an HDSB school that sources have asked to remain anonymous. The material is also clearly labeled as being from the HSS's United States branch (HSSUS).



The bottom of the banner clearly shows the HSS-US label (November 2022 Hindu heritage Month at HDSB school)

The material is supposed to help illustrate some basics of Hinduism and related Dharmic tenets of the religion.<sup>53</sup> Another poster used in the same Hindu Heritage Month event at the HDSB school also includes “Sikh Text of Guru Granth Sahib.” This, as per the World Sikh Organization (WSO), is deeply inappropriate as it blatantly suggests that Sikhism, a separate and independent world religion, is just a derivation of Hinduism. The same poster also does makes similar implications of “Jain and Buddhist Texts.”

Such misappropriations are typical of the highly politicized and ideological version of Hinduism peddled by the HSS shakhas. It minimizes the independence of these other religions that exist as minorities within India itself.



See bottom of the poster for misappropriation of Sikhism (November 2022 Hindu heritage Month at HDSB school)

Various shakhas in the United States have also posted footage of their activities online. Much of it shows innocuous sessions of physical exercise, community engagement, and yoga. Some also include celebrations and ceremonies for Hindu holidays such as Vijayadashami or Ugadi. But one distinct sign of the RSS or HSS's more politicized or militant form of celebrating these holy days is the ubiquitous presence of Hedgewar and Golwalkar's portraits, adorned with various ornaments or flowers, lingering very close to each ritualized celebration of a Hindu holiday.

One video showing a celebration of Vijayadashami, which marks a variety of events depending on the strain of Hinduism, in California's Bay Area HSS chapter shows a ceremony with participants standing and walking in military fashion, as someone erects the saffron flag (official colour of the RSS).<sup>54</sup> Hedgewar and Golwalkar's portraits are set close by next to an image of Bharat Mata, or Mother India, a personification of India used by the RSS to indicate their veneration of the nation's Hindu nature and essence.<sup>55</sup>

## Multiple Networks

But the HSS isn't the only international network in the RSS family that works to support its parent organization's over-arching Hindu nationalist outlook. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has been operating in Canada since 1995 as a registered charity.<sup>56</sup> It helps uphold another global network of chapters or "youth camps" known as the Bal Vihar.<sup>57</sup>

Within India, the VHP has a notorious historical track record of religious extremism and sectarianism characterized primarily by being on the frontlines of replacing the 16th Century Babri Mosque of Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh with a Hindu temple, which is now under construction. The VHP is infamous in India for its involvement in the 1992 demolition of the Babri Mosque, which Hindutva extremists insisted was built on the site of the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram.<sup>58</sup> Subsequent riots by mobs across India resulted in the deaths of 2,000 or so people.<sup>59</sup>

The VHP and other RSS groups were also implicated in the 2002 anti-Muslim riots that killed thousands of people in the province of Gujarat. The incident has become a defining moment of communal violence in modern India. The RSS and VHP's role have been well documented by international watch dog groups like Human Rights Watch.<sup>60</sup>

According to the United States VHP website, its youth-oriented Bal Vihar network is open to children four and above, and “provides an opportunity for our children to discover their cultural bond with Bharat and develop pride in their Hindu identity.”<sup>61</sup> The term bharat generally refers to India in common parlance.

The US VHP chapter also maintains a journal called Hindu Vishwa published four times a year that includes various social and political ideologies pushed by the RSS. For example, the Jan-March 2021 issue includes an eclectic sked of stories that range from pseudoscientific claims of humans existing with “mega beasts” to a more serious account of Muslim extremism in Kashmir. The piece presents this extremism, particularly in the early 1990s, as one example or reason in support of the BJP's widely condemned decision in 2019 to fully annex the Jammu and Kashmir region into India by stripping it of long-held special status under the Indian constitution.<sup>62</sup>

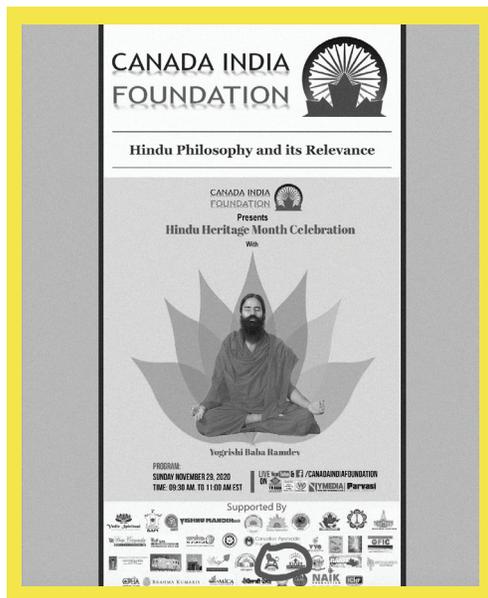
This kind of pro-BJP and pro-RSS polemic and vision is what international networks like the VHP and HSS brings to the Indian diaspora. Toronto's own Bal Vihar presence can be found in an entity called the Chinmaya Vedanta Heritage Centre, which is a branch of the India-based Chinmaya Mission. Chinmaya Mission's website includes a page noting how the group grew out of the VHP's inaugural meeting in 1964 “aimed at consolidating the Hindutva movement.”<sup>63</sup> The Mission's Toronto branch has a website that markets various options to attend “e-Bala Vihar” info sessions.<sup>64</sup>

The Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation (EVF) is another organization with operations here in Canada<sup>65</sup>, with roots in the RSS's single teacher schooling and missionary network in India's tribal regions, known as the Ekal Abhiyan<sup>66</sup>, which the VHP and other related groups have used as a model to make similar inroads into rural, tribal India.<sup>67</sup> In the same vein, EVF Canada's mission includes the “holistic development in the remote villages and tribal areas of India and developing neighboring countries through well-designed, effectual education...”<sup>68</sup>

The lessons imparted within these single teacher set-ups (of which there are over 100,000 in India and Nepal<sup>69</sup>) align with the RSS's overall ideas and messaging. The BJP's electoral results have markedly improved where such networks have taken root.<sup>70</sup>

Additionally, Ekal Vidyalaya and the HSS logos were imprinted on a poster advertising an online event in November 2020, organized by the Canada India Foundation (CIF), another registered non-profit in Canada<sup>71</sup> that, among other things, wants to transform “Canada’s relations with India by emphasizing India’s criticality to Canada’s future” and to “promote Canada’s interest in India.”<sup>72</sup>

The event, titled “Hindu Philosophy and Its Relevance,” was part of 2020’s Hindu Heritage Month. It was presented as a way for all Canadians to learn the tenets of Hinduism, its roots, and contemporary relevance. Yet the HSS and Ekal Vidyalaya, two groups tethered to the RSS’s highly exclusivist, supremacist, and politicized version of Hinduism, were listed prominently as co-sponsors (among other organizations).



The 2020 CIF HHM Poster



Moreover, the CIF’s held several online events throughout 2022 that featured speakers from India who have ties to the RSS and who have made a number of inflammatory and often violent remarks towards India’s minorities, sometimes leading to deadly consequences.

These include Anurag Thakur, a BJP parliamentarian in Himachal Pradesh who also serves as India’s Minister for Information and Broadcasting, as well as the Minister for Youth Affairs and Sport. He was featured in an August 2020 CIF webinar encouraging investment in India.<sup>73</sup>

Thakur was widely reported in January 2020 to have yelled the inflammatory chant, “desh ke gaddaron ko” to a crowd of supporters.<sup>74</sup> The phrase roughly translates as “What should be done to the traitors of the country?” The crowd responded with, “shoot them!” This exchange unfolded as Thakur, then Minister of Finance, was campaigning in New Delhi for another BJP candidate, right as protests were being held against the party’s amendment to the Citizenship Act—an bill that has been roundly condemned for making it easier to deport Muslim refugees in India.<sup>75</sup>

Thakur and other BJP figures have been widely criticized for this incitement of angry Hindu mobs right before bloody riots unfolded in the streets of New Delhi, resulting in around 50 dead, mostly Muslims. Amnesty International documented and investigated the riots, noting that the BJP figures' "hateful" speeches fed into the waves of riotous attacks on the city's Muslims.<sup>76</sup> Human Rights Watch have also done a thorough investigation and report that specifically names Thakur as one of several BJP leaders who advocated violence in the lead-up to the anti-Muslim pogroms.<sup>77</sup> Thakur appeared on the CIF webinar just months after the riots happened.

Another webinar speaker invited by the CIF was Pratap Chandra Sarangi (this time in June, 2022), a BJP parliamentarian from Odisha and former Junior Minister under PM Modi.<sup>78</sup> As the BBC reports, Sarangi "was the leader of the Bajrang Dal, a hardline right-wing group [and the youth wing of the VHP], when a Hindu mob brutally killed Australian Christian missionary Graham Staines and his two children in 1999."<sup>79</sup> In the end, no single group was officially held responsible for the murders (the victims were burnt alive), though a man with multiple links to the Bajrang Dal was ultimately charged and convicted.

Just three years later, Sarangi was arrested, as the state president of the Bajrang Dal, for on charges of rioting, arson, assault and damaging government property.<sup>80</sup> A large group of far-right Hindu militants attacked the Odisha legislative assembly, including individuals from the Bajrang Dal and the VHP.

The VHP, as we noted, has been implicated by international human rights organizations in the 2002 anti-Muslim massacres in Gujarat. This led to a chill or even breaking of relations between Gujarat, then run by current PM Narendra Modi, and various other governments around the world.

The CIF, on their website in 2010, posted four issues that they wanted to explicitly "lobby" Ottawa on, from free trade to more visa offices. But one of these four issues, as explicitly listed, is the restoration of relations between Canada and the senior government officials of Gujarat.<sup>81</sup>

The CIF has also been a vocal opponent of the recognition of the state sponsored 1984 Sikh Genocide in India. The Sikh Genocide was recognized by the Ontario Legislature in April 2017 with the passing of a Private Members Motion tabled by then Ontario Liberal MPP Harinder Malhi.

Although the 1984 Sikh Genocide has been recognized by several highly ranked elected Indian officials<sup>82</sup>, the Delhi Legislative Assembly<sup>83</sup>, and the Delhi High Court, the CIF still strongly opposed the recognition of the Sikh Genocide in Canada and issued a joint press release with other Indo-Canadian organizations condemning the Malhi's motion.<sup>84</sup>

Similarly, when then NDP MPP Gurratan Singh introduced a private member's bill, "An Act to Proclaim Sikh Genocide Awareness Week," in February 2020, the CIF once again led the opposition. The CIF and other Indo-Canadian organizations released another joint press statement condemning Singh's bill.

In the release, the CIF's National Convener Satish Thakkar said: "There is only one way to heal a historical wound – by applying a soothing balm of peace and reconciliation on it, and not be periodically scratching it for petty political gains."<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, in a letter to Ontario Premier Doug Ford dated March 5th, 2020, the Board of Governors of the CIF stated: "Politicians in Canada who continue to claim the victimisation of Sikhs in India are unaware or unwilling to accept the present Indian reality where a majority of Indians including Sikhs are focused on pursuing economic goals and the Indian state is enabling this wish fulfillment by doing its best to usher in policies that help rapid economic development."<sup>86</sup>



RSS Training (Taken From: Scroll: <https://scroll.in/article/889509/how-the-rss-operates-in-foreign-countries-in-general-and-the-usa-in-particular>)



HSS Meeting (Taken From: HSS Canada: <https://www.hsscandada.org/chapters/>, photo gallery)



RSS members salute during a drill session in Mumbai, India. (Lauren Frayer/NPR) (Taken from: NPR: <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/03/706808616/the-powerful-group-shaping-the-rise-of-hindu-nationalism-in-india>)



RSS members at a rally near Hyderabad, Telangana (STR/AFP via Getty Images) (Take from: The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/20/india-supremacist-nationalism-tearing-india-apart-modi-rss-tnu-attacks>)

# Global Political Influence



The most important openly political group belonging to the RSS's family of organizations is the Bharatiya Janata Party, or the BJP, which has won back-to-back federal elections (2014 and 2019) in India and currently has full control of its legislature.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, arguably one of the most influential and powerful Indians in modern times, started attending RSS meetings as a child and became a full time RSS worker as a young man.<sup>87</sup> He then rose through the ranks of the group's political apparatus in the state of Gujarat and became Chief Minister in 2002. He would only give up the position after becoming PM in 2014.

Modi also gained global infamy as Chief Minister when the state of Gujarat became the site of deadly riots in 2002 that resulted in the deaths of thousands of Muslims at the hands of Hindu extremists.<sup>88</sup>

A detailed report by Human Rights Watch includes Modi's infamous quip about the murderous riots' root causes: "Every action has an equal and opposite reaction."<sup>89</sup> The report also noted that, "The Hindu organizations considered most responsible for the violence in Gujarat are the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh..."<sup>90</sup>

In recent years, Modi and the BJP have come under consistent criticism by international human rights organizations for policies concerning India's non-Hindu minorities, particularly the Muslims. This isn't surprising considering the RSS's basic vision for an India run for and by Hindus first, an idea that animates not just the BJP and its highly polarizing and controversial strategies, but also a global network of political influence organizations that project the party's interests globally.

This expansive international political network is led by the ubiquitous Overseas Friends of the BJP (OFBJP), which, according to its main website, it also claims to operate in 40 countries, including the US, UK, and Canada. Its also claims that a "Large section of Indian Diaspora across the globe has been traditionally a big supporter and sympathizer of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)."<sup>91</sup>

The OFBJP lies at the centre of fundraising efforts in the Indian diaspora for the BJP's electoral efforts.<sup>92</sup> Since June 2018, the OFBJP Canada chapter changed its name to the Canada India Global Forum (CIGF) and is based in Brampton, Ontario.<sup>93</sup>

The head, or "Global convener," of the entire OFBJP network is Vijay Chauthaiwale, who is also listed as the entire BJP's Foreign Affairs Cell lead. This means he's a direct member and worker for the BJP itself and leads the party's overseas engagements and ventures.<sup>94</sup> He has also been a dedicated volunteer of the "Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) since his childhood."<sup>95</sup>

## Advancing a Foreign Agenda

Foreign interference in Canada's various domestic matters has become a hot topic as of late. The BJP's efforts to influence over a million or so Indo-Canadians has been a major aspect of this concern that has already been raised, including in a secret report prepared for deputy ministers in 2018 titled, "Countering Hostile State Activity: The Canadian Perspective."

A Canadian Press article briefly outlined how a significant number of government officials already know that the country's various minority communities, including the large Indian diaspora, have long been subject to engagement and lobbying by entities and groups representing the interests of other nations.<sup>96</sup>

OFBJP Canada, or the Canada-India Global Forum, is an explicitly foreign entity tied directly to the apparatus of the BJP itself in India. The CIGF is quite open about such foreign ties via public postings of, for instance, their hosting BJP officials like Hardeep Singh Puri, India's current Minister of Housing & Urban Affairs, as well as the Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, in Ottawa and Montreal two years ago.<sup>97</sup>

Moreover, the CIGF tweeted homage to Deendayal Upadhyaya,<sup>98</sup> an RSS member who helped co-found the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the BJP's Hindu nationalist predecessor, and who would develop Hindutva ideologies into a more cohesive political theory touching on numerous aspects of social relations.<sup>99</sup>

This ideological dedication also flows seamlessly into parroting the BJP's policies and talking points in Canada, including explicit support for the party's 2019 decision to annex the territory of Jammu and Kashmir by stripping it of its constitutionally protected special status (Article 370). The CIGF tweeted "unequivocal support" for the policy while characterizing criticisms toward it by countries like Pakistan as "ill-motivated efforts to meddle in India's internal affairs."<sup>100</sup>

The CIGF even told Nobel Peace Laureate Malala Yusufzai to not "complain about Kashmir" while minority women are "getting raped, kidnapped openly in Pakistan on a daily basis."<sup>101</sup> The Forum didn't support such a provocative tweet with any evidence of such alleged daily atrocities.

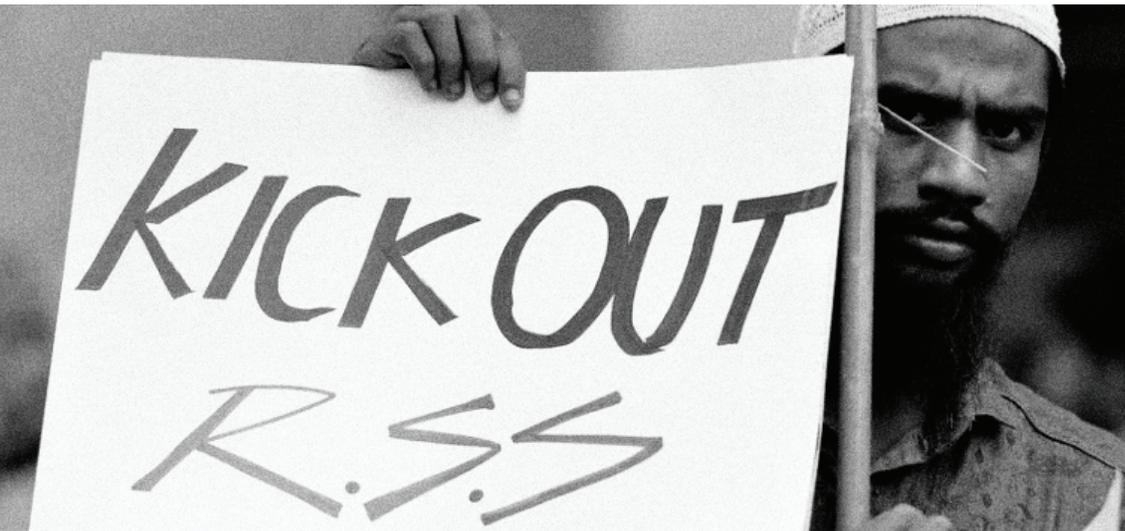
The OFBJP's open advocacy for the Hindu nationalist party to which it belongs while operating on foreign soil hasn't been without scrutiny. In the United States, the group had to register last year with the US's Department of Justice as a Foreign Agent.<sup>102</sup> In the UK, leading up to the 2019 election, a British diplomat flew to India to voice concerns that the OFBJP's representatives were being too transparently partisan against the Labour Party, including claiming that the BJP itself was helping Conservative candidates win elections through the group, which amounts to overt foreign interference.<sup>103</sup>

A report by Global News's Stewart Bell last year also confirmed that the Indian government has tried via its intelligence agencies to covertly influence Canadian politicians with bribes and misinformation.<sup>104</sup> Court filings obtained by Bell included a secret report detailing how Indian intelligence used an unnamed person of Indian descent to try and influence Canadian elected officials before being stopped by Canadian security agencies.

Beyond attempts to influence Canadian politicians, the Indian government has also been behind attempts to silence Canadian civil society groups on social media platforms.

In September 2020, for instance, The National Post reported that the Indian government successfully asked Twitter to remove a post by a Canadian civil society organization, the World Sikh Organization, commemorating the 1984 massacre of hundreds of Sikhs in India.<sup>105</sup>

In addition, a key area of concern is the circulation of the RSS's supremacist Hindutva ideology on social media with impunity. According to a Wall Street Journal report, Facebook has been subject to influence in favoring the BJP in online hate speech, as one of Facebook's top executives in India, Ankhi Das, "had opposed applying the company's hate-speech rules to a member of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party"<sup>106</sup> who had stated that "Rohingya Muslim immigrants should be shot, called Muslims traitors and threatened to raze mosques."<sup>107</sup>



# Islamophobic, Anti-Sikh and Casteist Rhetoric



The presence of Sangh Parivar and RSS-related groups sadly but predictably overlaps with various incidents of Hindu supremacist rhetoric and actions in Canada.

It's clear that those with an RSS background and training are active in Canadian civil society and even act on behalf of the BJP itself, such as the Canada India Global Forum, as we list below. It's also clear that such a presence has been accompanied by a troubling discourse of imported conflict that pits Hindus and minorities in India, like the Muslims and Sikhs, against each other.

This sectarian, discriminatory, and often hateful antipathy toward those framed by RSS and Hindutva ideology as the enemies of Bharat Mata pose a direct threat to Muslim and Sikh communities, as well as to the social fabric of Canada. This mentality often plays itself out in the bold and often public stereotyping of Muslims and Sikhs as anti-Indian, anti-Canadian, and Hinduphobic terrorists working to discredit the BJP's reputation and accomplishments across the world.

The following is a partial but representative list of incidents where such rhetoric was broadcasted in Canada by community leaders who are affiliated with mainstream organizations that project the harmful sectarian language.

It must be noted here that not every incident listed below involves organizations or individuals with explicit ties to the RSS network. A few certainly are, as we note, but not all. We are not saying that every entity or person listed below are explicit acolytes of the RSS or have worked with RSS affiliates.

What we are saying here is that the voices we highlight in this section are ones that 1) purport to speak for Hindu Canadians and Indo-Canadians, and 2) echo the broad antipathies that the Hindutva worldview has for groups that would be minorities inside India (eg. Muslims, Sikhs, etc.).

- 1. Example:** In May 2020, Rao Yendamuri, an immigration consultant based in Toronto, Canada, appeared on a local news program on TAG TV, to criticize the City of Mississauga, Ontario's successful motion to allow temporary broadcasting of the adhaan during Ramadan 2020.

"The motion offers comforts to the Islamic society," he said, "at the expense of the larger Canadian population."<sup>108</sup>

Yendamuri then elaborated on his argument by referring to a strongly worded press statement<sup>109</sup> released by the Hindu Forum Canada (HFC), a community organization for which he currently acts as President.<sup>110</sup>

The statement referred to the City of Mississauga's decision to okay the adhaan broadcast as "a shocking move violating the Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

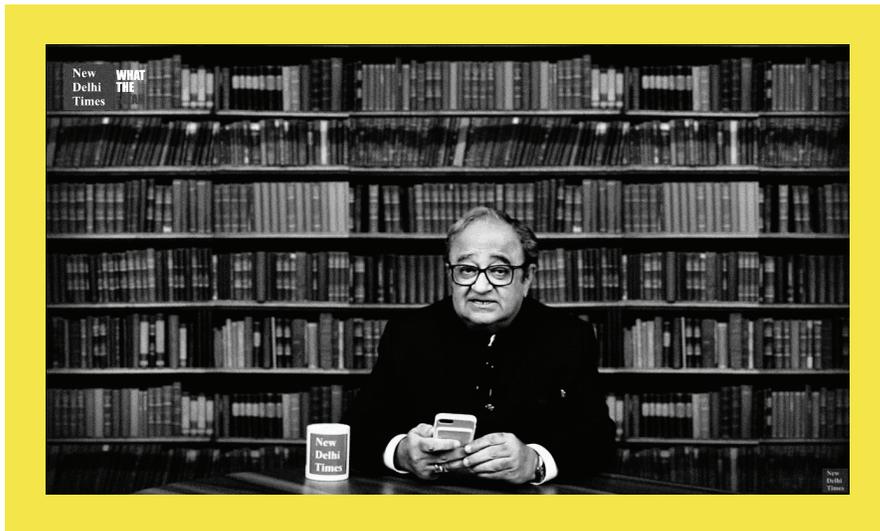
Moreover, allowing the adhaan to be broadcasted implied, “that all of Mississauga, with its large Muslim population, cares nothing for the rights and comforts of peoples of other faiths, or for that matter, of any stressed and nervous individuals affected by noise pollution during this crisis time of ‘lockdown...’”

Of course, allowing the adhaan broadcast, much like permitting church bells or Hindu hymns, is not a violation of the Charter. But the implication of such a complaint is that Muslims belong to a coddled minority group that gets special treatment over Hindus, a common narrative among supporters of Hindutva ideology where India is cast as a country where Muslims are also given special treatment by a generous Hindu majority.<sup>111</sup>

The HFC Twitter account has also tweeted at least one disturbing and discriminatory comment, which called “Pak DNA” “sadly mutated.” Pak in this case refers to Pakistan, a Muslim-majority country and India’s top regional rival.<sup>112</sup>



They have also retweeted multiple interviews and statements by prominent columnist Tarek Fatah, including a video clip of Fatah implying that City of Brampton mayor Patrick Brown criticized a BJP policy because he’s beholden to Sikh separatist (“khalistani”) voices in his city.<sup>113</sup>



A 2006 communique featured proudly on HFC's website shows current Indian PM Narendra Modi of the BJP happily replying to a "long letter" by Yendamuri, commending the latter on his "great love" for India.<sup>114</sup> This was years before Modi became Prime Minister through the BJP's big federal win in 2014.

The HFC was also linked to billboards that appeared in various locations around the Greater Toronto Area in 2021 featuring an image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and expressing gratitude to him for sending vaccines to Canada.<sup>115</sup>

- 2. Example:** Sounder Dilipan, a software engineer based in Toronto, Ontario is a self-identifying RSS adherent who has been associated with the group since the age of 12.<sup>116</sup>

He runs a pro-RSS Hindu nationalist e-zine called Bharat Marg that pushes various Islamophobic conspiracy theories, including the baseless narrative that Muslims in India are conducting a "covid jihad" by deliberately spreading the Covid-19 virus to kill non-Muslims, primarily Hindus.<sup>117</sup>

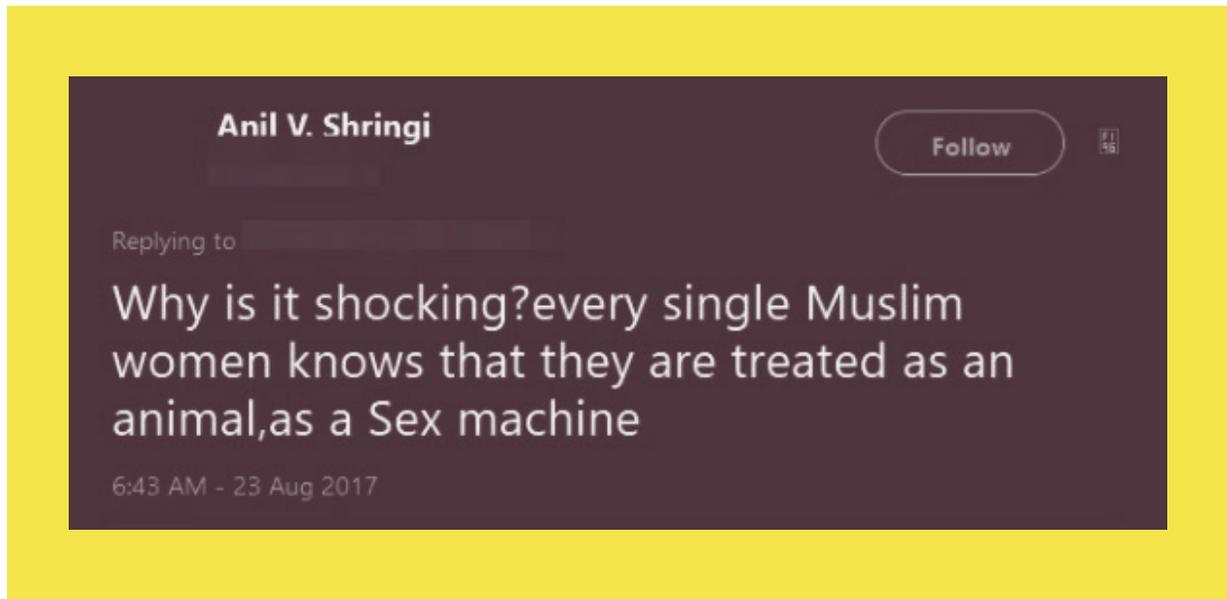
The site's "Know Your Editor" section proudly notes how Dilipan has worked for the "student wing of the RSS" and was in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh in December 1992 to participate in the "illegal structure demolishment" of the Babri Mosque by Hindutva supremacists who wanted to erect a Hindu temple in its place.<sup>118</sup> In other words, Dilipan's site proudly and explicitly displays his activities in service of Hindutva extremism.

Bharat Marg also includes a litany of articles focusing on religious and RSS rituals, but is focused primarily on Indian and Canadian politics. Its far-right outlook connects with similar voices in Canada, as Dilipan has interviewed<sup>119</sup> Islamophobic trolls like Mississauga, Ontario's Kevin Johnston<sup>120</sup> on the Bharat Marg YouTube page, as well as peddled the idea that Muslims are conducting a "population jihad" to have as many kids as possible in order to outdo non-Muslim populations.<sup>121</sup>

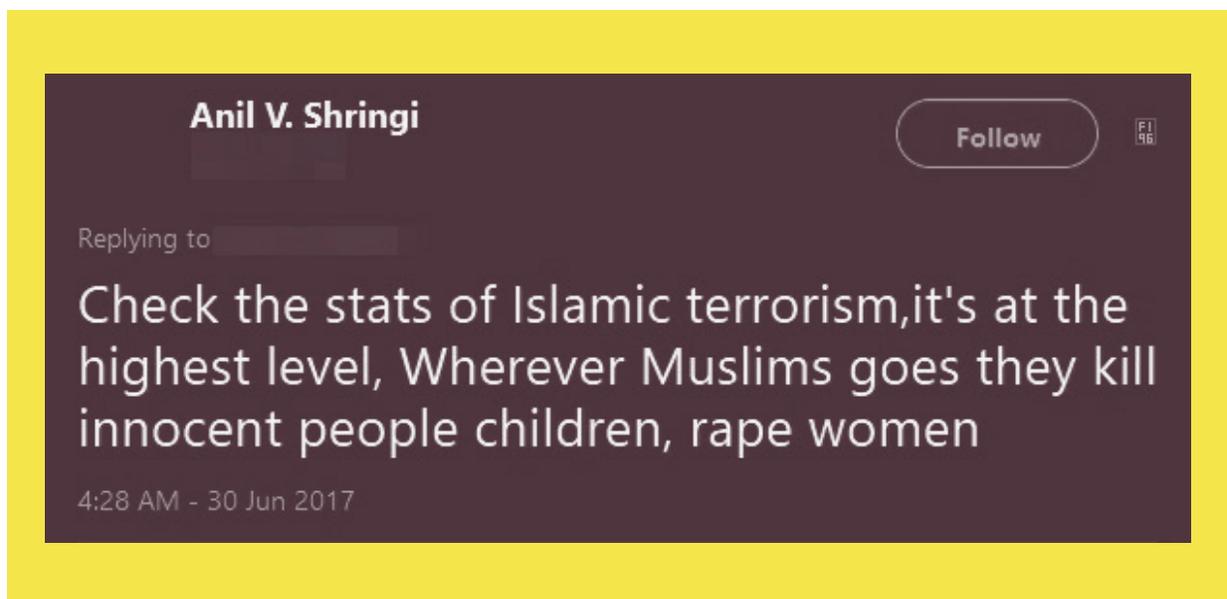
**3. Example:** Anil V. Shringi, a GTA-based supply chain and management specialist, is the National VP of Media and Mass Communications for the Canada-India Global Forum<sup>122</sup>, formerly known as the Canadian chapter of the Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party (OFBJP).

Shringi is a prolific tweeter who authored a number of explicitly Islamophobic tweets that portray Muslims as terrorists and rapists.<sup>123</sup>

“Where Muslims goes they kill innocent people children, rape women,” reads one such tweet from Shringi in 2017.<sup>124</sup>



Another tweet in 2017 reads: “every single Muslim woman knows that they are treated as an animal, as a Sex machine.”<sup>125</sup>



A more recent one suggests Muslims and Islam hate democracy: “Democracy are Haram (not allowed) in Islam, then why should democratic nations allow Muslims in their country Canadian politicians must know these FACTS, V should have open debate.”<sup>126</sup>



Anil V. Shringi  
@allanshringi

Zoom&Read this poster 📄

Democracy are Haram ( not allowed)  
in Islam,  
then why should democratic nations allow Muslims in  
their country  
Canadian politicians must know these FACTS, V should  
have open debate

@TarekFatah @TahirGora @patrickbrownont  
@BonnieCrombie @JustinTrudeau



10:15 AM · May 1, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

Shringi reserves particularly strong words for those protesting BJP policies, particularly ones that have been criticized for discriminating against India’s non-Hindu minorities. One example is a tweet of his calling protests against the BJP’s agricultural reforms a “conspiracy against India.”<sup>127</sup>

Among these protests have been significant numbers of Sikh Indians from the state of Punjab and elsewhere who make up a large segment of India’s agricultural sector. New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jagmeet Singh, himself an open and proud Sikh, has voiced support for India’s protestors.<sup>128</sup> Shringi tweeted that Singh is the “biggest threat to peace living Canadians.” [sic]<sup>129</sup>

**4. Example:** Arvind Bhardwaj, a former real estate sales representative based in the GTA, posted several Islamophobic comments on social media before getting fired by his company I-Pro Realty for the remarks.<sup>130</sup>

One tweet by Bhardwaj made a lewd and racist insult against Chinese people while referencing the strategic alliance that Pakistan, a major rival to India (and a Muslim-majority country), often strikes with the Chinese.<sup>131</sup>



Another earlier tweet suggests that all Muslims are terrorists.<sup>132</sup>



A charitable reading of these comments might interpret them as passing remarks made in jest, but according to a Manager at I-Pro Realty, Bhardwaj doubled down on his comments when asked to publicly apologize for his words.

“We would like to clarify for the record that we gave Mr. Bhardwaj an opportunity to apologize or we would consider further action,” said the manager when emailed about Bhardwaj. “He refused and tendered his resignation, which we immediately accepted.”

According to his public LinkedIn page, Bhardwaj was a Director at both the Indo-Canadian Harmony Forum (ICHF) and the Indo-Canadian Chamber of Commerce (ICCC).<sup>133</sup>

The ICHF’s Chair Praveen Verma denounced a 2019 panel discussion at Toronto’s Noor Cultural Centre featuring two scholars who were critical of the BJP’s policies towards Muslims and Dalit Indians in recent years. The academic panel discussion was co-sponsored by University of Toronto, York University and Queen’s University, but Verma insisted that the event’s criticisms and approach amounted to “partisan and biased approach by major Canadian institutions towards the Indo-Canadian Community.”<sup>134</sup>

**5. Example:** In a 2018 letter to organizers of Brampton, Ontario’s annual multicultural Carabram festival, the Indo-Canadian Harmony Forum supported the Consular General of India in Toronto’s attempts in 2017 to block the festival from featuring a distinct “Punjab Pavilion” separate from the Indian one.<sup>135</sup>

In a 2018 report by the Globe and Mail, a spokesperson for then Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland called the Consular General’s move an “inappropriate” “interference in domestic affairs by foreign representatives in Canada.”<sup>136</sup> The Indian diplomat’s move also clearly tried to stop Punjabi organizers at the festival from celebrating their identity in full, thus stoking communal tensions.

The Consular General of India is obviously by definition an extension of the ruling BJP government’s interests. Punjab is the only state in India with a Sikh majority and the BJP government is particularly sensitive to calls from Sikhs in both Punjab and the diaspora for an independent and sovereign Sikh nation.<sup>137</sup> (Tensions between RSS supporters and Sikhs have also spiked under the Modi administration, particularly as the BJP’s recent agricultural reforms have triggered huge protests from Sikh farmers in Punjab.)

The ICHF defended the Consular General’s interference in Carabram 2017 and called the Punjab Pavilion a representation of “narrow religious and political agenda” “promoted by some separatist elements.”<sup>138</sup>

The ICHF also rescinded its invitation to Ontario MPP Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria for its Annual Awards and Gala night in July 2019, due to his support of the recognition of the 1984 Sikh Genocide.

The ICHF stated: “It harms the community here. They use this term (genocide) and the unfortunate 1984 riots in a different political connotation. They talk as if the whole nation was involved. That was of course a bad spot in Indian history. But this is none of their business. It’s India’s matter and between Sikhs and Government of India. Why are these people poking their nose.”<sup>139</sup>

**6. Example:** Ajay Tandon, a veteran of the hospitality industry with a formidable track record of community work, was slated to sit on a panel discussion in July 2020 with Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown and Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie.<sup>140</sup> The event was hosted by the Indo-Canadian Chamber of Commerce (ICCC), where Tandon held the position of Director of Programs and Events.

Tandon was eventually disinvited after several of his Facebook comments calling for the deaths of those protesting against BJP policy surfaced.<sup>141</sup>

The comments were aimed at protests around the world against the BJP’s highly controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act, or CAA, which came under international criticism for granting a path to Indian citizenship for persecuted minorities of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, provided they are not Muslim. The Act was the first time that religion had been explicitly stated as a deciding factor regarding the attainment of citizenship under Indian law.

“Tandon’s comments amounted to calling for the death of those who protested this legislation by Indian police. This includes protests that happened throughout Canada by those unhappy with the BJP’s direction and the CAA. Against these Canada-based protests, Tandon warned in one comment that, “Canada will soon have Shariah Law if you allow them to continue!”

“If this isn’t stopped they will take over the countries,” he added. “The phobia word and the racist word is where their hide behind as their defense.” [sic]

Tandon was referring to the protestors as nefarious Muslim terrorists trying to undermine India’s stability and rule of law by demonstrating against the BJP while hiding behind terms like “Islamophobia” or “racist” when called out for it. He also wrote that such Islamists will soon replace Canada with Shariah law if left unchecked.<sup>142</sup>

**7. Example:** Ravi Hooda, a real estate agent working for RE/MAX Canada in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), tweeted several Islamophobic statements.

The tweets were mainly in response to the City of Brampton, Ontario allowing the Islamic call-to-prayer (adhaan) to be broadcasted for a few minutes every day during the holy month of Ramadan in 2020.

According to a May 2020 CBC report, one of Hooda's tweets read:

“ What's next? Separate lanes for camel & goat riders, allowing slaughter of animals at home in the name of sacrifice, bylaw requiring all women to cover themselves from head to toe in tents to appease the piece fools for votes.”<sup>143</sup>

The report also noted that a major school board in the area confirmed that Hooda was an executive school council member for Macville Public School in the city of Bolton, Ontario. Hooda was soon removed from RE/MAX and the Peel District School Board for his Islamophobic comments, according to the same CBC report.<sup>144</sup>

In 2018, someone by the name of Ravi Hooda spoke on behalf of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS or Hindu's Volunteer Organization), an international extension of the RSS tasked with organizing the Hindu diaspora, at a celebration of the Hindu Festival Raksha Bandhan with the Peel Regional Police in Mississauga, Ontario.<sup>145</sup>

The PRP called him a “devoted volunteer and organizer.”

Hooda refused all comment when asked to confirm that he is an HSS volunteer.

# Conclusion



Hindutva is a dangerous set of ideologies that casts India as a country that doesn't have to treat its ethno-religious minorities equally. The Hindutva movement, pushed by the RSS and its large network of affiliates (the Sangh Parivar) try to present their agenda as the agenda of all global Hindus. This is both impossible and completely false.

Yet the electoral success of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, along with the party's deep RSS ties, has helped smuggle Hindutva's discriminatory vision of one of the world's most diverse regions from the margins to the mainstream, with devastating results. The antagonism against Muslims, Sikhs, Christians other non-Hindu minorities in India, and Dalits have become more socially legitimized, emboldened, and now threatens to destabilize India's large diaspora populations across the world, including in Canada.

Canadian leaders cannot allow individuals and organization that push a Hindutva vision of India—a supremacist vision that discriminates against minorities and has led to mass bloodshed—entrench themselves in this country, perpetuate their supremacist ideologies, and radicalize relations between large faith-based communities.

We have seen what such entrenchment has led to in India, where RSS-linked groups, militias, and mobs have compiled a disturbing list of pogroms and crimes against India's minorities and various voices who openly oppose the vision of an intolerant India.

Hindutva is not Hinduism, yet the Hindutva nationalist movement seeks to remake India and its diaspora communities in the image of a fundamentalist, intolerant, and ultimately violent ideology. Canadian leaders and lawmakers must be informed about how this agenda is unfolding within Canadian cities and towns.

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