

Genocide Watch: India

Those Who Own the Past Own the Future

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When India became independent in 1947, its founders adopted a secular constitution for a pluralistic society. Gandhi and Nehru's vision of India's multi-cultural future guided the Congress Party which ruled India for most of its first four decades. Pakistan, on the other hand, was founded as a homeland for Muslims. Until the Pakistani Army's genocide in East Pakistan (Bangla Desh) in 1971, Pakistan united two territories separated by a thousand miles, based solely on their common religion. Today, there are more Muslims in India than in Pakistan – 130 million – twelve percent of India's population of over a billion. Only Indonesia has more Muslim citizens.

Mahatma Gandhi was heartbroken at the partition of India and separation of Pakistan, and at the genocidal massacres of 1947. Some of his most famous fasts were to stop the killings. But Gandhi's most virulent enemies were not separatist Muslims. They were the Hindu extremists of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (R.S.S.) (National Volunteers Association), who advocated creation of a militant Hindu state. On January 30, 1948, one of these extremists murdered Gandhi while he was on his way to prayer. At his trial, the murderer claimed that Gandhi's "consistent pandering to Muslims" had left him with no choice. He went to the gallows singing to "the Motherland, the land of the Hindus."

Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, supreme leader of the R.S.S. until 1973, expressed the tenets of Hindutva, the Hindu extremist ideology, in his manifesto "We, or Our Nationhood Defined." In it he said that Hindus could "profit" from the example of the Nazis, who had manifested "race pride at its highest" by purging Germany of the Jews. He declared Muslims and Christians in India to be "invaders."

Leaders of the R.S.S. have now taken over India. The Bharatiya Janata Party (B.J.P.) (Indian People's Party), the R.S.S. political wing, has dominated the coalition government in New Delhi since 1998. Both Atal Bihari Vajpayee, India's Prime Minister, and his Deputy and heir-apparent, L.K. Advani belong to the R.S.S.

One of the government's chief advisors, K.S. Sudarshan, the current leader of the R.S.S., said in 1999 that an epic war has begun between divine and demonic powers for world supremacy. He predicted that the ultimate victors would be Hindu nationalists. The R.S.S. now controls the biggest Indian political party (the B.J.P.), as well as schools, trade unions, cultural societies, and religious groups all over India. It runs camps of the Bajrang Dal, where young Hindu boys are taught the ideology of Hindutva and where hatred and fear of Muslims are openly advocated. These camps receive large financial contributions from Indians abroad, especially through the India Development and Relief Fund.

Sacred Centers

Most cultures create places of worship, where they venerate their gods or other sacred symbols. Places where events in the lives of sacred heroes occurred become venerated. Often churches, temples, or mosques are built over them, culturally containing them. These structures are symbolic claims to ownership of the sacred places. Perhaps the most famous such places are the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and the great Haram mosque enclosing the Kaaba in Mecca. Control of such sacred centers is a vital objective in many religions. The Christian Crusades to re-capture Jerusalem showed that men of faith will even commit genocide to re-take lost ownership over such centers. They are especially likely to do so when they feel that their own culture is under siege, as Christian Europe was from Muslims, and as Hindus feel they are from Muslim and Christian civilizations.

In 1989, the R.S.S. and B.J.P., led by L.K. Advani, started a campaign to build a Hindu temple in the north Indian town of Ayodhya over what they believe was the birthplace of the god Rama. There was only one problem. A Muslim mosque, the Babri Masjid, already occupied the site, and had since the 16th century. The R.S.S. claimed that the Mogul emperor, Babur, destroyed an ancient Hindu temple to build the mosque. He may well have done so, since Mogul emperors destroyed thousands of Hindu temples during their conquest of north India, often replacing them with mosques.

In December 1992, B.J.P. leaders organized a mob of Hindus that demolished the Babri Masjid, while shouting "Death to Muslims." At least 1,700 people, most of them Muslim, were murdered in the "riots" that followed. But these communal "riots" were actually organized genocidal massacres, that intentionally targeted victims because of their religious identity. In March 1993, Muslim terrorists retaliated with simultaneous bombings that killed over 300 civilians.

The R.S.S. controls the World Hindu Council, which has sponsored the carving of foundations and columns for a Hindu temple on the site of the Babri Masjid. Regularly, trainloads of Hindu militants descend on Ayodhya to demand that construction commence. Thus far they have been blocked by court order.

On February 27, 2002, a Muslim mob stoned a train loaded with World Hindu Council activists returning to Gujarat from Ayodhya. A train car burst into flames and 59 people, mostly women and children, burned to death. Who set the fire remains a matter of dispute. What is clear is that it became the signal for organized genocidal massacres of Gujarati Muslims that took over 1000 lives.

The independent Concerned Citizens' Tribunal, led by former Chief Justice Krishna Iyer has since investigated the mass murders. It noted that the killers used computer printouts of addresses occupied by Muslims to identify their targets. Police officers stood by while thousands of Hindus rampaged through Muslim enclaves, raping, shooting, stabbing, looting, and burning at least 124 Muslims alive. The killers clearly expressed their genocidal intent in their slogans: "Kill them all, destroy their society." "Finish off all Muslims; our people were not spared by them, don't have mercy." Police officials said that B.J.P. party officials instigated the mobs. "This was not a riot," said one senior police official. "It was a state-sponsored pogrom."

Campaigning on hate and fear, the B.J.P. won a landslide election in December 2002. The state's Chief Minister Narendra Modi, has long been an R.S.S. militant. L.K. Advani represents Gujarat in the national Parliament. Gujarat, the home state of Mohandas Gandhi, remains under the control of his enemies.

Gujarat has all of the preparatory stages for more genocidal massacres. It remains *classified* into Muslim and Hindu, *symbolized* by name, residence, and circumcision. R.S.S. extremists refer to Muslims as *dehumanized* outsiders, "invaders." The R.S.S. is highly *organized*. Gujarati society is *polarized* by religious identity. *Preparation* for more massacres has already begun. Much Muslim property has been expropriated or destroyed, and Muslims have been displaced into enclaves. A climate of impunity reigns, in which eyewitnesses to mass murders of their own families have been terrorized into recanting testimony and the killers have been acquitted.

The Archeological Survey of India has just found evidence that a structure resembling an ancient Hindu temple may lie under the ruins of the mosque in Ayodhya. Hindu nationalists say the findings prove that a Hindu temple should be built on the site. Next they want Hindu temples to replace structures in Varanasi and Mathura.

There are strong counter-forces to genocide in India, as well. Many Indians reject the Hindu fanaticism of the R.S.S. and the B.J.P. India has an independent judiciary that has so far blocked the construction of the Ayodhya temple. India's fiercely independent press fearlessly exposed the genocidal nature of the massacres. A recent study of Indian cities shows that a high degree of interaction across religious lines based on business and membership in voluntary associations correlates with a low level of inter-communal violence. It is evidence that secular inter-action prevents massacres.

International and domestic pressure on the Indian government has also borne some results. Subjected to severe domestic criticism following the Gujarat massacres, B.J.P. leaders denounced the killings, and forced

Narendra Modi to institute reforms in the Gujarati police. Behind the scenes, diplomats from many countries urged Prime Minister Vajpayee to drop his anti-Muslim, anti-Pakistani rhetoric. But there has been little direct public criticism from any foreign official of the religious intolerance of the R.S.S. and B.J.P., with the exception of ex-President Clinton and the government of Finland.

In Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat, the Muslims of the Juhapura enclave refer to the road that divides them from Hindus as the "border." It ends in a green field, called Unity Ground, where Hindus and Muslims used to play cricket together.

It was the dream of Mohandas Gandhi that the sacred centers of India would be open to people of all faiths; that the borders that divide them would end in a unity ground. May Gandhi's dream again become India's.