

## **The Aesthetics of ‘Everyday’ Violence:**

### **Narratives of Violence and Hindu Right-Wing Women**

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**Abstract :** ‘Right-wing’ movements see significant participation by women, who espouse their exclusionary and violent politics while at the same time often, contest their patriarchal spaces. Women also serve as discursive and symbolic markers that regularly form the basis of the rhetoric, ideology, actions, and policies of the right wing. However, even as women’s roles and politics within the right wing remain diverse and important, dominant feminist scholarship has had uneasy encounters with right wing women, labeling them as monolithic pawns/victims/subjects of patriarchy with limited or no agency. This paper aims to question this notion by examining the aesthetics and visual and oral imagery appropriated, (re)constructed, transformed, and mediated by right-wing women. Based on ethnographic and visual research conducted in 2013-14 with women in the cultural nationalist Hindu right-wing project in India, I argue that right-wing women use a variety of visual and oral narratives (from images to story-telling) to negotiate with spatialities and carve out an independent ‘feminine’ discourses within the larger language of the right-wing. I also argue that these narratives are ‘ritualized’ and performed in various spaces and styles and remain crucial to the ‘everyday’ politics and violence of right-wing women. The ‘everyday’ politics of right-wing women often contest, subvert, and bargain with the patriarchal goals of the larger projects, rendering narratives as sites of examining agency. Using specific examples of visual and oral narratives from the aforementioned movement, this paper articulates how

everyday violence is shaped by the aesthetics of the nation and the body and how these aesthetics shape everyday violence.

**Keywords: Everyday Violence, Hindu Nationalism, Right-Wing Women, Visual Politics, Aesthetics**

It was the third day of the annual weeklong Konkan region summer camp being held in Kalyan, a town outside Mumbai, organised by the *Durga Vahini* (the Army of Durga), a Hindu right-wing organisation for girls and women between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five. As per schedule, the hundred and fifty participants were woken up at the crack of dawn and were asked to assemble in the large playground of the school where the camp was taking place. As the girls trickled into the ground, Rochana, the 24 year old facilitator of the morning activities, screamed in Hindi,

Discipline yourselves! You have been too pampered at home by your parents and your easy lives. Your service to the nation is only something you think about on weekends and your free time. But this camp has been organised to make you strong everyday. You HAVE to get up at dawn and make yourselves stronger, otherwise how will you fight for the nation? TELL ME, HOW WILL YOU?<sup>i</sup>

Her words echoed through the vast ground only punctuated with whispers of the slightly terrified young girls. The girls arranged themselves in rows and columns, at “one-arm distance”, as instructed by Rochana. At the head of the ground was a saffron flag, still and non-fluttering on the hot and humid May morning. Next to the flag was a table covered with a saffron cloth, holding two large photo frames, a tray with supplies for ceremonial prayer

ceremonies, fresh flowers, and a printed sheet with the names of the participants. In front of the framed photographs of *Bharat Mata* (the Mother Goddess) and Sadhvi Rithambara, the founder of the organisation, Rochana ticked off names on the printed list. With every name, Rochana got louder and louder, imploring the girls to respond with the same energy and might. By the time “roll-call” finished, the chatter of the girls got louder and impatient. Finally, Rochana yelled, asking for silence. She lit a prayer lamp in front of the photographs, and asked her co-facilitator Roshni to read the morning prayer.<sup>ii</sup>

As Roshni read out the prayer in Hindi with a few words of Marathi creeping in, the girls repeated after her. Rochana, taking up the lead again, told a story of

a Hindu woman [who] was traveling in a train. And a Muslim man molested her. The Hindu woman’s husband could not help her because he was sick and feeling very weak. So no one could save her and the Muslim man took advantage of her. Do YOU want to end up in a situation like that? Don’t YOU want be strong enough to defend yourselves and defend your land and your nation against those anti-nationals who try to bring shame to it? This is a time when our Hindu land is being molested by many other people- who want to see it destroyed. So this is a time when we must rise and become strong – so we can protect our land and our nation everyday – in our streets, our neighbourhoods, on trains, on buses, on battlefields, on borders – everywhere.<sup>iii</sup>

In the Hindu right-wing project (as well as other right-wing movements), narratives (visual, textual, and oral) centered on the body and the land/nation were not only abundant but also fluid and sophisticated in their presentation and ritualization. Much like the aforementioned ethnographic account, these narratives were performed and ‘preserved’ by the movement’s

women, providing a gendered aesthetic to the 'everyday' politics and violence of right-wing women.

Right-wing women have received considerable attention from both feminist academics and activists, who often find themselves in conflict with women's participation in movements on the right as they subscribe to patriarchal ideological structures that feminism is<sup>iv</sup> trying to contest (Koonz 1987). From this, feminists have constructed the right as one homogenous, monolithic entity that stands against feminism (Pateman 1989; Gardinier 1995; Bedi 2006). This ignores the heterogeneity among movements of the right (as well as of feminist movements) and the diverse ideologies they stem from, the variety of discourses they employ, and the diversity in their engagement with the gendered self and other (Dworkin 1982; Moghadam 1994; Bacchetta and Power 2002). Moreover, these analyses ignore sites of everyday complexities, contradictions, subversions, and resistance among right-wing women (Dworkin 1982; MacKinnon 1987; Tong 1998).

In this paper, I argue that the visual and oral imagery performed, appropriated, (re) constructed, transformed, and mediated by right-wing women, thus, offer us a 'new lens' to examine the everyday politics of women in these movements. Using the reference of everyday violence and terrorism allows me to re-visit the debates and silences around agency/empowerment of 'difficult' and 'deviant' women. Everyday violence exists along the political violence continuum and includes such violences as creating and perpetuating broader discourses, campaigns, policies of exclusion, hatred and violence against the designated 'other' alongside daily rioting, aggression (verbal and physical), vandalism etc. directed at the 'other' and the spaces occupied by the 'other.' It is thus a subject that poses feminist and interdisciplinary challenges and questions (Das 2007). Studying everyday

violence and how it is reified in the aesthetic of Hindu right-wing nationalism highlights the complex daily spaces of subversion, resistance, agency, and empowerment of the women in the Hindu right-wing (Sen 2008).

Based on ethnographic and ‘visual’ fieldwork with the cultural nationalist Hindu right-wing movement in India, I examine aesthetic sources (visual and/or oral) to tease out the intricacies of right-wing women’s politics. In particular, I examine aesthetic productions around two themes – the body and the land/nation – to argue that right-wing women negotiate with these spatialities to carve independent ‘feminine’ discourses within the larger language of the right-wing. These productions are ritualized and performed in various spaces and styles and remain crucial to their ‘everyday’ politics, violence, and the many contestations and bargains they make with the larger patriarchal goals of right-wing projects. Critical analyses of these sources and an aesthetic approach to examining politics, therefore, remain crucial to rethinking right-wing women.

Bleiker (2009, 2) defines aesthetics as the “ability to step back, reflect, and see political conflict and dilemmas in new ways.” Aesthetics, therefore, not only refer to forms and practices of art – visual, textual, or oral- but also to the insights, reflective understandings, and political conversations they allow (Bleiker 2009, 2). Drawing on Sylvester (2001), he further argues that aesthetic approaches allow us to rethink knowledge claims that we have taken for granted and promote discussions and debates around previously silenced issues (Bleiker 2009, 11). In this paper, I broadly aspire to draw on these claims when examining the politics and violence by right-wing women using ‘aesthetic approaches’ to politics and international relations.

As right-wing women find themselves in the uncertain and tense ‘in-between’ spaces of embracing exclusionary, violent, and often-patriarchal ideologies while at the same

contesting 'everyday' patriarchy and prescribed gender-regimes, they (much like researchers) find aesthetic inspiration to manufacture new narratives, methods, languages, and 'alternative' paths for their politics. They turn to novel methods that combine the sensory and the emotional with the visual and the memorable to hold greater appeal and approachability, while at the same time iterate and assert their political aims and positions. Aesthetics and aesthetic/artistic endeavours, therefore, not only provide this paper with ethnographic sources, a research methodology, and an analytical framework, but they also guide the very aims, production, and mediation of the politics of my interlocutors.

### **Everyday violence and the 'aesthetic turn' in International Relations and Politics**

There is a plethora of work that unpacks the glaring assumption that women/femininity was 'intrinsically' more passive and 'peace loving' than men/masculinity (Chenoy 1996). Critiques emerging from feminist IR and politics have challenged this 'intrinsic' passivity of women, highlighting more complex forms of agency and initiatives that arise when women engage with war and/or discourses and movements that espouse violence (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; Sylvester 2010). Alongside research emerging from feminist anthropologies of violence (Scheper-Hughes 1993; Das 2007; Chatterji and Mehta 2007), they have also re-focused debates on women and political violence, bringing attention to the idea that spaces of the indeterminate and unsystematic 'everyday' can become sites where new meanings, new emotions, and new subjectivities arise (Das 2007; Parashar 2010). This critique is of particular importance when looking at women in South Asia. In context of South Asia, the gendered construction of women as peacemakers and opponents of violence and conflict holds strong (Jain 1992; Kumar 1993; Rajan 1993). Studies on 'fundamentalist' and 'extremist' violence in the regions have also asserted women's passivity and victimhood in

patriarchal nationalist movements (Qadeer and Hasan 1987; Davies 1994; Sharma 1997; Sarkar 1996 and 2001; Sarkar and Butalia 1996; Bacchetta 2004). This study seeks to undo these gendered studies by looking at the aesthetics of everyday violence of the Hindu right-wing and how it shapes women's lives and women's participation.

Everyday violence can be understood within a continuum of political violence, as several articles within this issue note (see Gentry; Sjoberg; and Zawelski and Runyan) as well as the scholarship of others who work specifically on everyday violence and terrorism (see Pain 2012 and 2014). Everyday violence can encompass actual violence that is often seen as quotidian and therefore 'minor,' like how rape and/or domestic violence have been historically minimized (Pain 2012 and 2014), but it can also include the threat of violence and how this threat shapes lives (see Pain 2014). Thus, the camp leaders mentioned in the introduction used the threat of everyday violence as a way of creating social cohesion.

By also situating political violence along this continuum, Das (2008, 295) finds that violence remains a subject that continues to pose feminist and interdisciplinary challenges and questions because of "its potential to both disrupt the ordinary and become part of the ordinary." Bringing this idea into a study of the 'everyday', Sen (2008) highlights the complex daily spaces of subversion, resistance, agency, and empowerment that emerge when women live and intersect with exclusionary and violent everyday politics. Asserting that violence and conflict lead to new forms of social norms, identity, and power for women, she asks that feminist scholars pay attention to the everyday of "women who are more at peace when at war" (Sen 2008, 182). While studies of violence in the intimate and everyday (as experienced, remembered, memorialized, and perpetrated) have engaged with several themes (as elaborated above), the bodies of literature remain largely silent on both- a critical

understanding of ‘everyday’ violence of/by women belonging to nationalist right-wing projects in South Asia as well as the intersection of aesthetic sources and practices with everyday violence. It is in these silences that I locate the questions and claims contained in this paper.

In her work on gender, subjectivity, and everyday violence, Das (2008, 284) asks

How is it that we can find references to courage, sacrifice, heroism, cowardice, despair, grief, angst, anger, suffocation, laughter, parody, longing, love, hate, disgust, horror, fear, pain, suffering, in fact, every conceivable kind of emotion or disposition as part of the experience of violence?

An answer to her question might be found in what is loosely defined as the ‘aesthetic turn’ in international relations and politics (Bleiker 2001). When violence becomes part of the ordinary and the mundane, it becomes a component of the everyday. The rhetoric used at the summer camp (mentioned in the introduction to this article) not only plays upon the threat of everyday violences—rape by the Muslim other, rejection from and shame of the husband (self)—but also highlights how violence from within the community shapes everyday life. This article will situate these everyday violences within the aesthetics of the Hindu right-wing movement.

Questions on aesthetics and politics have been addressed in various works that have engaged with visual and textual sources and practices to debate ideas on meaning and politics (Kant 1952; Gramsci 1985; Adorno 2007; Rancière 2009). In the last decade several scholars have examined aesthetic sources (from fiction to narrative to images and art to film to popular culture) in an effort to engage with larger questions on art and politics (Shapiro 1999 and



2008; Weber 2005 and 2006; Holden 2006; Bleiker 2009; Danchev 2009; Sylvester 2009; Moore 2010). Offering “alternative insights into international relations and a more open-ended level of sensibility about the political,” works emerging within the ‘aesthetic turn’ allow scholars to question the disciplinary boundaries and inherent assumptions of international relations and politics in interesting and challenging ways (Bleiker 2009, 2).

The ‘aesthetic turn’ has also influenced the study of violence and gender wherein scholars have examined not only aesthetic sources related to violence, war, and conflict, but also the unique insights and understandings they offer (Sylvester 2003; Moore 2006 and 2010; Shepherd 2008). However, there exist silences in the literature on aesthetics and politics when it comes to aesthetic sources produced, constructed, and appropriated by the female perpetrators and enablers of ‘everyday’ violence. This paper attempts to situate itself in these silences, examining the meanings and intimacies in the language, images, and aesthetics of everyday violence of the Hindu right-wing women and questioning their contribution to the debates on agency, empowerment, gender, and political violence in South Asia.

### **Locating right-wing women and their ‘everyday’ violences**

The most widespread understandings of what constitutes the ‘Right’ are derived from the study of Western European right-wing projects, which are “reactionary”, range from conservatism to fascism, and are positioned oppositional relative to movements, parties, and governments on the ‘Left’ (Bacchetta and Power 2002, 24). Drawing from Laclau (2005), this paper conceptualizes the ‘right-wing’ as a project of populism that consists of degrees of variations in the form of class, religion, race, caste, and ethnicity. Right-wing populism seeks to reinforce the dominant class over the dominated class by using tools such

as demonizing, scape-goating, apocalypticism, and conspiracies to reframe ethnic/cultural/religious/racial prejudices around political issues (such as immigration, land control, reform, healthcare etc.) (Laclau 2005). The ‘right-wing’ is then conceptualized by two distinguishing factors: first, it seeks to ‘preserve’ traditions that it deems endangered;<sup>v</sup> and second, right-wing projects all rely on some form of internal or external ‘other.’ They appropriate, construct, produce, and mobilize the ‘other’ and construct the ‘self’ relational to the ‘difference’ with this ‘other.’ These differences are based in gender, class, caste, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, community, and/or at the intersection of all these. Right-wing doctrines and practices against and regarding the ‘other’ take multiple forms (from co-existence to extermination) and are ‘explained’ by diverse discursive justifications (from cultural incompatibility to inferiorization) (see Bacchetta and Power, 2002).

As will be demonstrated later, aesthetics are important to articulating the self/other binary, exposing everyday violences. For now, it is important to clarify what the Hindu right-wing is. The Hindu right-wing movement is a project of cultural/religious nationalism that emerged in the mid 1920s as a mass anti-colonial and anti-Muslim organization that was open solely to men. Over the next few decades, the umbrella of the Hindu right-wing movement expanded from the initial organization, the RSS- *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*<sup>vi</sup> (Nationalist Volunteers Association) to a number of organizations (including the parliamentary wing, women’s organizations, and youth organizations) to form what is called *Sangh Parivar* (Family of Associations).<sup>vii</sup> The Hindu right-wing movement holds central the belief that the entire community shares a common and singular ‘national culture’ (in this case what is defined as a ‘national Hindu culture’). It seeks to revive this belief, time and again, by choosing and reasserting a clear ‘other’ (in this case the Muslim, Christian, and any ‘anti-national’ or ‘anti-Hindu’ communities/entities in the Indian subcontinent) who seeks to dissolve this national culture and hence the entire community. Gaining immense momentum

in the last three decades (and parliamentary majority in 2014) on tenets of exclusionary politics intertwined with discourses of neoliberalism and ‘economic growth and development’,<sup>viii</sup> the movement emphasizes masculinization, violence as ‘self-defense’, discipline, physical strength, self-control, and a rigid organizational structure comprising of millions of members in branches all over the world (Gowalkar 1935; Hedgewar 1985; Hansen 1995; Jafferlot 1996). Often referred to in terms of cultural/religious/ethnic nationalism, I argue that the project also lies at the intersection of various other right-wing ideologies and terminologies such as fascist, revivalist, nationalist settler colonial, religious ‘fundamentalist,’ national religious, ‘extremist,’ communally divisive, communitarian etc.

***“Where are the (Hindu) right-wing women?”<sup>ix</sup>***

Feminist interventions in the larger (and largely gender-blind) literature on projects of nationalism have examined in detail the gendered nature of “imagined” cultural and political entities such as the nation (Jayawardena 1986; Pateman 1988; Yuval-Davis 1989 and 1997; Kandiyoti 1991). In these interventions, women are theorized as the symbolic bearers of national identity and honour (individually and collectively) who have the ‘burden of responsibility’ to be biological and cultural reproducers of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997). Nationalism has thus been ascertained a result of “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope” that carefully constructs masculinities and femininities and renders women, in their capacities as mothers and wives, essential to nation-building (Enloe 1990, 44). Explicitly theorizing on right-wing nationalist projects, scholars have identified that the right-wing is built on exclusionary discourses around the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ with the self being an essentialised ethnicity/nation/religion/culture that is identified as a feminine “Mother race” which produces/contains individuals are identified by their

“masculinity” (Hansen 1995, 24). In the male-formulated foundational discourses of several right-wing movements, the feminine exists as the “bed-rock upon which inter-masculine ethnic/cultural solidarity rests” (Bacchetta 2004, 103). Discursively, the ‘feminine’ is thus equated to a ‘motherly’ entity that nurtures its brave ‘masculine’ sons. It has therefore been argued that the theme of childbirth and motherhood has been held analogous to battle in right-wing ideology (Macciocchi 1979; Rupp 1997). Other than their physical national obligation of ‘safeguarding’ demographics by birthing children, women have been described as the upholders of the purity of race, religion, ethnicity, or culture. Motherhood is therefore constructed as an honour, discursively equivalent to a man’s contribution in war (Galluci 2002).

After the establishment of the male-only Hindu right-wing project in the 1920s, Laxmibai Kelkar, the mother of two RSS veterans, who believed in “an independent women’s organization for the awakening of the women to the cause of the nation,” founded the *Samiti* in Wardha, Maharashtra (Sethi 2002, 1548). A Hindi language publication written by Kelkar (published by the Samiti in 1989), elaborates that Kelkar wanted women to learn to contribute to the ‘Hindu’ cause as mothers, wives, and daughters, who could be useful to the movement and learn from it (Kelkar 1989, lecture IV). The *Samiti*, which still remains the powerful centre of women’s organizing within the Hindu right-wing, functioned in parallel to the male organization in the early years, establishing *shakhas* (branches) to meet and plan collective action. In these early decades of the movement, the *Samiti* and its thousands of members did not have a substantial role in the movement and provided an organizational base to imbibe values and valorisations around motherhood and its role (Butalia 1995). In 1991, Sadhvi Rithambara, a leading *pracharika* (teacher/mentor) of the Hindu right-wing, established an organization called *Durga Vahini* (The Army of Durga), as a space for younger and more militant Hindu women (Sethi 2002). As one of my interlocutors, Veena

elaborated, the difference between the *Samiti* and *Durga Vahini* is that “the Samiti works in the day and the Durga Vahini works at night,” hinting that the former was the milder and ‘less hardcore and militant’ version of the latter.<sup>x</sup> The two organizations alongside some smaller overlapping ones (such as *Matru Shakti* – Power of the Mother, *Chetna Samiti*-Progress Organization, and Hindu Women’s Forum) have branches all over India (and in places with a heavy Indian Diaspora) and have millions of members (Sarkar 1999; Sethi 2002). Women’s roles have expanded since the inception of these organizations and Hindu right-wing movement regularly hold meetings, community and social events, religious events, pedagogical events (from seminars to workshops to conferences), ‘charitable’ events, protests and demonstrations, training camps (for physical and weapons training as well as for educational and employment training) and several other forms of engagement. Women also have their own organizational system and hierarchies within the movement and print their own publications (from pamphlets to books) and run their own websites and social media accounts. In all these everyday sites and spaces (virtual and physical), women of the Hindu-right embrace a discourse and practice of exclusionary and violent politics that continuously flow amid “the home and the world”<sup>xi</sup> and occupy the minutiae of their daily lives.<sup>xii</sup>

While literature on right-wing women and Hindu right-wing women in particular has covered motherhood and includes examinations of select alternative/aesthetic sources (from memoirs/letters to narratives) and work on violence and gender, there exist both theoretical and empirical gaps relevant to this article (Basu 1998; Sarkar 1999; Sethi 2002).

Theoretically, the broad literature on right-wing women is yet to question the production and distribution of gendered aesthetic sources (especially visuals) and their connection to the ways in which ‘everyday’ violence is perpetuated, sustained, and allowed to bridge the public/private divide. Empirically, while much has been written about Hindu right-wing women and their everyday politics,<sup>xiii</sup> this research remains outdated given the rise of the

right-wing in the last decade. This research also does not connect Hindu right-wing everyday violence to debates on aesthetics and politics.

### **Warrior-Goddesses and political strategists – women of the Hindu right-wing**

*“In the end, my body matters the most to my land. It holds my mind; it holds my honour and my family’s reputation. It also holds all my courage and strength. For me to serve the nation and society every single day, my body has to learn to cooperate with me. I have to teach it and train it.”*

- Pooja, a 24 year old member of the *Durga Vahini* (The Army of Durga)<sup>xiv</sup>

The aesthetics of mythological and historical female figures, their ritual print and oral recitation, and their presence in the ‘everyday’ of the Hindu right-wing woman allow the rendering of “invented traditions” that provide these women a “continuity with the historical past” (Hobsbawm 1983, 1-2). The presence of the images and narratives explored below places them in an “imagined past” (Anderson 1983) that connects them as individuals with their political contemporaries who are ‘fighting’ to instill ‘Hindu values’ and transform India into a ‘Hindu nation’ through everyday politics and political violence. The varied and flexible aesthetics of the movement also allow the adaptation of particular imagery and stories to suit contemporary ‘problems’ that are ‘plaguing’ the ‘Hindu nation’ and justify the use of violence to ‘solve’ these problems.<sup>xv</sup> As Smitha elaborates,

we see so many problems these days. Muslim boys are forcing Hindu girls into marriage by *love jihad*, Christians are converting Hindus in villages, and Muslims are attacking us- so much violence around us. When I hear about ancient Hindu women like *Jijabai*, I know that I can fight these problems and these anti-Hindu people. I too

can be violent, can be smart, and can be cunning in political ways to protect my land.<sup>xvi</sup>

***“I used to be Sita, now I am Durga”<sup>xvii</sup>***

In the early decades of the Hindu Nationalist movement, women’s bodies functioned as widespread symbolic and discursive markers of the project. Portrayed as weak, defenseless, and chaste; Hindu women’s bodies were always portrayed as those at of everyday violence with the risk of rape, violence, and ‘invasion’ by the Muslim ‘other’ (Sarkar 1999). While the Hindu man was constructed to be an effeminate man<sup>xviii</sup> that needed to toughen up and militarize himself, the Muslim man was constructed as the evil and barbaric polygamist and rapist who had uncontrollable anger and lust (Bacchetta 2004). Images such as *Figure I* were printed in right-wing publications alongside stories that emasculated Muslim men and glorified Hindu men and everyday stories of their masculinity and violence.<sup>xix</sup> Women within the movement who had by then united under a women’s organisation<sup>xx</sup> adopted these identities, portraying themselves as dutiful wives, nurturing mothers, and honourable daughters of the nation – always at risk of being violated and in need of constant protection. Drawing inspiration from the Hindu Goddess Sita (*Figure II*), the perfect wife who not only accompanies her husband into fourteen years of exile but also walks through fire (and survives) to assure her husband of her purity after having being kidnapped by the evil ‘other,’ narratives and images on themes of violence and politics that were produced by Hindu right-wing women mirrored those that were being distributed by the men (Sethi 2002). The aesthetics of Hindu nationalism work to confirm gendered identities through the threat of everyday violences—of rape and murder from the Muslim other—and become an everyday violence in themselves as the Hindu right leadership uses the threat and fear of the Muslim other to create inner-cohesion. These constructions and identities were reified through the

artwork and images that aesthetically delimit Hindu nationalism and it is a violent demarcation of the quotidian type as these images are reproduced on items such as household goods. They not just indicate a fear of what is termed everyday as noted above, but the images themselves are everyday in their aesthetic ubiquity.



*Figure I: The 'barbaric' Muslim 'other' as depicted in imagery of the Hindu right-wing<sup>xxi</sup>*



*Figure II: Sita, the defenseless and pure wife and mother<sup>xxii</sup>*

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Hindu right-wing movement underwent a resurgence tied to the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement.<sup>xxiii</sup> At the peak of this movement, clad in her fiery saffron, Sadhvi Rithambara, the young founder of the women's organization - *Durga Vahini* (The Army of Durga)<sup>xxiv</sup>, stood in front of thousands of men and women in Ayodhya and shouted, "*Khoon kharaba hona hai to ek bar ho jane do*" (If there has to be bloodshed, let it happen this time) (Jafferlot 1996, 396). Rithambara's call to violence echoed not only in the



large public ground in which she stood, but it also permeated into households and ‘domestic’ spaces across the country in two ways that clearly highlight how aesthetic materials continued to be used to speak to and about everyday violences. First, through VHS tapes, audiocassettes, and recordings of their speeches, Rithambara and other leaders of the Hindu right-wing movement seeped into everyday and intimate spaces of living and being. Their saffron-clad figures and words appeared on booklets, posters, print outs, brochures, calendars and even items of home décor, adorning the homes and walls of middle class families across India. Second, the very language and imagery of these speeches connect symbols of women’s domestic everyday lives and responsibilities with calls and allusions to everyday violences. The following words from a speech by Rithambara best illustrate this,

“Muslims, like a pinch of sugar, should sweeten a glass of milk; instead, like lemon, they sour it. What they do not realize is that a squeezed lemon is thrown away while the milk that has been curdles solidifies into *paneer* (cottage cheese). So Muslims have two choices: either to live like sugar or like wrung lemons.”  
(Basu 1995, 163)

As the movement gained strength and momentum, women, who had previously existed as symbolic victim-bodies in a male-dominated Hindu right-wing movement, transgressed the public/private divide, taking to the streets, engaging in acts of political violence, urging men to embrace violence as means of politics, while simultaneously bringing the language and aesthetic of violence into their everyday lives and homes (Kishwar 1993).

In the years that have followed this resurgence, Hindu right-wing women have constructed independent spaces within the movement to further their roles and assert and shape new identities. These spaces have included meeting centres and branches in various neighbourhoods; spaces of pedagogy and ‘humanitarian work’ such as counseling centres, schools, and charities; training and indoctrination camps for women and girls of different

ages at various levels (village/town/city, district, state/province, regional, and national), and other 'mobile' sites of gathering and community-building ranging from the homes of members to public parks to sites of protest and demonstrations. These new spaces have ushered in novel forms of aesthetic inspiration and practice, bringing to the forefront, a shift in narratives and imagery that is created, appropriated, and distributed by Hindu right-wing women. At the centre of this new aesthetic of both - a widespread narrative of fear of the 'other's' everyday violence as well as a need to perpetrate daily violence to 'control' and disable the 'other' - is the call to embody "service, self-defense and values"<sup>xxv</sup> by transforming women into *viranganas* (brave women) and *ranchandis* (warrior Goddesses) (Sethi 2002).

***"We will become our warrior Goddesses"*<sup>xxvi</sup>**

While earlier imagery of the Hindu woman's body solely focused on themes of honour and shame, the 'new' nationalist woman has been constructed to be a fierce 'warrior goddess,' who embodies a spirit of divinity and patriotism fuelled by passionate anger, aggression, and the willingness to engage in violence.<sup>xxvii</sup> As Ritu, a member of the *Durga Vahini* elaborates,

We were always told to be good wives and mothers and take inspiration from Hindu Goddesses who were honourable, but now we focus more on the fierce and angry Goddesses who teach us how to fight. When we go to meetings and camps, they have to teach us to use sticks and rifles and train us to be physically fit – we have to wake up every morning and run and become strong – so we need inspiration from warrior goddesses – we look at their pictures and sing songs about them to be inspired.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Lessons from the camps and meetings (although regular) are ritualized at an everyday level as members, either individually or along with members from the same family or locality, repeat the prayers and narratives they learn and continue their efforts to stay fit and

physically capable. These lessons also take on many other 'everyday' forms which include, daily efforts to monitor the members and activities of the Muslim community, not employ or provide any business to Muslims (from avoiding their shops to not hailing taxis or rickshaws with Muslim drivers), displaying aggressive behavior towards anyone deemed to be an 'other', spending hours posting these narratives online and 'trolling' individuals who are deemed 'anti-Hindu', using gatherings and exercises to display strength and 'preparedness' in public spaces such as parks and gardens etc.

The two warrior Goddesses that are invoked through imagery and stories are the Hindu deities Durga and Kali. Durga (Figure III) represented as armed and perched on a lion or tiger<sup>xxix</sup> is represented as one that was "created from the energies of the Gods."<sup>xxx</sup> As Pooja elaborates, "She is powerful and exists in a state of self-sufficiency and independence. She can kill demons easily but is also compassionate with a sense of justice."<sup>xxxi</sup> Kali, in her representation in Hindu right-wing's visual and oral narratives has four-hands and holds a sword, a trident, a severed human head, and a skull, while wearing a necklace made of 108 skulls around her neck. (Figure IV) Although Kali is represented as fearless and frightening, she is also 'given' a maternal side as any stories and even images of her violence are immediately followed by/juxtaposed with those depicting her as breastfeeding and calming a crying child while demon-blood still dripped from her hands.<sup>xxxii</sup> (Figure IV)



Figure III: The 'warrior goddess' Durga<sup>xxxiii</sup>



Figure IV: The 'warrior goddess' Kali as a fierce warrior and as a mother<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The imagery and narratives of these 'fierce' goddesses are crucial to spaces of everyday politics and violence of Hindu right-wing women for a number of reasons. First, they allow women of all backgrounds to embody the project's violent discourse in the everyday. As Rachna, a long-time member asserts, "Those *mullahs* [Muslims] rape us and kill us so why

don't we teach them a lesson. Kali and Durga did not allow *rakshasas* (demons) to live, so why should we?"<sup>xxxv</sup> Second, they allow the women to not only enjoy and value the various activities/camps/meetings they attend regularly but also justify the very need for a language of violence to patriarchal family members and even budget and financial committees of the larger project. As Veena, who is one of the organizers of the Konkan regional camp, elaborates, "Our goddesses did not fight with the evil without training and support. So why should we not train?"<sup>xxxvi</sup> Third, the imagery of violence allows women to connect their bodies and bodily capabilities to action on the streets and the very imagination of a 'Hindu' nation. This can be better explained by exploring the figure of *Ashthabhujā*, an eight-armed Goddess that was created by the women themselves (Figure V). Each arm of *Ashthabhujā* represents a different virtue (ranging from patience to aggression to intellect to science) that allows her to take on various personal and political forms in different spatialities. As Jaya elaborates "we feel that *Ashthabhujā* has many different and yet all important characteristics. So, women from different backgrounds, different education systems and levels, and even different temperaments can still identify with one or more of her virtues. And then when they hear stories about her actions, her heroism, and her commitment to the Hindu nation, they can each feel like they are her, no matter how different they might be."<sup>xxxvii</sup> Jaya's elaboration was visible during my fieldwork as I encountered women from a variety of locations and familial settings who engaged in different daily activities based on their abilities and accessibilities – with women with higher education taking on the responsibilities of writing furious articles about the 'other', women who were exceptionally fit teaching martial arts to younger members, women with 'good communication skills' taking on public and speaking roles etc.- all aiming to further the cause. Fourth, these images and narratives can easily permeate into the 'domestic' and the 'popular' and their occurrence on household objects (from clocks to t-shirts) and in stories (from bedtime stories and lullabies to religious

education) allows Hindu right-wing women to bridge the divide between the personal and the political and the spectacular and the everyday.



*Figure V: Ashthabhuja, the eight-armed goddess*<sup>xxxviii</sup>

***“We are our Motherland”***<sup>xxxix</sup>

Before the beginning of an event or meeting at the community branches as well as the training camps, conveners lead the session with a prayer. The participants usually stand together and pray, facing a saffron flag placed next to a framed image of the *Bharat Mata* (the Mother Goddess).<sup>xi</sup> She is represented in a female form (perched on a lion or tiger), displayed cartographically with her body covering the entire Indian subcontinent (*Figure VI*). The images of *Bharat Mata* have been crucial to several social movements in the history of India.<sup>xli</sup> However, Hindu right-wing women have adopted her imagery to construct the crucial bridge between their bodies and the ‘Hindu’ land/nation. This imagery, its worship in prayer ceremonies and its proliferation reminds the right-wing woman that her body is akin to the nation. Victimization of her body by the ‘other’ is painful and humiliating for the entire nation and perhaps, most importantly, embodying a strong, self-defensive, and aggressive

warrior spirit will not only protect her honour but will also lead to a stronger and safer Hindu nation. As Sumedha elaborates, “we are all *Bharat Matas* and we are all also the daughters of *Bharat Mata*. Separately and together, we represent her. And we need to keep reminding ourselves of our goals by worshipping her and admiring her every day.”<sup>xlii</sup>

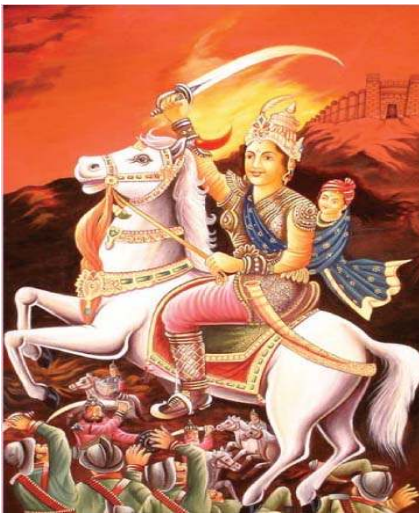


Figure VI: *Bharat Mata, the mother goddess*<sup>xliii</sup>

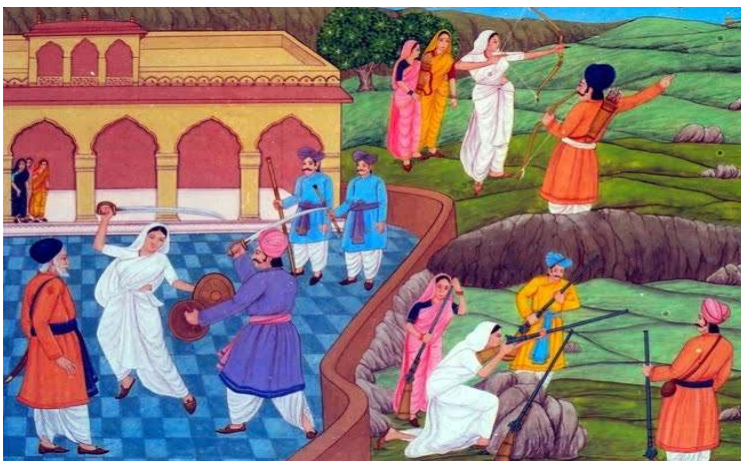
While the link between the aesthetics of the body and the aesthetics of the nation is best understood by examining the image of the *Bharat Mata*, other visual, textual and oral narratives of Hindu right-wing women strengthen this connection. These narratives also push the aesthetic into the ‘practical’, offering ‘concrete’ and ‘applicative’ ways of living everyday lives that “make a difference” within a discourse of violence. Imagery and stories associated with three ‘historical’ figures, *Bharat Mata*, *Rani Laxmibai*, and *Jijabai*, are repeated and ritualized to allow women to embrace these values for the betterment of the nation.

*Rani Laxmibai* (the Queen of Jhansi)<sup>xliv</sup>, depicted as perched on a horse with a sword in her hand and her baby strapped on her back (*Figure VII*) represents enlightened motherhood.

*Devi Holkar*<sup>xlv</sup>, portrayed in paintings as widow clad in white, leading the kingdom with purity and religion while training herself in the use of weapons, represents ideal leadership and dutiful efficiency as she remains “an ideal daughter, daughter-in-law, mother, as well as stateswoman.” (*Figure VIII*)



*Figure VII: Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi*<sup>xlvi</sup>



*Figure VIII: A painting depicting Devi Holkar*<sup>xlvii</sup>



Finally, *Jijabai* (the mother of Maratha ruler Shivaji)<sup>xlvi</sup>, the most revered historical figure, is always depicted as a strategic political thinker and warrior in her images, representing an amalgamation of all these values. As the mother who not only raised a warrior son but was the source of his physical and intellectual strength and his political strategy, her images always depict her as the larger than life figure looming over her soon. Her right arm is always outstretched, with her index finger pointing outwards, as she directs him to look in the direction of the Hindu land and nation. Her son Shivaji, folds his hands, as a symbol of respect to mark her superiority and status, and her body, confident and empowering not only directs him to the Hindu land but also represents it (*Figure IX*). As many of my interlocutors elaborated, the figures of these women inculcated an idea that in addition to being mothers/wives who fulfilled their daily domestic responsibilities, the ‘Hindu’ woman was also a brave and heroic thinker and warrior that had to think of the nation constantly and engage in strategic everyday violences (from denying a Muslim man a job in their locality to vandalizing ‘extremist’ mosques) that would minimize the threat from the ‘other’ and protect the nation’s subjects.



*Figure IX: Depictions of Jijabai and her son, Shivaji*<sup>xlvi</sup>

### ***Gendering the Hindu Nation and its imagery***

The following interaction brings together the arguments I have attempted to make in this paper. In March 2014, I attended a four-day annual meeting of a new male Hindu right-wing organisation. Calling itself the Hindu Defense League (HDL), the organization's leadership team comprised of about twenty-five young men from different parts of India. Passionate about the 'Hindu' cause, with several of them involved in other Hindu right-wing organisations, these educated middle-class (lower and upper) men had met each other on Twitter and had travelled from around the country to put together a manifesto and an action plan for the nascent organisation.<sup>i</sup> The four-day meeting was conducted in a bungalow in Northwest Delhi, where planning meetings were interspersed with lectures from senior male members, debates, protests and pre-election campaigning, disjointed discussions, cigarette and food breaks, and long informal talks and arguments. Women of the Hindu right-wing were mentioned several times during this 'meeting' and the framing of discussions involving these mentions was particularly telling in various ways.<sup>ii</sup>

First, listening to the narratives of the assembled men and the kind of stories and imageries they invoked and evoked made it quite clear that women in the movement had transformed the language of the right to suit their needs, causes, and inspirations. Male heroes had been replaced by female ones, masculine histories had been appropriated to suit the requirements of the women's groups, a masculine language had been adapted to create a new 'feminine' language, and the aesthetics of the male end of the movement had been transformed into one that would be relevant to women of the 'Hindu' nation (as diverse as that group might be).<sup>lii</sup>

Second, the men, who were not strangers to the Hindu right-wing (and had grown up within the movement), acknowledged openly that "the times have changed and women are a core

part of the movement and in many ways were more valuable than men as they [women] have the time and space to carry out the everyday politicization of the nation and the home and the will to be the agents of change through violence and politics.”<sup>liii</sup> Third, the men constantly referred to the women’s groups’ aesthetics (including several mentioned in this paper) as effective means of garnering more support from younger girls and women for the larger ‘Hindu’ cause. Last and fourth, while a small fraction of these men were dismissive of women (and their potential), most of them were keen to begin a woman’s wing of HDL and honestly afraid and curious of how to bring that about.<sup>liv</sup> My interaction with this male Hindu right-wing organization reaffirmed the larger aims of this paper. Right-wing movements, such as Hindu nationalism, have a significant number of women members and leaders who further the exclusionary and violent politics of the larger project in the everyday.

### **Re-thinking Right-Wing Women: Everyday Violence, Aesthetics, and Agency**

‘Agency,’ a conscious and independent ability to act out of choice, has been a critical site for feminist theorizing around both right-wing women and violent women (Gardiner, 1995; McNay, 2000; Madhok, Philips, & Wilson, 2013). Dominant theorizations around the agency and empowerment of violent right-wing women have been twofold. First, there is scholarship that has depicted right-wing women as ‘subjects/victims/pawns’ of right-wing men that either live in ‘false consciousness’ or adhere to the right-wing cause because its ideas are already integral to their intersectional social classification (Dworkin 1982; Koonz 1986; Jeffery and Basu 1998; Sarkar and Butalia 1995; Basu 1995; Blee 1991). Second, there is scholarship that asserts that right-wing women have ‘quasi/partial/limited’ agency (Bacchetta and Power, 2002). However, both these theorizations remain inadequate examining the “lives of women whose desires are shaped by non-liberal positions” (Mahmood 2001, 203). They also do not

allow for examining agency of women who consciously construct and constitute themselves between multiple domains of religion, violence, nationalism, and feminism (Karam 2002).

Recent theorizations on right-wing women's agency have departed from the binary of agency/coercion from the aforementioned ones and have argued that scholarship must distinguish between "agentic similitude" and "agentic differentialist" (Bacchetta 2002, 44).

The former considers right-wing agency and feminist agency to be similar with modalities of right-wing activism 'resembling' feminist activism<sup>lv</sup> (Karam 2002). The latter understands right-wing women's agency as different from feminist agency as right-wing women's political projects and objectives differ from feminists. Complicating this further, there has also been a discussion on understanding right-wing women's agency as "gender-supplemental agency" wherein a "gender-comparative" approach to the right illustrates that right-wing women, while individually lacking in 'agency;' "add" or "substitute" to the agency of right-wing men (Bacchetta 2002, 45). While this is an interesting manner of examining agency, it assumes that all right-wing organizations are entirely sex-segregated. Even in the case of sex-segregated organizations, while a "gender-comparative" approach might take into account public/political activities, how does it account for the intersection of the political with the personal? How does it (and other theorizations) account for the subversions, transgressions, and intricacies of right-wing women and their everyday politics and violence? Most importantly, how do these theorizations take the debates on agency and empowerment from the question of 'if they have agency' to 'what does agency do?'

It is these unanswered questions that allow me to put forth the claim that debates on agency and coercion of right-wing women can be furthered by examining the aesthetics of everyday violence that are espoused and propagated by these women. Following the ethnographic narratives that I elaborated on in the previous section, I highlight four points of interest that challenge the way we think about right-wing women, their everyday violence (that in this

case includes and is not limited to embracing a language and politics of hatred and exclusion; ‘watching’ and vandalising the neighborhoods and spaces occupied by the ‘other’; verbally and physically accosting and attacking the ‘other’; inciting, initiating, supporting, and perpetuating riots and communal violence; and excluding individuals from the communities of the ‘other’ from business, education, and community ventures), aesthetics, and agency.

First, the aesthetics of everyday violence by Hindu right-wing women are tied to a larger political economy of narratives and narrative making. Women are integral to this economy and the women I interacted with recognize this aspect of their aesthetic practices. The stories and texts recited and performed by women are published as books, pamphlets, magazines, brochures, and newsletters by the in-house Hindu right-wing printing presses. Imagery (from goddesses to historical figures to leaders of the movement) is converted into everyday objects (from busts and sculptures to calendars, pins, bags, t-shirts, pens, notebooks, clocks etc.) that are sold at Hindu right-wing stores across the country.<sup>lvi</sup> For women, who typically remain in-charge of ‘decorating’ their homes as well as the community centres, acquiring these objects and displaying them in central ways is not only an assertion of their political movement but also pertinent to their social and cultural capital and standing. Thus, decisions regarding these objects and aesthetics are decisions of agency, bargaining, and power.

Second, while aesthetics of everyday violence are created and taught/learned in certain ways, women leaders of the movement ritualize these practices, forms, and sources, rendering them as absolutely vital to daily life and belonging. This ritualization is thus not a mere coincidence but a strategy that requires careful planning and bargaining of performance, practice, and placement of the aesthetics of violence. Third, by constructing these aesthetics of everyday violence, women in the Hindu right-wing have developed an independent ‘feminine’ discourse that stands apart from the male dominated discourse of the movement in

several ways (Bacchetta 2004). Thus, women assert their unique identity and role in the movement as well as their importance as bearers of everyday politics in the larger project.

Last and final, the aesthetics of everyday violence of the Hindu right-wing women encompass two main themes- the body and the land/nation. Drawing on Lefebvre (1974, 1991) and Soja (1996), I consider the body and the land/nation to be spatialities or socially produced spaces that hold social relations, subjectivities, and power hierarchies. The body (of the right-wing woman), I argue, takes on several 'forms' (from maternalized ones to militarized ones) in the aesthetics of violence, both, as a result of and to influence/alter social relations. For instance, as elaborated, women in the Hindu right-wing appropriate and construct themselves as fierce goddesses and historically 'brave' female – rulers. These constructions are then materialized by the women as they confront the 'other' and partake in activism and violence, which in turn affects their social relations within the home. The nation (as imagined by right-wing women), I argue, holds transformations by the political and social mobilization of the body and is rendered a gendered geopolitical space through the aesthetics of everyday violence. Bringing in postmodernist feminist perspectives, I take this further, and assert that aesthetically produced spatialities of the body and the nation cross binaries and dichotomies and do not remain passive, inert, abstract, or mere backdrops onto which social actors and relations inscribe themselves (Massey 1994; Bondi 1990 and 1993). They play active roles as producers, signifiers, and the outcomes and effects of power relations and influence power relations between right-wing women and the designated 'other' as well as between right-wing women and right-wing men within the same larger project. Thus, I assert that the aesthetics of everyday violence encompass spatialities of the body and the nation and provide right-wing women with an alternate gendered "Third Space" that embodies the real and imagined. This space not only allows the women to negotiate with the 'other' but also allows them to put forth their own agendas and politics within the larger

patriarchal right-wing project, directing their agency and forms of empowerment (Soja 1996, 70).

## **Conclusion**

The examination of the aesthetics of Hindu right-wing women's everyday politics and violence uncovers a plethora of textual and visual narratives and imagery that is propagated through practices and objects and is ritualized and performed in various spaces. By linking debates between 'everyday' violence and aesthetics, this paper has examined how violence is accepted, nurtured, and furthered through imagery and narratives that are appropriated, constructed, and mediated by right-wing women. The aesthetics of right-wing women's political mobilizations and the violence they engender not only allow women to bridge the divides of public/private, home/world, and personal/political but also allow women to carve out independent 'feminine' discourses and spatialities within the larger movement. As right-wing women use these sites and spaces of everyday politics and violence as means of contestation, subversion, and bargaining with the patriarchal goals of the project as well as means of mobilization and empowerment, the aesthetics of the intimate yet violent become crucial to debates on agency and coercion of women in such projects. This paper has attempted to touch upon these debates by highlighting the aesthetics of everyday violence associated with one right-wing movement and its women. By doing so, it hopes to begin a larger discussion on gender and everyday violence as well as on the aesthetics of everyday politics and political violence.

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<sup>i</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, May 10, 2015

<sup>ii</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, May 10, 2015

<sup>iii</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, May 10, 2015

<sup>iv</sup> I use the singular ‘feminism’ instead of the more-inclusive plural ‘feminisms’ to emphasize the narrowness of a feminist idea that excludes ‘difficult’ women.

<sup>v</sup> Traditions here are defined as invented, fluid, and dynamic entities that can be contested and challenged (Hobsbawm 1983). They take on a variety of meanings within different movements, at various times within a movement, and within men and women’s factions of the same movement.

<sup>vi</sup> See the website for the RSS for more- [www.rss.org](http://www.rss.org)

<sup>vii</sup> The word *parivar* (family) is not only used to imply that all these organizations are a part of the same larger project, but is also used because the Hindu right-wing considers the family to be the primary societal unit that is responsible for imparting good ‘Hindu’ values into individuals.

<sup>viii</sup> The parliamentary organization/political party affiliated to the Hindu right-wing – the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) - forms the current government of India (with Narendra Modi as Prime Minister). The party’s campaigns and policy line has been drenched in a discourse of ‘growth’ and ‘development’.

<sup>ix</sup> I attribute the phrasing of this question to Cynthia Enloe (1989) and her pertinent question - Where are the Women?

<sup>x</sup> Interview with Veena Tambde, Thane, India, May 1, 2014

<sup>xi</sup> I attribute this phrase to Tagore’s influential novel, *The Home and the World* (1919).

<sup>xii</sup> Fieldnotes, October and November, 2013



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<sup>xiii</sup> Especially worth mentioning is Menon's (2010) seminal work on the subject.

<sup>xiv</sup> Interview with Pooja, New Delhi, India, February 21, 2014

<sup>xv</sup> Fieldnotes, February 27, 2014, New Delhi, India

<sup>xvi</sup> Interview, Smitha Hombali, April 28, 2014, Mumbai, India

<sup>xvii</sup> Interview with Anita Matai, Mumbai, India, April 12, 2014

<sup>xviii</sup> The Hindu man in colonial India was seen as one castrated and feminized by both – the British Empire as well as Gandhi's idea of non-violence as resistance.

<sup>xix</sup> For instance, stories of Muslim women leaving their Muslim husbands for Hindu men were often repeated as were stories of Hindu men winning wrestling competitions and fights against Muslim and British men.

<sup>xx</sup> The *Samiti* (as elaborated earlier)

<sup>xxi</sup> Photograph taken by author on October 18, 2013 of a pamphlet circulated by Vishwa Hindu Parishad, New Delhi.

<sup>xxii</sup> Photograph taken by author on December 15, 2013 of a booklet circulated by the *Samiti* at a Hindu Nationalist event in Dadar, Mumbai, India.

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Ram Janmabhoomi* translates to the 'Birthplace of Lord Rama'. The exact location of Rama's birth is not stated with any specific accuracy by the Hindu texts, but the term popularly refers to a tract of land in the city of Ayodhya in the Northern Province of Uttar Pradesh in India. From 1528-1992 this land was the site of the Babri Mosque, and thus the Hindu Right launched a movement in 1984 to reclaim this land and build a temple for Lord Rama on it. This movement was called the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. The movement strengthened in the late 1980s and early 1990s and ultimately resulted in the destruction of the mosque on December 6, 1992.

<sup>xxiv</sup> The *Durga Vahini* was found during this turbulent time in the year 1991.

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- <sup>xxv</sup> Pamphlet of the *Durga Vahini* - Procured in October 2013, Mumbai, India.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Interview with Sanjana Chowdary, February 18, 2014, New Delhi, India
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Fieldnotes, March 4, 2014, New Delhi, India
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Interview with Ritu K., March 2014, Pune, India
- <sup>xxix</sup> Fieldnotes, March 4, 2014, April 12, 2014, June 30, 2014, Mumbai, Delhi, Pune, India
- <sup>xxx</sup> Interview with Pooja and Priya Gore, April 11, 2014, Pune, India
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Interview with Pooja and Priya Gore, April 11, 2014, Pune, India
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Fieldnotes, March 4, 2014, April 12, 2014, June 30, 2014, Mumbai, Delhi, Pune, India
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Photograph taken by author on May 1, 2014, of the cover page of a book circulated by the *Durga Vahini - Konkan Province, Durga Vahini History*, Pune: VHP Press
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Photograph taken by author on February 26, 2014 of a calendar found in the home of a *Durga Vahini* member
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Interview with Rachna Kumar, January 23, 2014, New Delhi, India
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Interview with Veena Tambde, November 25, 2014, Mumbai, India
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Interview with Jaya Kanti, February 16, 2014, New Delhi, India
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Photograph taken by author on December 10, 2012 of a pamphlet produced by the *Samiti* and distributed at weekly meetings.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Interview with Rochana B., May 15, 2014, Kalyan, India
- <sup>xl</sup> Fieldnotes – May 15, 2014, Kalyan and Mumbai, India
- <sup>xli</sup> For more see Thapar (1993).
- <sup>xlii</sup> Interview with Sumedha G., December 7, 2013, Mumbai, India
- <sup>xliii</sup> Photograph taken by author (on July 23, 2015) of a pin (for bags/clothes) procured from the Hindu right-wing Suruchi Prakashan shop in Jhandewala, New Delhi, India in February 2014.

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<sup>xliv</sup> The Queen of Jhansi, Laxmibai, was one of the leading figures of the Indian Rebellion of 1857, and a symbol of resistance to British rule in India. It is said that she fought the battle with her child strapped to her back. This has further popularized her as a symbol in Hindutva discourse.

<sup>xlv</sup> Devi Holkar, also known as the *Philosopher Queen* was a Holkar dynasty Queen of the Malwa kingdom, India.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Photograph taken by author (on July 23, 2015) of the cover page of Ramaprasad, N. (2011). *Jhansi Lakshmi Bai*. Bangalore: Rashtrotthana Sahitya

<sup>xlvii</sup> Photograph taken by author (in November 2013) of a painting in the Mumbai branch of the *Durga Vahini*.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Shivaji, a revered figure in Hindutva ideology, led a resistance to free the Maratha nation from Sultanate of Bijapur, and establish self-rule ("*Hindavi Swarajya*"). He created an independent Maratha kingdom with Raigad as its capital, and fought against the ('Muslim') Mughals to defend his kingdom successfully. He was crowned as *Chhatrapati* - the Sovereign- of the Maratha Kingdom in 1674 and is an immensely popular figure in Hindu nationalist discourse.

<sup>xlix</sup> Photograph taken by author (on July 23, 2015) of pamphlet called *Veer Matayen* (Brave Mothers) produced and distributed by the Samiti.

<sup>l</sup> Fieldnotes, March 5 2014, New Delhi, India

<sup>li</sup> Fieldnotes, March 5 2014, New Delhi, India

<sup>lii</sup> Fieldnotes, March 5 2014, New Delhi, India

<sup>liii</sup> Interview with Deepak Patel, 1 March 2014, New Delhi, India

<sup>liv</sup> Fieldnotes, March 5 2014, New Delhi, India

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<sup>iv</sup> For more see Basu (1995 and 1998)

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