



Globalising Hindutva: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Construction of Transnational Hindu Nationalism

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolution of Hindutva ideology since Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister of India, exploring how the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has adopted various methods to foster a Hindu nationalist identity in a transnational context. It also highlights the contribution of the diaspora network to expanding Hindutva as a global identity—one that advocates for global engagement, the exchange of ideas, and deliberations that help strengthen Hindu nationalism.

The ideology of Hindutva has heavily influenced Indian society since the freedom struggle and India's subsequent independence. Since the advent of the Bharatiya Janata Party government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, the study of the ideology and its institutional force, the Sangh Parivar, has become the centre of scholarly attention at home and beyond.

The article argues that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has served as the principal organisational vehicle for the transnationalization of Hindutva. The VHP uses various methods and measurements, such as institutionalising diaspora networks, cultural organisations, religious activities, educational initiatives, and digital communication. These frameworks construct a shared Hindu nationalist identity beyond India's territorial boundaries.

Keywords: Hindutva ideology, transnational Hindu nationalism, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, diaspora and Sangh Parivar.

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I. Introduction

The term *Hindutva* was coined by Bengali essayist Chandranath Basu in 1892 and was later propagated by the Indian nationalist Veer Savarkar. Savarkar used the term to define a cultural, geographical, and political identity for inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent whose heritage is rooted in Hindu values—encompassing the land stretching from the Indus River to the seas. He argued that anyone who considers India both their "fatherland" and "holy land" is innately Indian, with the ultimate goal of metamorphosing India into a Hindu nation-state (*Hindu Rashtra*) (Savarkar, 2021). Modern transnational extensions of this ideology continue to build upon Savarkar's foundational Hindu nationalism.

In the contemporary globalised world, transnational ideological movements have become increasingly significant in shaping the global political landscape and identity formation. Most existing studies focus on Western or state-centric frameworks, whereas non-Western ideological networks operating across national boundaries have received little attention.

The Sangh Parivar (Family of the Sangh) refers to a vast network of independent organisations with a shared ideological alignment. It encompasses political, social, and educational branches at various levels of society. All of these entities share, to varying degrees, the core ideology of Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism. In practice, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leads the Sangh Parivar, whose aim is to redefine Indian national identity through a cultural and civilizational lens. Within this broad organisational framework,

established in 1964, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) plays a fundamental role in articulating and extending Hindutva beyond India, predominantly through its engagement with global Hindu communities.

This study closely examines how the Sangh Parivar's ideological framework is constructed and how it is extended worldwide through the VHP's organisational and transnational activities.

Research Significance

This research addresses a gap in understanding how Hindutva operates as a transnational ideological network in the contemporary landscape of international relations and societal development. In this context, Hindu nationalism and the concept of 'Hindutva' have been extensively studied. However, their transnational expansion and global organisational networks remain underexplored (Jaffrelot, 2007; Hansen, 1999).

The expansion of the VHP across multiple countries reflects the transformation of nationalism into a transnational phenomenon, in which ideas, identities, and institutional structures circulate across borders (Vertovec, 2009; Jaffrelot&Therwath, 2007). This process highlights the importance of examining how ideological movements sustain coherence as they adapt to diverse socio-political environments.

This research is significant for three main reasons:

First, it contributes to the study of non-Western forms of transnational nationalism.

Second, it advances understanding of diaspora politics, particularly how identities are reconstructed through transnational networks (Kurien, 2007).

Third, it provides insight into the intersection of religion, ideology, and global networks, which remains insufficiently theorised in existing scholarship.

II. Literature Review

The existing literature on the Sangh Parivar and the VHP is analytically categorised into three main themes: ideology, political mobilisation, and connections with groups worldwide.

Ideology and the Construction of Hindutva

The traditional scholarship examines Hindutva as a form of cultural nationalism that seeks to redefine Indian identity in civilizational and religious terms (Savarkar, 1923/2003; Jaffrelot, 2007). Scholars argue that Hindutva operates as a political project that relies on historical narratives and perceptions of cultural threat to construct a unified Hindu identity (Hansen, 1999). This threat perception ideology, to some extent, works to unify the Hindu at home, and yet to see whether these tactics work or not on the global stage, to mobilise and organise the Hindu diaspora under the VHP wing.

The VHP contributes significantly to this ideological framework by promoting religious unity and cultural consolidation. At the same time, the study of the Sangh Parivar and the VHP remains contested within academic scholarship. Critics argue that such a framework may suit majoritarian narratives and marginalise minority communities (Nussbaum, 2007). Moreover, the emphasis on the unity of Hindu often overlooks the existing social stratification and hierarchies within, particularly regarding caste inequalities and gender disparity (Guru, 2005).

Organisational Structure and Political Mobilisation

A second strand of literature focuses on the organisational capacity and political role of the Sangh Parivar to stimulate fellow members of the Hindu community. Andersen and Damle (1987) underscore the network's institutional strength and discipline, elaborating on the concept of "Parivar" as a "steel frame" that signifies strong institutional cohesion within the network. The concept illustrates a close connection between RSS and its affiliates, such as the VHP and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Jaffrelot (2007) highlights the Sangh Parivar's capability to translate ideological narratives into effective political mobilisation. The presence of the Sangh Parivar at the grassroots level gives it a strategic advantage in politically motivating Hindu communities to build a common platform.

Existing scholarship suggests that the VHP has been instrumental in mobilising religious sentiment and organising mass movements across the states, including the Ram Janmabhoomi movement at home and promoting it as a Hindu identity internationally (Hansen, 1999). Jaffrelot argues that its interaction with political actors, such as the BJP, has contributed to the wider acceptance and normalisation of Hindutva in political discourse (Jaffrelot, 2007).

Diaspora, Transnationalism, and Global Networks

More recent scholarship has explored aspects of the transnational expansion of Hindu nationalism. Rajagopal (2000) and Jaffrelot and Therwath (2007) demonstrate how diaspora communities actively sustain and restructure nationalist ideologies across borders. Kurien (2007) argues that Hindu identity is actively reshaped in multicultural contexts to fit into the Hindutva narrative of making Hindu nationalism.

The above-discussed scholarly works have provided deep insights into the domestic roots of Hindutva and demonstrated that the VHP plays a key role in linking and connecting diaspora communities through

cultural programs, institutional networks, and ideological dissemination. However, they largely overlook the transnational organisational mechanisms that sustain these ideologies in diaspora contexts. Thus, the relationship between ideological worldview and global organisational expansion remains under-theorised.

Theoretical Framework

This research adopts an interdisciplinary framework combining transnationalism, network theory, and political identity theory.

The transnationalism framework helps understand how ideas, identities, and organisations operate across national boundaries (Vertovec, 2009). The concept of "long-distance nationalism" (Anderson, 1992) helps explain how the Sangh Parivar maintains influence and ideological ties across borders. Beyond Western-centric transnationalism, which often focuses on liberal NGOs, this study introduces Ideological Transnationalism.

Network theory explains how organisational structures facilitate the circulation and coordination of ideological practices across multiple levels (Castells, 2010). Theories of political identity provide a framework for analysing the development of collective identities through common narratives and institutional practices (Anderson, 1983). Diaspora studies further explain how these identities are adapted and transformed within new socio-cultural contexts (Kurien, 2007).

Together, these perspectives provide a framework for understanding how ideology is both structured and transformed within transnational networks.

The International Expansion of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad

Hindu nationalism is rooted in the territory of India and naturally based on ethno-religious factors, which raises the question of how it can broaden its activities in a foreign land when dissociated from its sacred Land. As Hindu migrants move abroad, they gradually establish diaspora communities that form fragments of India overseas. According to Christophe Jaffrelot (2007), without Hindu nationalists, these fragments face the danger of cultural erasure. Consequently, a primary objective of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad is to actively promote Hinduism abroad.

The Hindu nationalist is not just confined to Indian domestic politics; the phenomenon of Hindutva politics plays a vital role in the transnational efforts to unite Indians in different countries through the diaspora network and strengthen its hold in the country where most Indians live permanently or temporarily. The Hindu nationalist movement is trying to reach out to other far-right groups to cooperate to mobilise not only Indians but also other nationalists to embrace Indian culture for security and global identity. The pan-Hindu American organisation argues that they speak for Hindu across the US, and these groups are usually ideologically linked with Hindu nationalists (KURIEN, 2004).

According to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), its branches extend across 29 organisations spanning all seven continents. The primary objective of these organisations is to educate both Indians and other nationalities about the rich heritage, culture, and customs of India. To disseminate Hindu culture, they form several associations within these countries, undertaking activities such as:

- Running Bal Vihars and Bal Gokulams: Educating children and organising children's camps.
- Youth Camps and Family Camps: Fostering community engagement across generations.
- National Conferences and Hindu Sangams: Bringing the community together for cultural exchange.
- Hindu Mandir Executive and Priest Conferences: Streamlining temple management and leadership.
- Cultural Programs: Organising regular religious festivals and cultural events through Hindu temples and community organisations.

Through these initiatives, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad actively promotes transnational Hindu nationalism, establishing a strong foundation for Hindutva beyond Indian territory. This raises a critical question: who financially supports this massive organisation abroad? According to *The Caravan* magazine, it is primarily funded by donations from the global Hindu diaspora, wealthy families, and grassroots community fundraising. Additionally, it receives support from non-profit organisations operating in countries and regions with large Hindu populations, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and the Gulf nations. Whenever there is a need to build a religious site, these organisations rely on crowdfunding and community-driven campaigns rather than government funding.

III. Discussion: VHP, Transnational Politics, and the Globalisation of Hindutva

The implications of the VHP's activities go beyond the mere presence of a religious organisation. Its expansion demonstrates an intersection of religion, nationalism, and globalisation. The VHP, through its branches have become an important actor in connecting Hindu communities across different nations. It has changed the nature of diaspora politics as the Indian diaspora is no longer viewed merely as a migrant

population. They have started playing an active role in political, social, economic, and ideological debates concerning India. The VHP has emerged as a bridge between overseas Hindus and developments in India by organising cultural events, leadership programs, and financial aid.

The VHP's activities, such as religious gatherings, youth camps, and digital platforms, have contributed to the globalisation of Hindutva. These activities help preserve Hindu culture and civilisational identity among younger generations living abroad. The VHP's activities foster a sense of belonging within the global Hindu community. However, some scholars criticise that they export discriminatory practices like the caste system and promote a particular form of Hindu nationalism within diaspora communities.

Host countries view these activities differently. Some scholars see activities as acts of cultural preservation and community service. In contrast, others fear the growing religious nationalism that can contribute to political polarisation, reinforce social divisions, or influence debates surrounding caste and minority relations within diaspora communities. However, these activities do not have a uniform impact, and their significance depends on local political contexts, immigration patterns, and the nature of community relations. Therefore, simple judgments of support or criticism of the VHP's activities are not enough to understand it. It requires an examination of how its activities are interpreted and experienced in different settings.

IV. Conclusion

The VHP uses soft power to mobilise both Indian migrants and other nationalities, bringing them into the fold of Hindutva ideology and expanding its branches globally to showcase the greatness of Hindu nationalism. Its methods of influence include forming various associations, organising cultural programs and youth camps, running Bal Vihars and Gokulams, hosting national and international conferences, establishing diaspora networks, and utilising digital communication to propagate its message and foster community engagement. This diaspora network plays a critical role in supporting the organisation's growth and flourishing, as well as in shaping its transnational identity. The nature of diaspora politics has also changed, playing a dynamic role in both politics and culture. The VHP has become a bridge between Hindus at home and abroad, bringing the two closer together and strengthening Hindu nationalism beyond Indian territory.

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