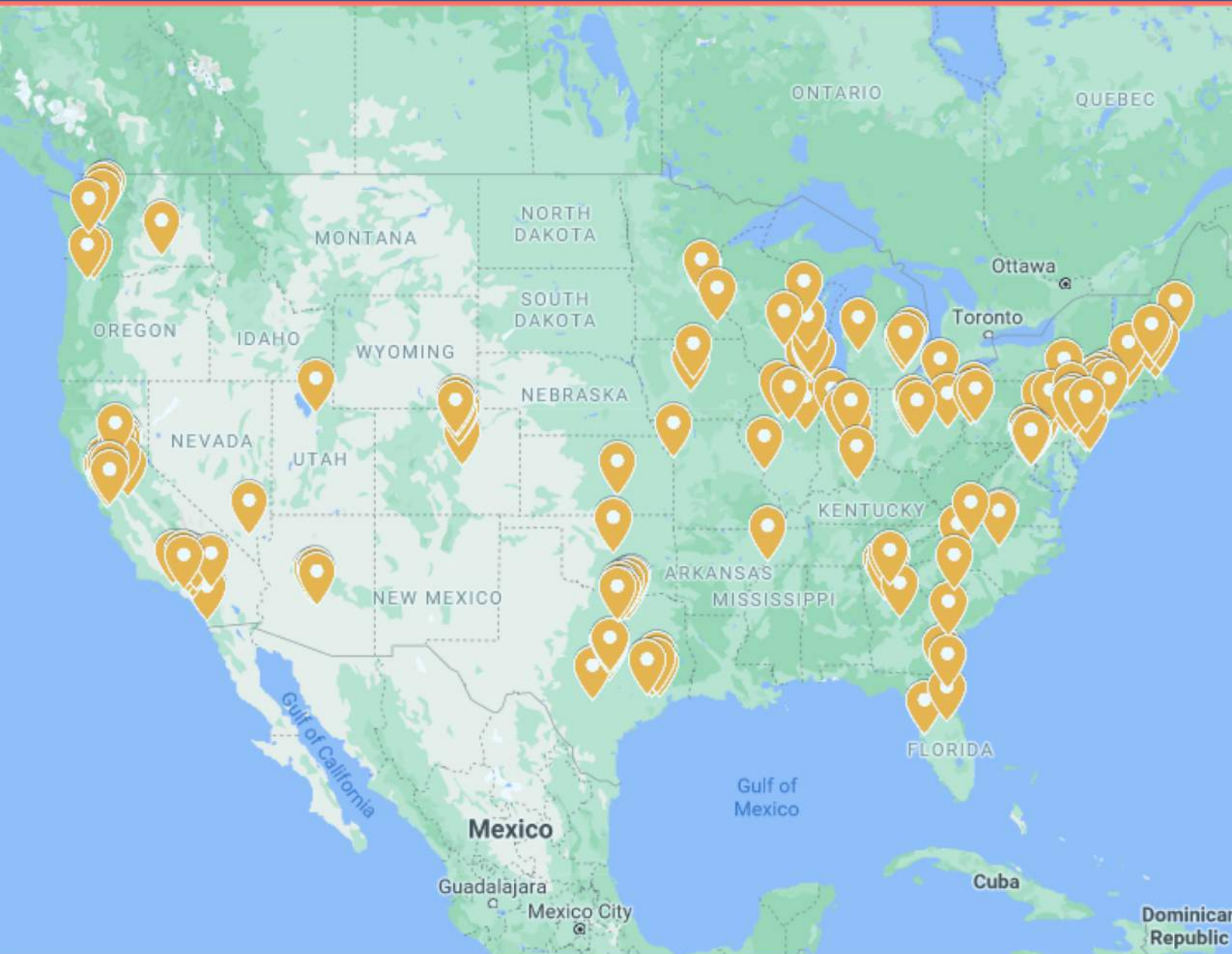


# Hindu Nationalist Influence in the United States, 2014-2021

## *The Infrastructure of Hindutva Mobilizing*



Jasa Macher

May 2022

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May 2022

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*Released via sacw.net*

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## Executive Summary

As targeted communities and allies decried the Indian Government's revocation of Kashmir's autonomy<sup>1</sup> and Nuremberg-like citizenship laws in India,<sup>2</sup> a solidarity rally in New York in 2019 protested Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the United Nations.<sup>3</sup> At the protest, it was noted that Hindutva's treatment of Muslims in India was inspired in part by Nazism's treatment of Jews<sup>4</sup>—a statement supported by contemporaneous records and scholarly research.<sup>5, 6</sup> Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism, is like white nationalism<sup>7, 8</sup> in that it believes that a single social group should have political dominance in a nation-state: in this case, Hindu nationalists dream of an upper-caste, Hindus-first India.<sup>9</sup> According to scholars and news reportage, Hindutva ideology lives strongly in India<sup>10</sup> and its diaspora, including in the United States.<sup>11</sup> It is alive in "Hindu grievance" narratives that demonize Muslims,<sup>12</sup> Christians,<sup>13</sup> and other targeted communities, and provides justifications for caste-<sup>14</sup> and gender-based forms of control and violence against Dalits<sup>15</sup> and other caste-oppressed groups.<sup>16</sup>

These fascism-inspired groups, called the Sangh Parivar (Sangh family, or the Sangh), operate a vast social ecosystem throughout India. Human rights groups, scholars, and journalists have reported on the Sangh's connections to vigilante "violence, intimidation and the enforcement of morality and majoritarian 'standards,'"<sup>17</sup> sometimes in collusion with police.<sup>18, 19</sup> The Sangh's vision "combines cultural nationalism and political strategies aiming at flagrant social dominance by the upper castes, rapid economic development, cultural conservatism, intensified misogyny, and a firm grip on the instruments of state power."<sup>20</sup> Hindu nationalists in India have become mainstreamed through winning elections and gaining control of the national and several state-level governments.<sup>21</sup> Observers have noted that, in coordination with the Sangh's efforts to win elections in the last several decades, Hindutva groups have consolidated power through waging hate campaigns against minorities and critics,<sup>22, 23, 24</sup> cultivating its own mythologized history-based information ecosystem,<sup>25</sup> and establishing education and development projects in poor and rural areas,<sup>26, 27</sup> coming to exert social influence in communities marginalized by capitalism and where the Indian government "has retreated from critical domains such as public education and public health."<sup>28</sup>

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*"The vision... held by [Sangh Parivar] combines cultural nationalism and political strategies aiming at flagrant social dominance by the upper castes, rapid economic development, cultural conservatism, intensified misogyny, and a firm grip on the instruments of state power... The contemporary ascendance of Hindu nationalist dominance to establish a majoritarian state in India [witnessed] the triumph of the BJP in 2014. This new dispensation combined four features: populism, nationalism, authoritarianism, and majoritarianism."*

*~Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism is Changing India  
(Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot, 2019)<sup>29</sup>*

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Those social and educational projects, part of the Sangh's apparatus of influence in India, are funded and supported in large part by communities in diaspora, according to news reporting and tax records. On the U.S. side, that apparatus combines diasporic Sangh-implemented family and youth programs, cultural events, temple-related conferences, charitable funders of education and health projects, and political pressure groups that appear to provide social and political support to Hindutva. Sangh groups in the diaspora are important to the enterprise because these entities operate as influence groups on the more powerful middle-class and wealthy communities, disseminating and amplifying shared supremacist worldviews that appear to result in greater financial and social support for Sangh groups. Sangh groups are part of the landscape of a Hindu

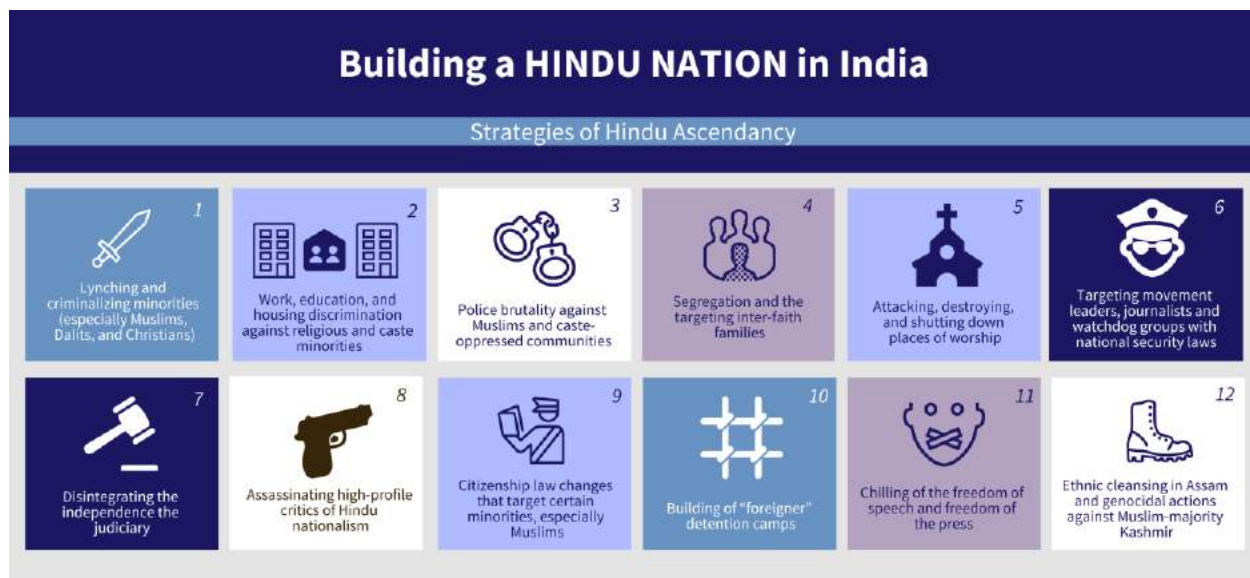


ascendent India, in which the following actions, as reported by news media, civil society groups, and human rights bodies, can be recognized from other nationalist and authoritarian movements across the world and through history:

- ❖ Lynching and criminalizing minorities (especially Muslims, Dalits, and Christians);<sup>30</sup>
- ❖ Work, education, and housing discrimination against religious and caste minorities;<sup>31, 32</sup>
- ❖ Police brutality against Muslims and caste-oppressed communities;<sup>33</sup>
- ❖ Religion- and caste-based segregation and the targeting inter-faith families;<sup>34</sup>
- ❖ Attacking, destroying, and shutting down non-Hindu places of worship;<sup>35</sup>
- ❖ Targeting movement leaders, journalists, and watchdog groups;<sup>36</sup>
- ❖ Disintegrating the independence of the judiciary;<sup>37</sup>
- ❖ Assassinating high-profile critics of Hindu nationalism;<sup>38</sup>
- ❖ Citizenship law changes that target certain minorities, especially Muslims;<sup>39, 40</sup>
- ❖ Building “foreigner” detention camps;<sup>41</sup>
- ❖ Chilling of the freedom of speech and freedom of the press (India ranked 142 out of 180 on the 2020 World Press Freedom Index);<sup>42</sup>
- ❖ Forms of ethnic cleansing in Assam<sup>43, 44</sup> and genocidal<sup>45</sup> actions against Muslim-majority Kashmir.<sup>46, 47</sup>

Though the U.S. State Department<sup>48</sup> and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom<sup>49</sup> and numerous Indian and international human rights groups, scholars, and journalists have reported on the Sangh Parivar’s violent actions at least since the late 1990s,<sup>50, 51</sup> in-depth engagement with Hindu nationalism and criticism of the Sangh gained more traction in the diaspora and international news media only in recent years. *The New York Times* reported in 2019 that the “consensus among Indian activists and liberal political analysts is that their society, under Mr. Modi, has become more toxically divided between Hindus and Muslims, between upper and lower castes, between men and women,” highlighting Hindu nationalism as the major causal factor.<sup>52</sup>

Figure 1. Building a Hindu Nation in India



In 2014, when Modi first became Prime Minister, *Hindu Nationalism in the United States: A Report on Nonprofit Groups*<sup>53</sup> (also by the author of this report<sup>54</sup>) was released. The report built on the work of other pluralism researchers and groups that sought to encourage public scrutiny on the U.S.-based Sangh Parivar, including the Sabrang & South Asia Citizens Web,<sup>55</sup> Campaign to Stop Funding Hate,<sup>56</sup> and Coalition Against Genocide.<sup>57, 58</sup> This report is a continuation of that thread of investigation, aided by the reporting of a growing group of scholars, journalists, and activists.

In India, the major Sangh Parivar groups include: **Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)**, **Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)**, **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**, and the **Bajrang Dal**. Per news reporting, the RSS's official membership possibly numbers over 16 million across India as of 2019,<sup>59</sup> and there is an enormous number of Sangh affiliates, as well as Hindu nationalist groups not affiliated with the Sangh,<sup>60</sup> spread throughout India and its diaspora. This report focuses only on selected diasporic chapters of the Sangh, on the work believed to be establishing and fortifying the Sangh's stature to the diaspora and U.S. bodies. News reporting and civil society groups have noted that in the United States, as in India, Sangh-affiliated groups have been developing and experimenting with their playbook of influence, conducting their work in varying social sectors under different names, using different strategies to coordinate persons in the diaspora with India-based actors toward the shared objective of a Hindu-dominated India, which is the subject of this report.

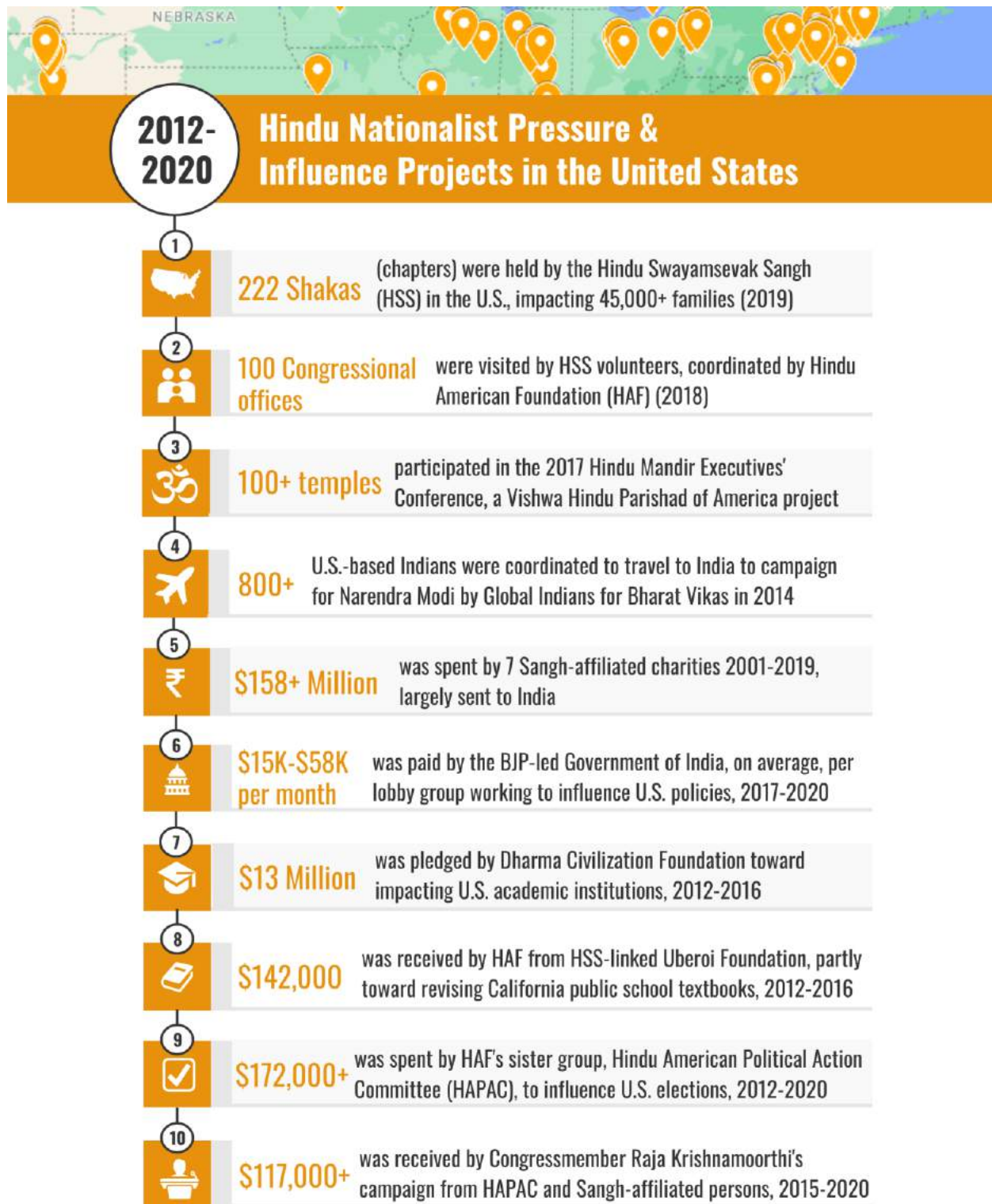
Using data mining of tax records and government filings, public statements, websites, and news reporting, this report seeks to map portions of the Hindu nationalist ecosystem in the United States. It **presents evidence of the Sangh affiliation of selected groups and individuals, funding flows between different groups, and possible strategies and areas of influence in U.S. social, educational, and political institutions from 2014 to 2021**, including Hindu nationalist efforts to a) cast Sangh groups as cultural gatekeepers and representatives of Hindus, b) fund Sangh groups in India, c) insert support for Hindutva histories into U.S. academic institutions and textbooks, d) shift U.S. domestic and foreign policy pertaining to South Asia, e) finance Sangh-friendly politicians, and f) target their critics.

Preliminary findings on the Sangh's pressure and influence work are summarized in Figure 2. This report also highlights some administrative and financial irregularities in the paperwork of certain Sangh-affiliated groups, toward enabling further investigations to determine if there is any misconduct, and to better understand how such groups function.

### *Findings*

1. As of 2020, there are reportedly 222 shakhas (chapters) of the **Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS)**, the U.S. counterpart of the militant, paramilitary Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), across 32 states and 166 cities in the U.S., operating weekly with an estimated 8,880 participants in its youth and family programming, according to tax records and HSS's 2019-2020 annual report. Its work in 2019-2020 involved 426 other organizations and impacted more than 45,000 families in 198 cities.
2. The **Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America** reportedly operates 21 chapters in 14 states, according to its website; its cultural projects often use different names, such as the **Swami Vivekananda Family Camp** or **Hindu Mandir Executives Conference (HMEC)**.
3. Between 2001-2019, according to available tax returns, seven Sangh-affiliated charitable groups reportedly spent at least \$158.9 million on their programming, sending much of it to groups in India. The groups studied in this report are: **All India Movement (AIM) for Seva**, **Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of America**, **India Development and Relief Fund**, **Param Shakti Peeth**, **PYP Yog Foundation**, **Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America**, and **Sewa International**.

Figure 2. Hindu Nationalist Pressure Efforts in the U.S. (Selected), 2012-2020

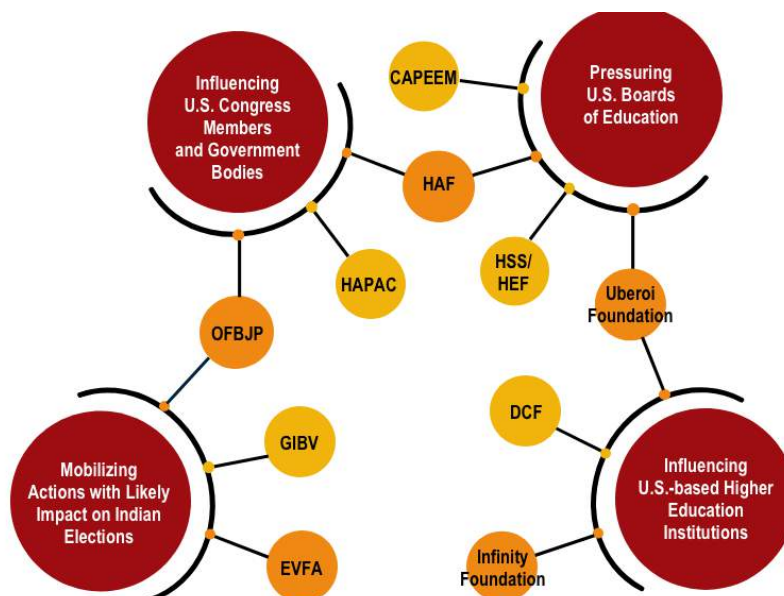




4. Local journalism in India has connected the work of the Ekal Vidyalaya program in India to the electoral victories of the BJP. The work of the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of the USA appears to be linked in some way to a larger pattern of pro-BJP electioneering activities of U.S.-based Hindutva leader **Ramesh Shah**.
5. The **Dharma Civilization Foundation** website and news media reported the foundation had offered over \$13 million between 2012-2016 toward establishing academic programs or chairs at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU), University of California at Irvine, and University of Southern California, with UC Irvine refusing the offered funds. According to tax records and its annual reports, the **Uberoi Foundation** spent at least \$561,000 in the United States between 2010-2016 toward influencing public school textbooks, establishing university endowments, undertaking teacher training programs, distributing research grants, developing educational materials, and funding the VHPA's Hindu University of America toward saffronizing South Asian history. To "saffronize" is to bring an institution or social sector into closer alignment with Hindu nationalism.<sup>61</sup>
6. The HSS-affiliated **Uberoi Foundation** reportedly gave the **Hindu American Foundation (HAF)** at least \$142,000, partly to influence the content of California textbooks from 2012-2016, per tax records and annual reports.
7. According to news and civil society reporting, the U.S.-based Sangh appears to benefit from online abuse and hate campaigns, work-based harassment, where public smear campaigns and petitions are aimed at a faculty member's institution, as well as civil lawsuits and subpoenas that pressure education officials and disincentivize scholars from participating in public processes relevant to their areas of expertise, such as public school textbook revisions.
8. Per the groups' websites and government filings, the Sangh's efforts to platform and amplify Hindutva priorities in U.S. domestic and foreign policy appear to include briefings and meetings held by groups like the **Hindu American Foundation** and **Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies (FIIDS)**; campaign financing through the **Hindu American Political Action Committee (HAPAC)**, headed by HAF leaders) and individual Sangh-affiliated donors; and through direct lobbying by the Indian government.
9. Per Federal Election Commission filings, from 2012 to 2020, HAPAC reportedly spent more than \$172,000 toward influencing U.S. elections.
10. Per Federal Election Commission filings, between 2015-2020 Congressman **Raja Krishnamoorthi** reportedly received more than \$117,000 from Hindu American Political Action Committee and Sangh-affiliated individuals. Between 2014-2019, Congressman and Presidential candidate **Tulsi Gabbard** received at least \$110,000. Between 2018-2020, Congressional candidate **Srinivas Rao Preston Kulkarni** received more than \$95,000. Between 2014-2019, Congressman Brad Sherman received more than \$27,000.
11. Per news reporting, the efforts to impact U.S. policies by Sangh-affiliated groups and individuals reportedly included protesting the State Department's visa denial to Narendra Modi; the insertion of Hindu nationalist histories into public school textbooks; and the assertion that India state violence against Kashmiris is an "internal matter" to India.
12. According to Department of Justice filings, between 2017 and 2020, the BJP-led **Government of India** reportedly paid lobbying groups, on average, between approximately \$15,000/month to about \$58,000/month each to forward India's interests on matters connected to U.S. policy and academic institutions.
13. Per to tax filings, the **Bhutada Family Foundation** reportedly gave over \$1.7 million to Sangh-affiliated charities from 2006-2018 and the **Puran Devi Aggarwal Family Foundation** reportedly gave over \$272,000 to Sangh-affiliated charities from 2008-2018. It has been reported that major donors

- connected to the Dharma Civilization Foundation include: **Mira and Ajay Shingal, Irma and Ushakant Thakkar, Drs. Harvinder and Asha Sahota** and **Drs. Meera and Jasvant Modi**.
14. In April 2021, *Al Jazeera* reported that five U.S.-based Hindu nationalist groups—Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA, Hindu American Foundation, Infinity Foundation, Sewa International, and Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America—received approximately \$833,000 of U.S. federal COVID-19-related funds. The Hindu American Foundation sued several civil society groups in connection with the *Al Jazeera* article in May 2021.
  15. Within or close to the Biden-Harris campaign and administration appear to be individuals with Sangh affiliations, or who have attended Sangh events and thereby conferred legitimacy to U.S. Sangh groups, including **Amit Jani, Sonal Shah, Sri Preston Kulkarni, and Vivek Murthy**, per news reporting.
  16. Through this research, the evidence of possible financial irregularities was noted via government filings and websites, including possible electioneering work by **Global Indians for Bharat Vikas**, a series of land and money transfers between **Vivek Welfare and Education Foundation** and other groups, and some multi-million-dollar loans from non-profit groups like the **India Development and Relief Fund** and **Bhutada Family Foundation** to other entities. **Hindu American Foundation** has also appeared to provide material aid to **Pakistan Hindu Refugee Relief Program (PHRRP)**, a VHP-affiliated channel of funds to India whose website states it is not a tax-exempt organization. The evidence was highlighted in this report for further investigation.
  17. In January 2022, *The Wire* began to publish the findings from its two-year investigation into the app Tek Fog, which appears to have links to the BJP and a company with U.S. offices, Persistent Systems. The app was reportedly used in support of the BJP toward the erosion of democratic participation in India by manipulating the information ecosystem available to the citizenry via injecting partisan posts into trending online topics; enabling the automated online abuse of BJP's critics; and invading private citizens' WhatsApp accounts to influence their contacts.

Figure 3. Reported Influence Efforts of Hindu Nationalist Groups in the United States



CAPEEM = California Parents for the Equalization of Education Materials; Dharma Civilization Foundation; Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA; HAF = Hindu American Foundation; HAPAC = Hindu American Political Action Committee; GIBV = Global Indians for Bharat Vikas; HEF = Hindu Education Foundation; HSS = Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh; OFBJP = Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The information here is discussed in depth and cited throughout this report.

Table 1. U.S. Hindu Nationalist Organizations Named in This Report

	Organizations	Area of Work	Government-issued Identification Numbers	Net Assets (Year)
1	All India Movement for Seva	Charitable funding	Tax ID # 11-3573392 <sup>62</sup>	\$1.4 million <sup>63</sup> (2019)
2	Bhutada Family Foundation	Funding	Tax ID # 20-2051596 <sup>64</sup>	\$2.2 million <sup>65</sup> (2018)
3	California Parents for the Equalization of Education Materials	Education	Tax ID # 56-2565521 <sup>66</sup>	\$78,000+ <sup>67</sup> (2019)
4	Dharma Civilization Foundation	Higher education	Tax ID # 45-5428131 <sup>68</sup>	\$474,000+ <sup>69</sup> (2019)
5	Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA	Charitable funding	Tax ID # 77-0554248 <sup>70</sup>	\$3.9 million <sup>71</sup> (2019)
6	Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies	Think tank	Tax ID # 46-2065646 <sup>72</sup>	Information unavailable
7	Global Indians for Bharat Vikas	Charitable/election-related	Tax ID # 46-3735966 <sup>73</sup>	\$13,000+ <sup>74</sup> (2015)
8	Himalayan Academy	Education	Tax ID # 23-7062033 <sup>75</sup>	\$884,000+ <sup>76</sup> (2019)
9	Hindu American Foundation	Political advocacy and charitable funding	Tax ID # 68-0551525 <sup>77</sup>	\$3.1 million <sup>78</sup> (2020)
10	Hindu American Political Action Committee	U.S. electoral politics	Federal Election Commission ID # C00536615 <sup>79</sup>	Cash on hand: \$18,000+ <sup>80</sup> (2020)
11	Hindu Education Foundation	Education	(a project of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh)	n/a
12	Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference	Temples and religious communities	(a project of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America)	n/a
13	Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS)	Youth and family programs, outreach	Tax ID # 52-1647017 <sup>81</sup>	\$4.4 million <sup>82</sup> (2019)
14	Hindu University of America	Education	Tax ID # 59-2977691 <sup>83</sup>	\$581,000+ <sup>84</sup> (2020)
15	India Development and Relief Fund	Charitable funding	Tax ID # 52-1555563 <sup>85</sup>	\$2.5 million <sup>86</sup> (2019)
16	Infinity Foundation	Higher education	Tax ID # 22-3339826 <sup>87</sup>	\$3.7 million <sup>88</sup> (2019)
17	Overseas Friends of the BJP	Political advocacy	Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) Registration Number 6861 <sup>89</sup>	Information unavailable
18	Puran Devi Aggarwal Family Foundation	Funding	Tax ID # 20-4670236 <sup>90</sup>	\$105,000+ <sup>91</sup> (2018)
19	PYP Yog Foundation	Charitable funding	Tax ID # 26-0718985 <sup>92</sup>	\$6.8 million <sup>93</sup> (2019)
20	Sewa International	Charitable funding	Tax ID #20-0638718 <sup>94</sup>	\$8.1 million <sup>95</sup> (2019)
21	Uberoi Foundation	Funding – higher education & textbooks	Tax ID # 26-6101307 <sup>96</sup>	\$6.7 million <sup>97</sup> (2019)
22	Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America	Youth and family programs	Tax ID # 51-0156325 <sup>98</sup>	\$5.3 million <sup>99</sup> (2019)
23	Vivek Investment Corporation	Land-related activities	Tax ID # 46-4235031 <sup>100</sup>	Information unavailable
24	Vivek Welfare and Educational Foundation (now named Aggarwal & Gupta Family Foundation Inc.)	Charitable funding	Tax ID # 59-3623323 <sup>101</sup>	\$47.5 million <sup>102</sup> (2019)
				<b>Total: \$97.7+ million</b>

## Introduction: Rise of U.S.-based Hindu Nationalism

With the Sangh Parivar's political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in power again at the national level as of 2014, Hindu nationalism has become more mainstreamed. As scholars noted, the Sangh's rising power in India has been built partly through its social and development projects, in tandem with its electoral campaigns.<sup>103, 104</sup> In the northeast of India, as the BJP was starting to win more elections in recent years, a journalist observed in 2019: "The RSS and its affiliates are getting into every sphere of life."<sup>105</sup>

Similarly, Hindu nationalists have been building their influence and information ecosystem in different social spheres in the United States since at least the 1970s, according to one of their websites,<sup>106</sup> strengthening their status in the Indian diaspora via youth and cultural programs, charitable work, outreach to government officials, cultivating a community that sees the world through a prism that ignores or supports Hindu nationalist violence and discrimination. This influence appears to work in part counter to accountability efforts that may arise from the U.S. government's own reports on religion-based violence in India, many of which have explicitly named Sangh Parivar groups as perpetrators since the late 1990s.<sup>107, 108, 109</sup> Selected quotes from recent annual reports of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and the U.S. State Department can be found in Figures 4 and 5.

According to scholars and civil society observers, the Sangh's agenda in the U.S. appears to focus on consolidating power for Sangh-affiliated Hindus through a network of groups that organize Hindu communities by capturing the righteous frustration at experiences of racism<sup>110</sup> and directing communities' energies toward a pride in a Vedic, upper-caste cultural repertoire and acceptance of Hindus as "the true autochthons and owners of the land" in India.<sup>111</sup> This ownership and its attendant sense of social bonding appear to be energized through religion- and gender-based targeting of minorities.<sup>112, 113</sup>

The rise of white nationalists<sup>114, 115</sup> to prominence in the U.S., along with reports on Russian efforts to impact the 2016 elections,<sup>116</sup> have increased U.S. public awareness of influence campaigns and lie/myth-based social networks,<sup>117</sup> and the notion of information ecosystems that enable certain groups of people to see the world through a lens of grievance,<sup>118</sup> a set of strategies similar to those used by diasporic Hindu nationalism. This report documents and analyzes such parts of Hindu nationalism's social infrastructure and funding patterns galvanized to implement their agenda in the United States.

### *Methodology: Locating Information*

U.S. transparency laws enable the public to see the tax returns of nonprofit groups, e.g. via the websites of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS),<sup>119</sup> Guidestar,<sup>120</sup> and ProPublica's Nonprofit Explorer<sup>121</sup> database. State-level filings are often available through each state's Secretary of State websites, sometimes through a paywall. Applications for tax-exempt status with the IRS are not consistently available at the above sites but can be requested from the IRS using Form 4506-A. Court documents, such as lawsuit complaints and associated filings, are accessible to the public from the Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER) system.<sup>122</sup> Lobbyists for foreign governments must register with the Department of Justice, and those filings are open to public review through the Department of Justice's own website<sup>123</sup> or through organizations like the Center for Responsive Politics, which runs the website OpenSecrets.org. Letters written to the California Department of Education as part of the curriculum and textbook revision processes were made available to members of the public upon request. Information was also gathered from previous versions of certain websites, saved at Archive.org or via Google cache.

This report relies on materials and filings available at the time of writing, which may be from 2020 or earlier.



Figure 4. USCIRF Annual Reports on the Sangh Parivar's Religious Freedom Violations, 2015-2020



Source: United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Annual Reports, 2015-2020.<sup>124</sup>



Figure 5. U.S. State Department's Annual Reports on the Sangh Parivar's Religious Freedom Violations, 2014-2019



Source: U.S. State Department Annual International Religious Freedom Reports, 2014-2019.<sup>125</sup>

### *What Inspires Hindu Nationalism in Diaspora: Connecting to “Home”/India*

It is important to locate the influence efforts of diasporic Hindu nationalism as one branch of Hindu nationalism’s older and wide-ranging activities in India.

Observers noted that since the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) ascendance to power in 2014, the Sangh and its allies have accelerated India’s transformation into a “Hindus-first” state.<sup>126</sup> With BJP control over government mechanisms at the Center (national level) and at the helm in many states, international stakeholders have seen in India a rise in social and gendered violence: lynchings of Christians, Dalits, and Muslims,<sup>127</sup> religion- and caste-based discrimination,<sup>128, 129, 130</sup> the targeting of interfaith and inter-caste couples (including through harassment, and violence, and legislation),<sup>131</sup> and the building of “foreigner” detention camps.<sup>132</sup> Deleterious laws threaten the citizenship rights of minorities—especially Muslims—across India.<sup>133</sup> Freedom of speech and of the press are endangered<sup>134</sup> and the rule of law is imploding.<sup>135</sup> The Indian state’s revocation of partial autonomy and continued occupation of Kashmir has exacerbated the jeopardy to life, livelihood, and rights of Kashmiris since August 2019.<sup>136</sup>

Scholars have documented the Sangh as made up of a profusion of groups deeply entrenched in society throughout India, organizations employing a constellation of gendered and caste drives for a Hindu-dominated India at the expense of other groups, including religious minorities, caste-oppressed communities, and LGBTQIA persons.<sup>137, 138, 139</sup> Hindutva’s playbook can be seen in the strategies toward social control used by its many affiliates in different social arenas. The below section highlights only some of such sectors and the Sangh groups in them; Sangh-affiliated groups are too numerous to list here in full, and members of one group are often members in multiple other groups.

All figures claimed by Sangh groups below require independent verification.

1. Ideological leadership. Per scholarly research, the **Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh**, “from the 1940s on became the most powerful and important Hindu nationalist organization in the country.”<sup>140</sup> The RSS implements men-only paramilitary and ideological training<sup>141</sup> in 57,000+ chapters in India, according to an RSS representative.<sup>142</sup> The RSS stated it had eight million members in 2008<sup>143</sup> and in 2019, claimed its membership had doubled over the previous ten years,<sup>144</sup> bringing a rough estimated membership to 16 million persons.
2. Cultural and religious policing. According to scholars, one of the **Vishwa Hindu Parishad**’s key activities is the “development of a national Hinduism...a common code for all Hindus,” toward cultural gatekeeping who is an authentic Hindu.<sup>145, 146</sup> The VHP’s campaign to build a Ram temple in the place of the Babri Mosque<sup>147</sup> appears to operate as both fundraiser<sup>148</sup> and a social shibboleth: a code through which in-group (supporters of Hindu nationalism) and out-group persons can be sorted.
3. State capture. Scholars understand the **Bharatiya Janata Party** as one of the major political parties of the Sangh Parivar and one of its main vehicles of state capture, or control over government levers of power.<sup>149, 150</sup> In 2019, the BJP ruled at the national level and sixteen states on its own or in an alliance.<sup>151</sup> In 2020, the BJP working president stated the party had 180 million members in India.<sup>152</sup>
4. Building a network of schools. The Sangh has numerous education programs under different names such as **Vidya Bharti** or **Ekal Vidyalaya**, among many others.<sup>153, 154</sup>
5. Disseminating Hindutva histories. A 2018 *Reuters* headline, “By Rewriting History, Hindu Nationalists Aim to Assert Their Dominance Over India” highlights the importance of history and historiography to the Sangh’s Hindu nationalist project. The article notes that Sangh efforts to control India’s ancient history appears to enmesh India in “a timeless popular historical memory... justifying Hindu communal violence in the

- present.”<sup>155</sup> The Sangh has been working on disseminating Hindutva histories via textbooks (e.g. via the work of **Shiksha Bachao Andolan Samiti**.)<sup>156, 157, 158</sup>
6. Policy research and advocacy. In 2015, *Catch News* reported on the establishments of “eight think-tanks... in the national capital from 2004 and 2014, all supported by prominent members of the BJP and its fountainhead, the RSS.”<sup>159</sup> Among them are the **Vivekananda International Foundation** and the **India Foundation**, both linked to Ajit Doval, India’s National Security Adviser.<sup>160</sup>
  7. Coordinating religious bodies. In 2003 *The Hindu* reported that VHP-affiliated **Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha** was formed to help Hindu religious and spiritual leaders gather to develop “a coordinated effort on issues concerning Hindus,” to shape the course of spiritual life in India.<sup>161</sup>
  8. Relief and development groups. The Sangh has an enormous number of development and disaster relief organizations, which often lay what scholars call the “brickwork for hate and civil polarization.”<sup>162</sup> The groups include **Ekal Vidyalaya**, **Param Shakti Peeth**, **Saraswati Shishu Mandir**, **Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram**, and **Sewa Bharati**.<sup>163</sup> Indian press has noted that Sangh “welfare” organizations contribute in a significant way to the BJP’s electoral success.<sup>164</sup>
  9. Vitiating social harmony and the safety of minority communities. According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom’s 2018 Annual Report: “Conditions for religious minorities have deteriorated over the last decade due to a multifaceted campaign by Hindu nationalist groups like [RSS and VHP] to alienate non-Hindus and [caste-oppressed groups]... These groups face challenges ranging from acts of violence or intimidation, to the loss of political power, to increasing feelings of disenfranchisement and ‘otherness.’”<sup>165</sup>
  10. Large-scale anti-minority mass violence. Local and international rights groups, academics, and journalists have reported on incidents of mass violence, including lynchings and sexual violence, against minority communities, carried out by **Bajrang Dal**, **BJP**, and **VHP** members.<sup>166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171</sup>
  11. Police and judicial complicity. Local and international news and human rights reports have documented police and judicial irregularities, complicity, or outright support that benefit Hindu nationalist perpetrators of violence.<sup>172, 173</sup>
  12. Circulating Hindu nationalist notions of “health.” In 2017, news media reported that the RSS’s health wing, **Arogya Bharati**, launched an apparent eugenics project to help parents bear a “customised child.” According to the national convener of Arogya Bharati, Hitesh Jani: “The parents may have lower IQ... but their baby can be extremely bright. If the proper procedure is followed, babies of dark-skinned parents with lesser height can have fair complexion and grow taller.”<sup>174</sup>
  13. Targeting political enemies using institutional mechanisms. Per a 2018 report from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the **Bharatiya Janata Party** government reportedly used its powers to cut off foreign funding for an estimated 10,000-33,000 organizations: “The NGOs targeted were often political opponents of the Modi Administration, but also included non-Hindu religious organizations.”<sup>175</sup>
- According to news reports, Dina Nath Batra, former head of the Sangh’s Vidya Bharti school network, used India’s legal treatment of defamation as a crime against Wendy Doniger’s book *The Hindus: An Alternative History*.<sup>176</sup> Penguin India settled with Batra out of court and agreed to pull the book from India.<sup>177, 178</sup> On university campuses, **Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad** is “a student group affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.”<sup>179</sup> News media have reported on ABVP members threatening others with rape<sup>180, 181</sup> and assault for their views, harassing faculty, “[escalating] violence on campuses,” or accusing their critics of bad



- acts to set the authorities on them, such as with the case of Dalit scholar Rohith Vemula, reportedly setting off a series of events leading to his suicide.<sup>182, 183, 184</sup>
14. Targeting critics via online hate. Many journalists and academics of South Asia, especially women, have spoken openly of the intimidation and harassment they receive from **online mobs**, including rape and death threats.<sup>185</sup> Journalists noted that virtual mob members were often fans of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and he appeared to embolden them by following them online and reportedly inviting some to the Prime Minister's residence.<sup>186, 187</sup> Threats against journalist Swati Chaturvedi were so intense that several U.N. Special Rapporteurs wrote to the Indian Government, noting the "wide presence of fundamentalist discourses and intolerance, including from members of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, which may encourage negative social mobilization leading to expression of intolerance, incitement to hatred, violence, including gender-based violence."<sup>188</sup> In January 2022, *The Wire* reported on the BJP-affiliated<sup>189</sup> app Tek Fog; one of the app's functions automates online harassment (e.g. on Twitter) against certain categories of people, such as women journalists.<sup>190</sup>
  15. Alleged assassinations and bomb plots. In 2018, *Hindustan Times* reported that members of **Sanathan Sanstha** were charged in high-profile assassinations, including that of journalist Gauri Lankesh.<sup>191</sup> In an undercover *India Today* investigation, two Sanathan Sanstha members were recorded confessing planting bombs in Maharashtra in 2008.<sup>192</sup>
  16. Establishing women's groups. Feminist scholars have written on the Sangh's women's wings, e.g. **Durga Vahini** and **Rashtriya Sevika Samiti**.<sup>193, 194, 195</sup>
  17. Establishing workers associations. The RSS-backed trade union is reportedly the **Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh**.<sup>196</sup>
  18. Establishing farmers' associations. The RSS's farmer's wing is the **Bharatiya Kisan Sangh**.<sup>197</sup>
  19. Crony capitalism. Others have written of crony capitalism under Modi's rule.<sup>198, 199, 200</sup> One example reported by *Reuters* in 2017 was that celebrity "[yoga] guru Baba Ramdev sent his supporters into the streets to help propel Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to power in 2014," and after the BJP won, "Ramdev's company [**Patanjali**] received more than an estimated \$46 million in discounts for land acquisitions in states controlled by the BJP."<sup>201</sup>
  20. Building a Hindu nationalist information ecosystem. The information ecosystem of the Hindu right<sup>202</sup> is too vast to cover in this report; only a few highlights will be included here. As noted above, in India, a series of pressures on media outlets, including injury and threats to journalists, contour the reporting landscape toward "toe[ing] the Hindu nationalist government's line," per Reporters Without Borders.<sup>203</sup>  

*The Organiser* is the mouthpiece for the RSS,<sup>204, 205, 206</sup> and major Sangh Parivar groups have websites and social media presence. Other parts of this information ecosystem include **Republic** (TV channel) and **Swarajya Magazine** (print and online), which are "trying to carve a space for right-wing opinion-makers in the public sphere."<sup>207</sup> In the U.S., there is the VHP-established, Houston-based<sup>208</sup> **World Hindu News**,<sup>209</sup> and a print paper like **India Post**, published by California-based Romesh Japra,<sup>210</sup> who was a director of VHPA-affiliated<sup>211</sup> Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA.<sup>212</sup> The Hindu right wing has also flourished on social media, including on Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook, per news reporting.<sup>213</sup>

*The Wire's* reporting on the BJP-affiliated app **Tek Fog** also found that the app can be used to "manipulate public discourse" on social media by mass-injecting customized posts into a trending Twitter hashtag's swell of online conversations and "perpetuate a

partisan information environment” on a wide scale, and it can hijack “inactive” WhatsApp accounts of private citizens to influence the account’s contacts.<sup>214</sup> *The Wire* also reported that an Indian company with U.S. offices, Persistent Systems, appears to be connected in some way to the development of the app,<sup>215</sup> though the company later denied any involvement.<sup>216</sup>

Of special note are groups that operate separately but in step with the Sangh. The anti-disinformation group EU Disinfo Lab reported extensively on the **Srivastava Group’s** 15-year, wide-ranging influence operations, which included 750+ reportedly falsified news media outlets covering 119 countries, 550+ websites, and the names of defunct organizations to advocate

for India’s interests at United Nations and with the European Union, per a 2020 report.<sup>217, 218</sup>

While the Srivastava Group has not been proven to have links to the Indian government or the Sangh, the group appears to be part of an ecosystem supporting key elements of the Sangh Parivar’s agenda. *The Wire* reported that Srivastava Group’s affiliate, the **International Institute of Non-Aligned Studies**, reportedly funded and arranged the visit of largely right-wing Members of the European Parliament to visit Kashmir during the communications clampdown of the region.<sup>219</sup> India-based press noted that many of these European politicians have anti-Muslim and anti-multiculturalism track records, and that independent journalists and diplomats, including a U.S. Congressman and United Nations human rights Special Rapporteurs, had been refused entry into Kashmir, in contrast.<sup>220</sup>

Figure 6. Sangh Parivar Activities and Agents India (Selected), 2014-2021





### Hindu Nationalist Activities in the United States

In the United States, the Sangh's playbook appears significantly different, aimed at largely middle-class and wealthy diasporic communities, institution leaders, and government officials in the context of a society committed to certain forms of multiculturalism and minority rights. U.S.-based Hindu nationalists have established or strengthened Hindu youth and family programs, charitable funding groups, information and news ecosystems, temple-related groups, and advocacy groups related to higher education, U.S. policy, and public opinion.

Figure 7. Sangh Influencers in the U.S. (Selected), 2014-2020



## Consolidating Cultural Authority in Diasporic Communities

Sangh groups have apparently sought to become cultural gatekeepers and representatives of Hindu communities in the U.S. via their youth programs. Their ability to mobilize a large number of Hindu families confers authoritative weight when the Sangh groups then hold fundraisers or try to pressure U.S. government officials on issues related to Hindus, Hinduism, or India. Where other Indians or persons of Indian descent spoke out against the Sangh's efforts, Sangh affiliates have sometimes labelled their opponents as "anti-democratic"<sup>221</sup> or "a fringe Hinduphobic group."<sup>222</sup>

### Youth and Family Programs

In the United States, the websites of both **Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh** and **Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America** state that they are "inspired" by their India-based counterparts, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (the key leadership body of the Sangh) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad.<sup>223</sup>

Both groups, through their websites and activities listed in tax filings, appear to present themselves as authorities on Hinduism and a Hinduized Indian identity, holding identity-based youth programs, cultural events, and disseminating Sangh-approved forms of Hindu culture to the diaspora. As noted by research, these youth camps and programs often harness the frustration and pain Hindu Americans experience when targeted by U.S. racism and direct their energies toward a worldview that conflates Hindu nationalism with Hinduism and cultivates anti-Muslim and anti-Christian sentiments toward minority communities in India.<sup>224</sup>

According to the HSS's own 2019-2020 annual report: across 32 states and 166 cities in the U.S., there are at least 222 HSS chapters (shakhas),<sup>225</sup> operating weekly online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with an estimated 8,880 participants.<sup>226</sup> Its work in 2019-2020 involved 426 other organizations and impacted more than 45,000 families in 198 cities.<sup>227</sup>

As reported in the early 2000s, the Hindu cultural forms and the notions of civilization spread by Hindu nationalist cultural programs were culturally "Sanskritic," [which] privileges Hindi-based north Indian Vedic-brahminic traditions," and not reflective of the diversity of Hinduism across region, caste, and national borders.<sup>228</sup> As well, the curricula used in the HSS's youth programs (e.g. Balagokulam weekly classes) feature the notion of an India "under attack" from outsiders, linking the notion of foreigners to Muslims and threat via the coded language of "foreign invaders" who "wanted to spread their religion":<sup>229</sup>

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*Bharat [India] Shrunk*

*As time went by, Bharat came under attack from several foreign invaders starting from Alexander, Muslims, Mongols, Turks, French, Portuguese and British. Because of strong cultural roots, she survived all these attacks. Main reason of the invasions was an immense wealth and prosperity of Bharat. Another reason was these foreign invaders wanted to spread their religion and expand their territory.*

*~Syllabus for a Balagokulam Course<sup>230</sup>*

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These Hindu nationalist histories have long been criticized by established historians,<sup>231, 232</sup> with prominent historian Romila Thapar declaring that the Hindu nationalists' over-arching discourse that Muslims had victimized and enslaved Hindus for the past thousand years as "historically unacceptable" and not consistent with rigorous interpretation of the historical record.<sup>233</sup> Such "Hindu victim" and anti-Muslim discourse likely aids Hindu nationalists in attracting adherents from Hindu targets of racism in the U.S., while providing an opening for Hindu nationalists to ally with other Islamophobic right-wing groups, a process seemingly underway between the Government of India and Europe's right-wing politicians.<sup>234</sup>

With the cultural authority of its programs, the HSS has been raising its social

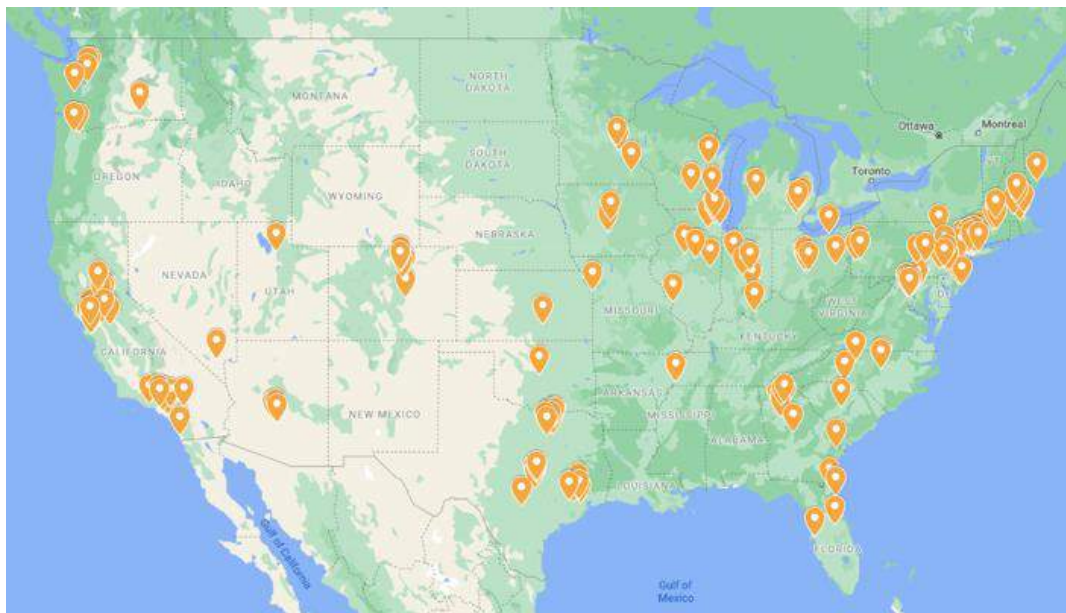
profile. Per HSS's 2018-2019 Annual Report, HSS members took part in a program to visit the offices of more than 100 Congressmembers, coordinated by the Hindu American Foundation.<sup>235</sup> The HSS's other U.S.-based outreach work includes: creating cultural modules for youths and families, such as "teacher appreciation day," implementing a mentorship program, conducting disaster relief work,<sup>236, 237</sup> as well as visiting a police station in Indiana, an event about which the Organization for Minorities of India, a community advocacy group, raised concerns, naming the HSS and RSS directly.<sup>238</sup> In November 2020, India-West reported that the HSS held a virtual celebration of Diwali (a Hindu holiday) that was attended by eight mayors or mayor-elects of the San Francisco Bay Area: Karla Brown (Pleasanton); Sanjay Gehani (Foster City); Barbara Halliday (Hayward); Melissa Hernandez (Dublin); Dave Hudson (San Ramon); Lily Mei (Fremont); Alan L. Nagy (Newark); and Bob Woemer (Livermore).<sup>239</sup>

According to its website, as of 2020, the VHP of America had 21 chapters in 14 states, according to its website: California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New York,

Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Texas.<sup>240</sup> The VHPA implements projects under different names, such as the **Swami Vivekananda Family Camp**,<sup>241</sup> or the **Hindu Mandir Executives Conference** (HMEC),<sup>242</sup> which brings together Hindu temple leaders in North America and the Caribbean to discuss and strategize actions on different social issues. According to a recent HMEC brochure, more than 100 temples and 250 temple leaders were in attendance in 2017.<sup>243</sup>

The cultural and social capital the HSS and VHPA accrue through these activities may grant Hindu nationalist groups' voice more legitimacy when they describe a group, a report, or public figure as "Hinduphobic"<sup>244</sup> or "anti-India."<sup>245</sup> As the Sangh leadership becomes recognized as cultural authorities in diasporic communities and by local U.S. institutions, the HSS and VHPA's public statements and petitions are likely to gain wider audiences and supporters; such actions have been able to mobilize large numbers in mass agitations and letter writing campaigns to apply pressure on U.S. government officials, such as in the case with the efforts to insert Hindu nationalist histories into U.S. textbooks.<sup>246, 247</sup>

**Figure 8. City Locations of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh Chapters in the U.S., 2021**



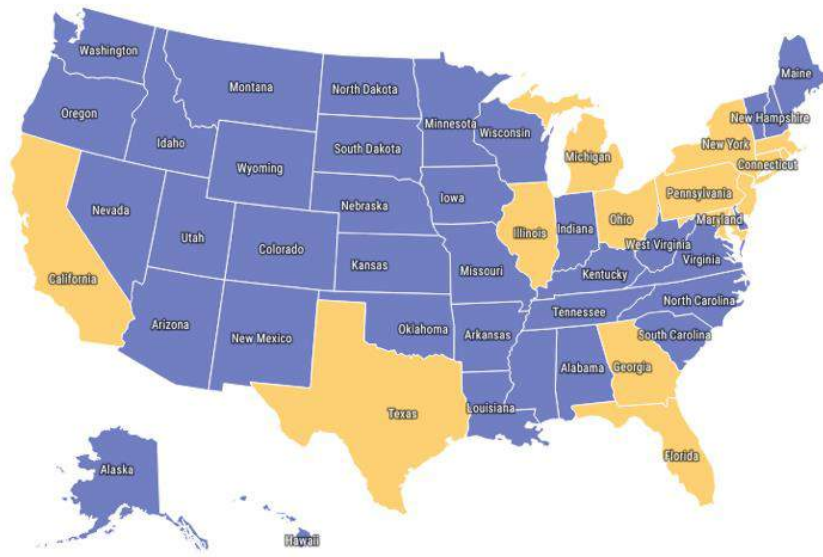
Source of chapter location: Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh website, 2021.<sup>248</sup> See Table 2 for city names.

**Table 2. List of U.S. Cities with HSS Shakhas/Chapters, January 2021**

State	Shakha/Chapter Locations	State	Shakha/Chapter Locations
<b>Arizona</b>	Chandler, Phoenix, Scottsdale	<b>Nevada</b>	Las Vegas
<b>California</b>	Burbank, Campbell, Cerritos, Chino, California State University, East Bay - Hayward, Cupertino, Cupertino, Dublin, Folsom, Foster City, Fremont, Irvine, Livermore, Milpitas, Modesto, Mountain View, Oak Glen, Pleasant Hill, Pleasanton, Rancho Cordova, Roseville, Sacramento, San Diego, San Jose, San Jose State University, San Ramon, Santa Clara, Saratoga, Stockton, Sunnyvale, Temple City, Thousand Oaks, Tracy, University of Southern California, Yuba City	<b>New Hampshire</b>	Nashua
<b>Colorado</b>	Aurora, Broomfield, Colorado Springs, Englewood, Longmont, Louisville	<b>New Jersey</b>	Bridgewater, Chesterfield, Edison, Egg Harbor City, Iselin, Jersey City, Kendall Park, Milltown, Paramus, Parsippany, Piscataway, South Jersey
<b>Connecticut</b>	Glastonbury, Newington, South Windsor, Wilton	<b>New York</b>	Columbia University, Elmsford, Hicksville, Jamaica, White Plains
<b>Florida</b>	Jacksonville, Orlando, Saint Augustine, Tampa	<b>North Carolina</b>	Apex, Charlotte, Charlotte, Harrisburg, Morrisville, Winston Salem
<b>Georgia</b>	Alpharetta, Atlanta, Georgia Institute of Technology, Bloomingdale, Cumming, Macon, Morrow, Smyrna, Suwanee	<b>Ohio</b>	Cleveland, Columbus, Dublin, Lewis Center, Ohio State University - Columbus, Reynoldsburg, West Chester
<b>Illinois</b>	Arlington Heights, Aurora, Bensenville, Bloomington, Buffalo Grove, Chicago, Peoria, Schaumburg, Urbana, Wesleyan University	<b>Oklahoma</b>	Oklahoma City
<b>Indiana</b>	Avon, Carmel, Columbus, Fishers, Greenwood, Purdue University - West Lafayette	<b>Oregon</b>	Hillsboro, Portland
<b>Iowa</b>	Ames, West Des Moines	<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Audubon, Bethlehem, Clarks Summit, Exton, King of Prussia, Lebanon, McDonald, Montgomeryville, Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Wexford
<b>Kansas</b>	Kansas City, Wichita	<b>South Carolina</b>	Columbia
<b>Kentucky</b>	Louisville	<b>Tennessee</b>	Memphis
<b>Maine</b>	Scarborough	<b>Texas</b>	Allen, University of Arlington - Arlington, Austin, Carrollton, Cedar Park, Dallas, Flower Mound, Fort Worth, Frisco, Fulshear, Georgetown, Houston, Irving, Katy, Keller, McKinney, Pearland, Plano, Round Rock, San Antonio, Spring, Sugar Land
<b>Maryland</b>	Columbia, Ellicott City	<b>Utah</b>	Salt Lake City
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Billerica, Boston, Burlington, Chelmsford, Foxboro, Springfield, Westborough	<b>Virginia</b>	Ashburn, Chantilly, Fairfax, Falls Church, Herndon
<b>Michigan</b>	Canton, Farmington, Grand Rapids, Troy	<b>Washington</b>	Bellevue, Kent, Olympia, Sammamish, West Richland
<b>Minnesota</b>	Eagan, Minneapolis, Rochester	<b>Wisconsin</b>	Brookfield, Kaukauna, Sun Prairie
<b>Missouri</b>	Saint Louis		

Source: Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh website, 2021.<sup>249</sup>



**Figure 9. States where there are Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America Chapters**

States with VHPA chapters in light orange.

### Diasporic Funding for Hindu Nationalist Groups in India

It has been reported that the BJP government has used its powers to target India-based watchdog groups and critics by restricting such groups' overseas funding<sup>250</sup> and freezing their assets (e.g. Amnesty International<sup>251</sup>), while the Sangh Parivar has received a constant flow of overseas funds. As discussed by other activists and scholars, Sangh development and education programs have been alleged to be part of the capillaries of social polarization and demonization of minorities in India.<sup>252, 253</sup> The 2014 *Hindu Nationalism in the United States* report found much of \$55 million had been transferred from the U.S. to India via just five Sangh-affiliated charities, from 2001-2012: Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA, India Development and Relief Fund, Param Shakti Peeth, Sewa International, Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America.<sup>254</sup> Since 2014, according to tax records, Hindu nationalist groups in India continued to receive millions of dollars from these groups. This section will look at the funding flow from seven organizations, adding two more to the original five: All India Movement (AIM) for Seva and PYP Yog Foundation.

### Establishing Sangh Credentials of Charitable Groups

The Sangh credentials for **All India Movement (AIM) for Seva** are evidenced in the actions of its founder, Swami Dayananda Saraswati.<sup>255</sup> Saraswati drafted the constitution of the VHP in 1964,<sup>256</sup> and in 2003, was the convener of an "apex" group, Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, to coordinate Hindu spiritual leaders on social matters, backed by then-VHP chief, Ashok Singhal (see Figure 10).<sup>257</sup> Saraswati was also reportedly the spiritual guide of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and his passing and cremation in 2015 drew some of the top leaders of the Sangh Parivar, including Narendra Modi, Ashok Singhal, Dattatreya Hosabale, and Ram Madhav.<sup>258</sup>

According to its website, the All India Movement (AIM) for Seva, founded in 2001, funds and operates more than 100 hostels in rural and tribal/indigenous communities in India at least across sixteen states in India, according to its website. Its website reported that the group impacts thousands of young people.<sup>259</sup>



**Figure 10. Swami Dayananda Saraswati, 2003**



Note: This photo was taken at the founding of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, with VHP chief Ashok Singhal.<sup>260</sup>

The second new group is **PYP Yog Foundation**. Its links to the U.S. Sangh are evidenced by the affiliations of its officers; according to its 2016 Annual Report<sup>261</sup> filed with the Florida Secretary of State, its leadership reportedly included:

- ❖ Braham Aggarwal, one-time VHPA office bearer;<sup>262</sup>
- ❖ Ramesh Bhutada, Vice President of the HSS per reporting in 2020;<sup>263</sup>
- ❖ Jugal Malani, the Chair of the “Howdy Modi” event in Texas, and an advisor to the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA.<sup>264</sup>

Per tax filings, this group appears to be an overseas funding channel to Patanjali Yogpeeth.<sup>265</sup> This India-based group is headed by yoga celebrity Baba Ramdev, who had, according to *Reuters*, “sent his supporters into the streets to help propel Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to power in 2014.”<sup>266</sup> Baba Ramdev is listed as a director in the group’s founding IRS filings in 2008, at the Patanjali address in Uttaranchal.<sup>267</sup>

#### **Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA:**

Per tax documents, this group reportedly funds India-based Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of India, which runs 79,000+ schools in rural and tribal areas across India, impacting at least 2.7 million young persons.<sup>268, 269</sup> The VHPA’s website has claimed the Ekal Vidyalaya as one of its projects,<sup>270</sup> and Indian journalists have reported on the Ekal Vidyalaya schools as implemented by the VHP.<sup>271</sup>

**India Development and Relief Fund’s** Sangh affiliations were documented in the 2002 report, *The Foreign Exchange of Hate: IDRF and the American Funding of Hindutva*.<sup>272</sup>

**Param Shakti Peeth Foundation** appears to fund the Vatsalya Gram project in India, which conducts childcare, elder care, and women’s programs in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, according to its website.<sup>273</sup> The Vatsalya project was founded by the VHP leader Sadhvi Rithambara,<sup>274</sup> who the Liberhan government commission had reportedly found culpable of bringing India “to the brink of communal discord”<sup>275</sup> in connection to the 1992 demolition of the Babri mosque.<sup>276</sup>

According to its website and filings, **Sewa International** too appears to have HSS links: HSS National Vice President Ramesh Bhutada<sup>277</sup> is the Chair of Sewa’s board<sup>278</sup> and HSS Founding General Secretary<sup>279</sup> Manohar Shinde is listed as a Sewa “Honorary Board Member.”<sup>280</sup> Sewa also partnered with the HSS to conduct COVID-19 pandemic-related work in 2020; the Indian news media described Sewa International as “a part of the [Sangh] Parivar in the US.”<sup>281</sup> This connection appeared not to have deterred Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey’s donation of 2.5 million dollars to Sewa International, prompting an outcry.<sup>282</sup>

Some of **Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America’s** links to the VHP of India were discussed in the 2014 report.<sup>283</sup> On its website, the VHPA states that it is “inspired by the same ideals as those followed by Vishwa Hindu Parishad of Bharat [India]” and its service “projects were started to offer concrete assistance to institutions in Bharat.”<sup>284</sup>

Between 2001-2019, these seven groups reportedly spent over \$158.9 million, sending much of it to India. In some cases, per tax filings, a group did not appear to differentiate consistently between programs in the U.S. from those in India, and further investigation is needed to disaggregate the funding and examine the impact of each group’s programs. The figures in Table 4 would benefit from further research in India to verify the impact of the activities funded.

Table 3. Sangh Credentials of Selected Charitable Groups

Name	Sangh leadership role	Ekal Vidyalaya	Param Shakti Peeth	PYP Yog	Sewa International
<b>Braham Aggarwal</b>	One time Florida VHPA office bearer <sup>285</sup>	Board member 2010-2011 <sup>286</sup>	Donated \$1.8 million to Param Shakti Peeth <sup>287</sup>	Trustee and Chair 2011-2018 <sup>288</sup>	
<b>Ramesh Bhutada</b>	National Vice President of the HSS <sup>289</sup>		Board of Advisors <sup>290</sup>	Trustee 2011-2018 <sup>291</sup>	Chair of the Board (2018) <sup>292</sup>
<b>Ramesh Shah</b>	One-time OFBJP national vice president <sup>293</sup>	Chair of Board, 2007-2011, 2018-2019 <sup>294</sup>			
<b>Subhash Gupta</b>	President of HSS Houston Chapter <sup>295</sup>	President-2008 <sup>296</sup> Chair of the Board 2012-2013 <sup>297</sup>	Board of Advisors <sup>298</sup>		
<b>Jugal Malani</b>		Board member 2011 <sup>299</sup>	President of India House when it hosted an event for Sadhvi Rithambara in 2010, <sup>300</sup> Param Shakti Peeth founder <sup>301</sup>	Secretary and Trustee 2011-2018 <sup>302</sup>	Donor of at least \$50,000 <sup>303</sup> to Sewa International in 2020. <sup>304</sup>
<b>Mahesh Mehta</b>	One-time VHPA President <sup>305</sup>	One-time Board member <sup>306</sup>			
<b>Manohar Shinde</b>	HSS Founding General Secretary <sup>307</sup>				Board member 2018 <sup>308</sup>

Table 4. Program Expenses of Seven Sangh-affiliated Charitable Groups, 2001-2019

Charitable groups	Recipients in India (Selected)	Amount (timeframe)	During BJP's rule (2014-2019)
<b>All India Movement (AIM) for Seva</b>	AIM for Seva schools and hostels in India <sup>309</sup>	\$27.2 million <sup>310</sup> (2001-2019)	\$15.5 million
<b>Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of America</b>	Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of India <sup>311</sup>	\$70.1 million <sup>312</sup> (2001-2019)	\$39.4 million
<b>India Development and Relief Fund</b>	Vidya Bharati, Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram <sup>313</sup>	\$30.6 million <sup>314</sup> (2001-2019)	\$9.9 million
<b>Param Shakti Peeth</b>	Vatsalya Gram (VHP leader Sadhvi Rithambara's project <sup>315</sup> )	\$5.8 million <sup>316</sup> (2004-2018)	\$3.9 million (2014-2018)
<b>PYP Yog Foundation</b>	Patanjali Yogpeeth <sup>317</sup> (Baba Ramdev's organization <sup>318</sup> )	\$335,000 <sup>319</sup> (2013-2016)	\$195,000 (2014-2016)
<b>Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America</b>	Likely one or more VHP-affiliated groups in India	\$7.6 million <sup>320</sup> (2001-2019)	\$3.3 million
<b>Sewa International</b>	Sevabharati Keralam <sup>321</sup>	\$17.1 million <sup>322</sup> (2005-2019)	\$12.9 million
	<b>Total (est.)</b>	<b>\$158.9 million</b>	<b>\$85.4 million</b>

### Charitable Groups and Electioneering

Donations to Sangh charitable groups may be impacting elections in India in ways that require further investigation, as under U.S. law—Internal Revenue Code 501(c)3—charitable organizations are expressly forbidden from “participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of ... any candidate for elective public office.”<sup>323</sup>

In 2014, shortly after the BJP came to power at the national level India, BJP General Secretary Ram Madhav, according to his website, attended a celebration in New Jersey jointly held by the Overseas Friends of the BJP (OFBJP) and Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, where the work of the Ekal Vidyalayas was specifically highlighted, implying its importance to the electoral success of the BJP.<sup>324</sup> The group’s work, per its website, cover a range of projects in education, health, and skills training in rural and tribal/indigenous communities.<sup>325</sup>

The Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA’s work appears to be linked in some way to a larger pattern of pro-BJP electioneering activities of Ramesh Shah and other U.S.-based Sangh leaders. Shah, one founder of the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of America,<sup>326</sup> reportedly traveled in person with BJP leader L.K. Advani to campaign for the BJP as early as 2004.<sup>327</sup> *Times of India* reported that Shah was also a co-convener<sup>328</sup> of Global Indians for Bharat Vikas, a group that in 2014 coordinated the travel of “800 [U.S.-based Indians] from across United States [to] work as foot soldiers across India to make Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi the next prime minister.”<sup>329</sup> In 2019, *Outlook* reported that Shah again traveled to India to campaign for a second term for BJP’s Narendra Modi.<sup>330</sup> *Daily News & Analysis* reported that Shah was also once a Vice President of the Overseas Friends of the BJP,<sup>331</sup> a group which registered as a foreign agent of the BJP with the U.S. Department of Justice in August 2020, according to its Department of Justice filing.<sup>332,333</sup>

In 2017, news reports from Gujarat and the northeast of India<sup>334</sup> made it clear that the BJP understood the Ekal Vidyalaya schools as part of

their strategy to win elections: “The BJP’s [electoral] hopes stem in part from a vast network of Ekal Vidyalayas, schools run by the VHP for tribal children.”<sup>335</sup> An Ekal Abhiyan (Movement) leader in Gujarat, while describing to *Daily News & Analysis* how the Ekal Vidyalaya work brought RSS-trained leaders into an area and his hopes to establish Ekal Vidyalaya schools in every village under his control, also explicitly declared his hope that these “efforts will bear fruit one day and the BJP will be able to win all seats in the tribal belt.”

<sup>336</sup> A 2020 investigative article in *The Caravan* described the growth of Sangh foothold in West Bengal via Ekal Vidyalayas, which “followed a similar pattern, with minor variations. [A] one-teacher free coaching centre or school [would be established]. In a few weeks [a] mothers’ group[] would be formed... Once the centre became popular enough that students of a nearby government-run school started attending the classes regularly, [another Sangh group] would start a weekly moral-values centre...”<sup>337</sup>

Though some Indian news reportage has said that Ekal Vidyalaya teachers do not pressure people on how to vote, journalists who went to the areas with Ekal Vidyalayas noted that the schools were clearly an arm of RSS and BJP influence in tribal / indigenous and caste-oppressed communities.<sup>338, 339, 340</sup> A 2019 *Firstpost* headline declared: “Saffron wave in Assam: Ekal Vidyalayas helped BJP, RSS establish strong roots in Assam’s tribal areas.”<sup>341</sup>

For an Indian administration USCIRF has noted for the use of government powers to target its critics,<sup>342</sup> the rewards for its supporters appear no less extravagant. Per the Ministry of External Affairs, the Modi government in 2017 awarded the highest civilian honor for overseas Indians, the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award, to Ekal co-founder Ramesh Shah.<sup>343, 344</sup> In 2019, the BJP-led Government of India awarded Gandhi Peace Prize of 2017 to Ekal Abhiyan Trust, the organization that implements Ekal Vidyalaya schools, per the group’s 2018-2019 annual report.<sup>345</sup>

As of 2021, the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation’s website declared the group had more than 79,000 schools across India.<sup>346</sup>

Table 5. Ramesh Shah's Charitable and Political Work

Year	Events
2001	Ramesh Shah was a founder the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA, according to <i>India-West</i> . <sup>347</sup> Ekal Vidyalaya is a VHP project <sup>348</sup> and regarded by journalists as a contributing factor in the electoral rise of the BJP in India. <sup>349, 350, 351</sup>
2001-2019	According to tax filings, between 2001-2019, Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of America reportedly sent at least \$70 million to India. <sup>352</sup>
2004	<i>Rediff</i> reported that Ramesh Shah, noted as Overseas Friends of the BJP national vice president, traveled in person with L.K Advani to campaign for the BJP. <sup>353</sup>
2014	<i>Times of India</i> reported Ramesh Shah as a co-convenor <sup>354</sup> of Global Indians for Bharat Vikas, a group that in 2014 coordinated the travel of 800 persons from the United States to become BJP's campaign "foot soldiers." <sup>355</sup>
2014	<i>Daily News &amp; Analysis</i> reported that Ramesh Shah was part of the group that helped to organize the Madison Square Garden reception for Narendra Modi's first U.S. visit as Prime Minister. <sup>356</sup>
2017	The Government of India awarded Ramesh Shah the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award, a high civilian honor for "significant contribution" <sup>357</sup> in fields related to India, according Indian government bodies. <sup>358</sup>
2017	In a government filing, Ramesh Shah was also listed as a Director of the Texas India Forum, the organization that hosted the large "Howdy Modi" event in Texas honoring Narendra Modi. <sup>359</sup>
2019	<i>Outlook</i> reported Ramesh Shah again traveled to India to campaign for BJP's Narendra Modi. <sup>360</sup>

### Inserting Hindu Nationalism into Textbooks and Higher Education

One area of the Sangh's influence on U.S. domestic policy is its efforts to insert Hindu nationalist messaging and sectarian histories into U.S. public school textbooks, as such histories appear to be key to the cohesion and coordination of Hindu nationalism's adherents.<sup>361</sup> Scholars and activists note that these narratives prioritize the histories and cultural markers of caste-privileged Hindu communities while denigrating Muslims and erasing reference to Dalits, Adivasis, and caste and gender oppression.<sup>362, 363</sup> The operation of Hindutva depends on the circulation of a mythologized South Asian history; historian Tanika Sarkar once asked:

*How is [Hindu nationalist anti-Muslim] hatred produced, especially towards people who are not aliens or invaders, who are far more vulnerable and disempowered than Hindus?... In place of doctrine, dogma and theology, [Hindu nationalist ideologue V.D.] Savarkar would define the Hindu community through 'history'—*

*history of a sort that enables a Hindu will to violence... Drawing its elements from a diffused popular commonsense, it builds on it, tweaking some of the points... to produce a new bricolage out of familiar stories... Its sources are historical fiction and fictionalised histories, discrete fragments from myths and legends, political gossip, rumours and scandals. All histories tell the same story—unprovoked Muslim attacks and necessary Hindu reprisals.*  
~ *Hindutva's Hinduism* (Sarkar, 2012)<sup>364</sup>

Scholars have noted that hallmarks of Hindu nationalist histories include casteism, Islamophobia, and patriarchy, and the "[collapsing of] distinction between history and religious myth."

<sup>365</sup> Per scholarly, news, and activist reports, Hindu nationalist efforts to influence textbooks included:

❖ In India, the BJP's early 2000 attempt to rewrite history books elevated the notion that Muslims' arrival to South Asia brought only "oppression and [Hindu] temple-destruction."<sup>366</sup> When similar efforts appeared in California in 2015, pro-pluralism scholars wrote to California's education officials: "It is



imperative that we dissociate to some degree the spread of Islam from Turkish and Afghan military conquests and remind students that Islam spread to... the Indian subcontinent through steppe and frontier groups far away in space and time from the core areas of the Arabian Peninsula.”<sup>367</sup>

- ❖ Hindu nationalist groups, including **Hindu American Foundation** and **Uberoi Foundation**,<sup>368</sup> sought to remove the term “Dalit” from U.S. textbooks in 2005-6 and 2016-2017.<sup>369, 370</sup>
- ❖ The **Hindu Education Foundation** (HEF) sought to connect bullying against Hindu students to the portrayal of Hinduism in U.S. textbooks.<sup>371</sup> HSS’s tax returns from 2011-2019 state that the HSS is “doing business as” Hindu Education Foundation.<sup>372</sup>
- ❖ Hindu nationalists’ efforts to “whitewash caste”<sup>373</sup> in U.S. textbooks sometimes tried to dismiss the concerns of Dalit activists by labeling them as Christian missionaries; Dalit and non-Dalit activists’ response: “if any Dalit person is a Christian that should neither be a slur, nor an indication that he or she can no longer speak as a Dalit.”<sup>374</sup>
- ❖ Hindu nationalists reportedly claim that Hindus are indigenous to the subcontinent,<sup>375</sup> as part of its nativist and anti-minority discourses,<sup>376</sup> despite wide-ranging evidence across multiple disciplines to the contrary.<sup>377, 378, 379</sup> This claim may also dilute the struggles and accomplishments of Adivasi (tribal, indigenous) communities.
- ❖ Hindu nationalists also claimed that Ancient South Asia had equality between men and women.<sup>380</sup> South Asia scholars and historians pointed out to the California Department of Education in 2006 that there is “considerable evidence that Hindu women had (and continue to have) fewer rights and opportunities than Hindu men, and that this was sanctioned by Sanskritic religious texts.”<sup>381</sup>

The Sangh’s textbook campaigns, youth programs, and cultural events appear to provide

entry pathways into the Sangh’s information ecosystem, establishing Hindutva groups as cultural authorities on India and Hinduism. Per scholarly research: a large presence of the Sangh in online and social spaces may also shape a person’s perception of realities in India and South Asia.<sup>382, 383</sup> At least since the early 2000s, South Asia scholars from around the world have challenged Hindu nationalists, with varying results.<sup>384, 385</sup> The Sangh’s efforts in higher education appear to be part of this groundwork to cultivate Sangh-affiliated scholars to compete with established and respected academics.

### *Purchasing a Place for Hindutva in Academia: Grants and Endowments*

Historically, academics in India and abroad have challenged the Sangh’s efforts to police who is a “Hindu,” as well as its use of a mythologized glorious Hindu past to manufacture grievance politics against Muslims and Christians in the present and the invisibilization of Dalits and tribal/indigenous persons.<sup>386</sup>

In terms of academic caliber, Hindu nationalist groups have struggled to compete with respected and established scholars like Irfan Habib,<sup>387</sup> Tanika Sarkar,<sup>388</sup> and Romila Thapar,<sup>389</sup> often confronting them in two ways: the first, through funding academic programs and academics that may be friendly to Hindu nationalism’s mythologized, glorious Hindu past. The second is the intimidation and harassment of academics (see Targeting Critics section below). The first strategy under scrutiny is Dharma Civilization Foundation’s efforts to establish academic programs through endowments at three different institutions of higher education.

Dharma Civilization Foundation (DCF)’s Sangh credentials are evidenced in its leaders’ affiliations, per tax documents:

- ❖ DCF Trustee<sup>390</sup> Vinod Ambastha was on the HSS board 2009-2015 and the President of the HSS 2016-2018.<sup>391</sup>
- ❖ DCF Trustee<sup>392</sup> Ved Nanda was HSS President from 2004-2018.<sup>393</sup>

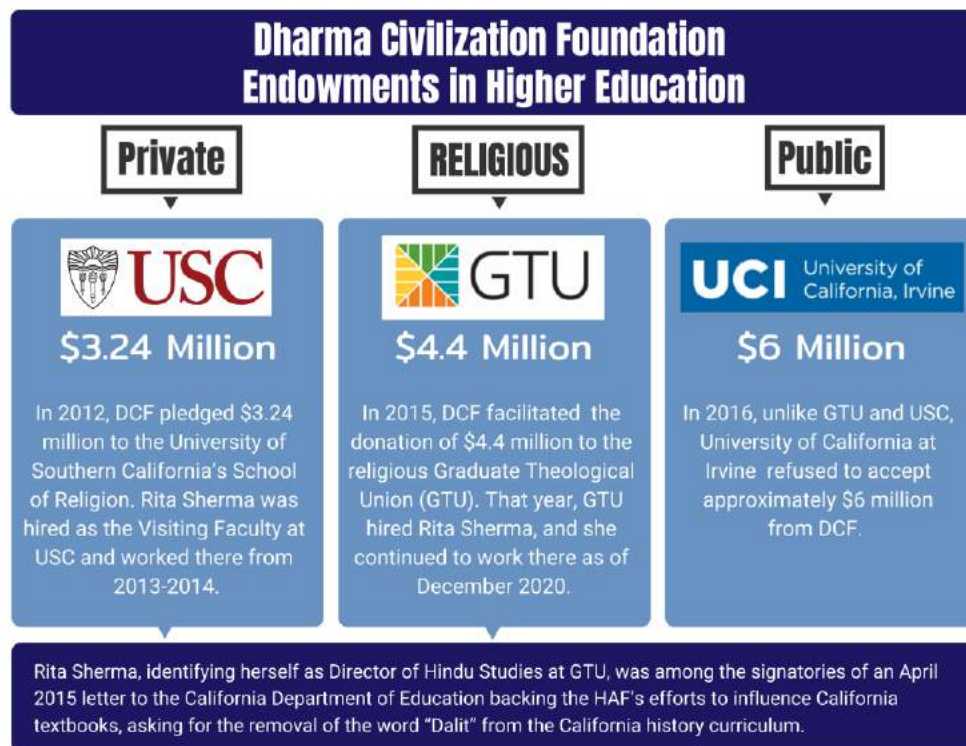
- ❖ DCF Trustee<sup>394</sup> Manohar Shinde was an office bearer of the HSS from at least 1998 to 2003.<sup>395</sup>

In 2012-2016, DCF reportedly attempted to grant at least \$13 million to three different types of educational institutions: private, public, and religious. In 2012, DCF pledged \$3.24 million to the School of Religion at the University of Southern California (USC),<sup>396</sup> per a USC website. The funds were reportedly for the creation of two positions, the Swami Vivekananda Visiting Faculty in Hindu Studies, and the Dharma Civilization Foundation Chair in Hindu Studies.<sup>397</sup> Rita Sherma, per her LinkedIn profile, was hired as Visiting Faculty at USC for 2013-2014.<sup>398</sup> In 2015, the DCF website announced the group facilitated<sup>399</sup> the donation of a \$4.4 million gift from philanthropists **Mira and Ajay Shingal** to the religious Graduate Theological Union (GTU) for the establishment of a Dharma Studies Center.<sup>400</sup> The GTU then hired Rita Sherma as Director of Hindu Studies and announced a partnership with

DCF to “develop a robust program in Hindu Studies” at GTU, per GTU’s website.<sup>401</sup> Sherma was reportedly still working at GTU as of early 2022.<sup>402</sup> While identifying herself as Director of Hindu Studies at GTU, Sherma was among the scholars who signed an April 2015 letter to the California Department of Education backing the HAF’s efforts to influence California textbooks, asking for the removal of the word “Dalit” from the California history curriculum,<sup>403</sup> a stance opposed by Dalit and pro-pluralism groups and South Asia scholars.<sup>404</sup>

In 2016, the University of California at Irvine, a public institution, refused approximately \$6 million from the DCF “after faculty and students raised questions about the group’s suspected ties to Hindu nationalists in India.”<sup>405</sup> *Orange County Register* reported that DCF chair **Ushakant Thakkar** and his spouse **Irma Thakkar** contributed \$1.5 million to the endowment,<sup>406</sup> and **Drs. Harvinder and Asha Sahota** and **Drs. Meera and Jasvant Modi** and their children contributed \$3 million.<sup>407</sup>







Figure 11. Dharma Civilization Foundation's Endowments, 2012-2016



**Uberoi Foundation's** multi-sector approach to influencing history writing in the United States is summarized in Figure 12, totaling more than \$561,000 between 2010-2016, per its tax documents and annual reports. Its link to the U.S. Sangh is direct: HSS president Ved Nanda (2004-2019)<sup>408</sup> also served as the Chair of the Board of Uberoi Foundation (2007-2019), where 2019 was the latest tax return available.<sup>409</sup> Uberoi Foundation's funding related to the California curriculum and textbook adoption processes appears to be a fragment of a larger funding pattern to influence history writing in a wide range of academic, para-academic and educational institutions:

1. **Textbook adoption processes at the state level in the United States.** Uberoi Foundation channeled at least \$142,000 to the Hindu American Foundation and at least \$95,000 to the Himalayan Academy between 2013-2016, according to Uberoi Foundation's tax returns.<sup>410</sup> Members of all three groups took part in the process to revise California public school history textbooks from 2014-2017.<sup>411, 412</sup>
2. **University Endowments.** In the context of a neoliberal university and diminishing government funding, wherein university

Figure 12. Uberoi Foundation's Funding Pattern in History Writing, 2010-2016

US Public School Curriculum / Textbooks	University Endowments	Teacher Training	Research Grants	Educational Materials	Funding Allied Groups
Inserting Hindutva histories into textbooks	Funding scholars who have or may support Hindutva interests	Implementing teacher training programs in alignment with Hindutva histories	Funding scholars who have or may support Hindutva priorities	Production of Hindutva education materials for the public	Grants to other Hindutva-aligned groups
					
Hindu American Foundation Samir Kalra Suhag Shukla et al 2012-2016	Loyola Marymount University Christopher Key Chapple 2013-2016	California State University - Long Beach Shiva Bajpai & Tim Keirn 2012-2016	San Diego State University Sthaneshwar Timalsina & possibly others 2010-2012	Himalayan Academy Acharya Arumuganatha-swami & possibly others 2013-2016	Hindu University of America Ram Agarwal Indira Walia et al 2012-2016
\$142,000	\$125,000	\$88,000	\$68,000	\$95,000	\$43,300
Public campaigns; Director of Education & Curriculum Reform	Master of Arts in Yoga Studies; Centers for Sikh and Jain Studies	TeachIndia! Teacher Training	Research on scholars and writings in "Dharmic traditions"	Hinduism documentary series	Research and Teacher Training

administrators are assessed based on the funds they can secure, universities and faculty may find it harder to turn away such funds. Per tax records, Uberoi Foundation has allocated grants of at least \$125,000 to Loyola Marymount University from 2013-2016, toward a Yoga Studies program and Centers for Jain and Sikh Studies that would be guided by, or have some connection to, Professor Christopher Key Chapple (citations in Table 6). The effects of this funding in relation to Hindu nationalist priorities is another area for further investigation.

3. **Teacher training.** Professor Shiva Bajpai, one of the key Uberoi Foundation representatives in the California curriculum revision process, was a leader of a teacher training program called the TeachIndia! Project at California State University, Long Beach. This project received at least \$88,000 from Uberoi Foundation, per Uberoi's tax returns.<sup>413</sup>
4. **Research grants.** Uberoi Foundation also offered research grants. In this case, at least \$68,000 was allocated to San Diego State University for research, including one project for constructing a database of information on "scholars working in the four Dharma traditions of Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism."<sup>414</sup> According to the Uberoi Foundation annual reports, an individual named in connection with the Uberoi grants was Sthaneshwar Timalina,<sup>415</sup> whom the

Uberoi Foundation later recommended to serve as an appointed academic consultant for the California Department of Education's textbook revision process.<sup>416</sup>

5. **Popular history, or history for public consumption.** Per tax filings, Uberoi Foundation allocated at least \$95,000 from 2013-2016 to the Hawaii-based Himalayan Academy to create a documentary series on the history of India.<sup>417</sup> The funds were received by Acharya Arumuganathaswami, who was one of the representatives of Uberoi Foundation in the California textbook revision process.<sup>418</sup>
6. **Other Hindutva education-related allies.** Per 2012-2016 tax records, Uberoi Foundation granted \$43,300 to the **Hindu University of America**,<sup>419</sup> a project of the VHP of America.<sup>420</sup> The school awards graduate-level degrees, though as of 2021 it did not have accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the accreditation body for higher education institutions in Florida.<sup>421</sup>

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*A central plank of official Hinduism in the United States consists of articulating and disseminating an alternative version of Indian history from that accepted by most professional historians.*  
*~A Place at the Multicultural Table,*  
 (Kurien, 2007)<sup>422</sup>

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**Table 6. Uberoi Foundation Grants Connected to Christopher Key Chapple, 2013-2016**

Year	Amount	Project
2013	\$10,000	Scholarship for students seeking a Master of Arts in Yoga Studies <sup>423</sup>
2014	\$17,500	"Master's of Arts in Yoga Studies" <sup>424</sup>
2015	\$35,000	"Creation of Center(s) for Sikh and Jain Studies" <sup>425</sup>
2015	\$15,000	"International Summer School for Jain Studies" <sup>426</sup>
2015	\$7,500	"Master of Arts in Yoga Studies" <sup>427</sup>
2016	\$25,000	"Professorship of Jain and Sikh Studies" <sup>428</sup>
2016	\$10,000	"International Summer School for Jain Studies" <sup>429</sup>
2016	\$5,000	"Study of Dharma Traditions" Scholarship Fund <sup>430</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$125,000</b>	



### Targeting Critics

As journalists, civil society groups, and U.S. government bodies reported a context of rising Hindu nationalist mob and vigilante violence in India,<sup>431, 432</sup> between 2013 and 2017, there were four high-profile assassinations of public figures: Narendra Dabholkar,<sup>433</sup> M. M. Kalburgi, Gauri Lankesh, and Govind Pansare,<sup>434</sup> all critics of Hindutva.<sup>435</sup> Per news media reporting, the investigation has resulted in the arrest of at least six persons, some connected to the Hindu right-wing group Sanathan Sansthan as of 2018,<sup>436</sup> but the case appears to be still ongoing. The threat of violence against certain scholars is great enough that Romila Thapar, the foremost scholar on ancient Indian history, had to deliver a 2015 lecture in Mumbai under police protection.<sup>437</sup>

Physical violence and threats of physical violence by Hindu nationalists are less common in the United States, but still present. In 2018, *The Quint* reported that anti-Hindutva protesters disrupted the 2018 World Hindu Congress (WHC), a large Chicago Sangh event featuring a keynote speech by the head of the RSS, Mohan Bhagwat.<sup>438</sup> At the time, some WHC participants reportedly surrounded the protesters.<sup>439</sup> The protesters, composed largely of young women, later reported in a public statement: “They choked, kicked, and spat on us,”<sup>440</sup> and global OFBJP convenor<sup>441</sup> Vijay Jolly reportedly shouted at the scene, “We should have bashed them up” about the protesters.<sup>442</sup>

#### Work-related harassment

More prevalent in the U.S. are online and work-related forms of harassment. As reported in the 2014 *Hindu Nationalism in the United States* report, large-scale hate mail campaigns, death and rape threats, and smear campaigns against academics by pro-Hindutva online accounts and activists have been ongoing at least since the early 2000s,<sup>443</sup> and such campaigns have spread across the disciplines that focus on South Asia. In 2014, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported anecdotal confirmation for the chilling effect that this culture

has had in U.S. academia, including scholars who “quietly changed the focus of their research [connected to India] to less-contentious questions.”<sup>444</sup>

At a September 2019 rally in New York protesting Narendra Modi and Hindutva, Rutgers historian Audrey Truschke stated that “early Hindutva espousers openly admired Hitler. They praised Hitler’s treatment of the Jewish people in Germany as a good model for dealing with India’s Muslim minority,” which is a matter of historical record.<sup>445, 446</sup> She also called the communications shutdown in Kashmir a “human rights disaster” and warned of “rising fascism in India.”<sup>447</sup> Shortly after her statements, two petitions were launched against her, gaining thousands of signatories. One (reaching 16,000+ signatures) called her statements “propaganda and lies against Hindus”<sup>448</sup> while another (reaching 20,000+ signatures) requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to revoke Truschke’s visa to India.<sup>449</sup> In October 2019, *Newsweek* magazine reported that Rutgers University stood by Truschke while noting that she “had a long track record of welcoming ‘reasoned debate.’”<sup>450</sup> Her experiences appeared similar those of Harvard Professor Michael Witzel in 2005 when he was among the faculty that challenged the Sangh efforts to insert Hindu nationalist histories into California textbooks in 2005-2006. The *Harvard Crimson* reported that Witzel also experienced a petition and letter writing campaigns aimed at Harvard University, described by Witzel’s colleague Steve Farmer as a “highly coordinated smear campaign -- uglier and on a bigger scale than any [they had] experienced before.”<sup>451, 452</sup>

Many journalists and academics connected to South Asia, especially women, have also spoken openly of the intimidation and harassment they experience from anonymous online mobs, including rape and death threats, noting that the virtual mob members have often been fans of Prime Minister Narendra Modi; Modi has also appeared to embolden some online accounts by following them on social media.<sup>453, 454, 455</sup> The magnitude of the harassment and level of physical threat against journalists and activists have been

intense enough that Reporters Without Borders took note publicly<sup>456</sup> and United Nations Special Rapporteurs wrote to the Indian government in concern for the safety and freedom of speech of women journalists, specifically Rana Ayyub<sup>457</sup> and Swati Chaturvedi<sup>458</sup> in 2018, after the assassination of journalist Gauri Lankesh in 2017. Such threats and violent acts in India also have chilling impacts on scholars and activists outside of India.

The waves of online and offline harassment apparently are often informed by Sangh leaders or websites, such as an “India Facts” page listing academics and activists Angana Chatterji, John Dayal, Meera Nanda, Vinay Lal, Martha Nussbaum, Cedric Prakash, Vijay Prashad, and Romila Thapar, as “anti-India intellectuals,”<sup>459</sup> or in the form of entire books on persons identified as those who are “Breaking India,” per Rajiv Malhotra’s 2012 book.<sup>460</sup> The HAF’s response to the 2014 *Hindu Nationalism in the United States* report, as well, name checked and disparaged a long list of activists and organizations, none of whom authored the report.<sup>461, 462</sup>

Multiple persons have identified Rajiv Malhotra, the head of **Infinity Foundation**, as an enabler of harassment and intimidation of scholars. Law and ethics professor Martha Nussbaum described Malhotra’s attacks against scholars as “sarcastic and intemperate... [showing] little concern about factual accuracy,” and though he did not overtly encourage violence, his “irresponsible characterizations of other people’s work have done much to foster a climate in which such threats can be made.”<sup>463, 464</sup> The phenomenon of hostility represented by Malhotra and the accompanying chill of academic freedom was common enough that in December 2004 there was a conference of religious and South Asia studies scholars “whose work had been targeted by an increasing number of censorship campaigns from those who purported to find ‘defamation’ or ‘blasphemy’ in their writings.”<sup>465</sup>

The force behind Malhotra’s words comes in part from the Infinity Foundation’s grantmaking. From 1997 to 2011, according to tax records, Infinity Foundation focused its donations to institutions of higher education, including

prominent universities: Columbia University, Harvard University, Louisiana State University, Loyola Marymount University, McGill University, Princeton University, Rutgers University, Tulane University, University of California, Santa Barbara, University of Hawaii, and University of Washington.<sup>466</sup>

This culture of targeting scholars appears to have official sanction in India, where Rajiv Malhotra was reportedly received with approval by political leaders. Infinity Foundation’s 2017 Annual Report noted his in-person meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath,<sup>467</sup> both high-level BJP politicians.<sup>468</sup>

Malhotra’s history did not appear to deter Uberoi Foundation from giving approximately \$40,000 in grants to him between 2011 and 2015, according to the Uberoi Foundation’s annual reports.<sup>469</sup> Nor did it stop Uberoi Foundation from featuring him as a speaker at its annual Experts Meetings multiple times,<sup>470</sup> indicating the Foundation’s indifference to, or perhaps approval of, the patterns of hostilities against scholars that he has apparently promoted.

Through its grantmaking, Uberoi Foundation appears to be a part of the infrastructure of this culture of hostility, as is the same case with Infinity Foundation donors. In 2019, the organization received \$376,815 in donations, with major individual donors contributing between \$5,000 to \$70,000 each, per its tax return (see Table 13).<sup>471</sup>

In July 2021, North America-based South Asia Scholar Activist Collective created a “Hindutva Harassment Field Manual” to provide resources to defend targets of Hindu nationalist harassment and to educate allies and others about the phenomenon.<sup>472</sup>

### *Use of Lawsuits and Subpoenas*

In India, Hindu nationalists have appeared to weaponize Indian criminal law on defamation to target scholars that challenge Hindu nationalist's mythologized version of history. According to *The Caravan*, in 2011, the leader of the RSS-affiliated group **Shiksha Bachao Andolan Samiti**, Dina Nath Batra, reportedly filed a civil lawsuit against the publisher Penguin Books India, targeting Wendy Doniger's 2009 book *The Hindus: An Alternative History*.<sup>473</sup> According to Doniger, the book sought to "[tell] a story [about Hinduism] that incorporates the narratives of and about alternative people...people of other religions, or cultures, or castes, or species (animals), or gender (women)," to illustrate their contributions to Hinduism.<sup>474</sup> It is a text different from dominant narratives in India, telling "a story of Hinduism that's been suppressed and was increasingly hard to find in the media and textbooks."<sup>475</sup> Though the Dina Nath Batra civil lawsuit took place in India, it had a diasporic component—it was reportedly financially supported by an Atlanta-based group of individuals.<sup>476</sup> While Rajiv Malhotra claimed distance from the Atlanta group and the lawsuit in particular, *The Caravan* magazine reported in 2014 that "as far as Batra and his [group] was concerned, Malhotra is part of the organization that instigated and funded the legal case against Doniger."<sup>477</sup> Further indicating some kind of collaboration between Malhotra and Batra is that the Infinity Foundation's 2012 tax return documents a July 2011 in-person meeting between Malhotra and Dina Nath Batra in India, though the filing does not specify the subject of their meeting.<sup>478</sup>

A significant part of the arsenal against Penguin in India was criminal law, including section 295A in the Indian Penal Code, which held as a crime an act "maliciously insulting the religion or the religious beliefs of any class," empowering hurt Hindu sentiments with legal force.<sup>479</sup> *The Caravan* reported that Batra's group had already filed a criminal charge against Penguin under this law in 2010 on Doniger's book, before the civil case in 2011.<sup>480</sup> In 2013, Dina Nath Batra's group reportedly filed a criminal charge of sedition against Penguin, which in part led to Penguin's

decision to settle, as the publisher could not fight these criminal cases.<sup>481</sup>

In 2014, Penguin settled the lawsuit and agreed to stop publishing the text in India and to destroy the existing books, resulting in international outcry over issues of censorship.<sup>482</sup> Doniger later reported that no books were actually destroyed and that sales of her book actually rose steeply outside of India, but the case remains in the social imagination as a success for Hindu nationalists flexing their powers in the legal realm against targets in the academic realm.<sup>483</sup> This precedent prompted an Indian writers group to express concern at the case's cascading effects, such as the emboldening of Hindu nationalists and the possibility of self-censorship among authors and publishers, which could "[narrow] India's intellectual discourse and significantly [undermine] freedom of expression."<sup>484</sup>

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In California, the lawsuit as a political tool functions differently, as the Hindu nationalists' social positioning in the United States is as a faction within the minority Hindu and Indo-American communities, and not as a dominant political faction with control over national and state government apparatuses. Though there were no criminal laws used against texts or scholars in California, a civil lawsuit could still make life difficult for scholars and education officials.

In 2006, the Sangh-affiliated Californian Parents for the Equalization of Educational Materials (CAPEEM) sued California state education officials in connection with their claim of "the derogatory and unequal treatment of the Hindu religion in social sciences textbooks" (case number 2:06-cv-00532-FCD-KJM), per its

complaint.<sup>485</sup> Though the judge did not find any anti-Hindu bias in the textbook content, he did rule there were procedural irregularities in relation to the California State Board of Education's treatment of the Hindu groups.<sup>486</sup> In the settlement, CAPEEM received \$175,000.<sup>487</sup>

A civil lawsuit achieves objectives in addition to winning settlement funds: it enables Hindu nationalist groups to perform a dramatic and muscular public action for its base and drains education officials and academics of resources over a small portion of California textbooks, further incentivizing the academics and officials to simply give in to the Sangh during the next round of textbook revisions.

In the 2017 round of California textbook revisions, after a group of South Asia faculty and pro-pluralism activists convinced California Board of Education to reject certain Hindu nationalist content from California textbooks, CAPEEM again sued California's state-level education officials, as well as local school district board members, per its complaint.<sup>488</sup> In this suit, the Hindutva group used its subpoena powers to successfully gain access to private e-mail communications of the South Asia faculty on the other side.

The suit, filed against California education officials for "unfair and unconstitutional treatment of Hinduism,"<sup>489</sup> also impacted Professors Jonathan Mark Kenoyer of the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Kamala Visweswaran of the University of California at San Diego, who were part of a faculty group that sought to challenge the Sangh's efforts to influence California textbooks.

During the suit, CAPEEM sought to make public certain subpoenaed documents from Kenoyer. As a testament to the level of attention this case received, lawyers from the offices of the Wisconsin and California Attorneys General, as well as those of the University of California, became involved in support of the South Asia faculty to keep their communications and materials sealed.<sup>490</sup> In 2019, CAPEEM's past practice of posting subpoenaed documents on its website was highlighted by lawyers representing

the University of California, expressing concern as to the "significant harm that would flow from allowing the private researcher communications at issue to become public documents. [...] That concern applies directly to CAPEEM, as evidenced by their website, which contains postings attempting to denigrate researchers that have views different from theirs."<sup>491</sup>

On August 16, 2018, Magistrate Judge Jacqueline Corley ordered that the Kenoyer communications and documents subpoenaed by CAPEEM remain confidential from the public, noting these legal tactics' pressures on faculty: "Professors Kenoyer and Visweswaran sufficiently demonstrate a risk of particularized harm if the documents at issue are publicly disclosed—the chilling of shared research among the Faculty Group... Thus, it is likely that Faculty Group members would refuse to participate in future curriculum reviews if their internal communications were made public."<sup>492</sup>

Ultimately, these communications were ordered unsealed by a different judge, Charles R. Breyer.<sup>493</sup> The unsealed information did not win the case for CAPEEM, as Judge Breyer subsequently issued a judgment against CAPEEM and in favor of the California education officials on February 28, 2019.<sup>494</sup> The case was appealed, and on September 3, 2020, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against CAPEEM, agreeing with the district court that the textbook content under contention "did not disparage or otherwise express hostility to Hinduism in violation of the Constitution."<sup>495</sup> On April 26, 2021, the United States Supreme Court refused to hear CAPEEM's appeal, ending the legal struggle.<sup>496</sup> Though CAPEEM lost, the lawsuit drained the resources and mental and emotional energies of education officials and academics, warning them against future challenges to the Sangh.

The next round of California textbook revisions begins in 2023.<sup>497</sup>



### **Challenging Caste-Based Protections in U.S. Universities**

Another Hindutva impact on U.S. institutions of higher education is its opposition to legal protections against caste discrimination.

Caste-based discrimination in education and workplaces is alive in the United States, per a 2016 report by the Dalit-led group Equality Labs.<sup>498</sup> After the Uberoi Foundation and HAF's efforts to remove the word "Dalit" from California's history textbooks in the 2014-2017 round of revisions,<sup>499</sup> the HAF reportedly went on to disparage or challenge the movement of caste-oppressed people for legal protections against caste discrimination and social exclusion.<sup>500</sup>

One of the Equality Lab report's recommendations is that "discrimination policies for students and staff [on college and university campuses] must be updated to specifically mention Caste,"<sup>501</sup> and movements at some institutions of higher education have begun to advocate for this change. Though the HAF's website states explicitly that the organization "oppose[s] all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including caste discrimination,"<sup>502</sup> its actions appear to run counter to that statement. Below are two examples in higher education.

In 2019, Brandeis University added caste as "a recognized and protected characteristic" in the school's anti-discrimination policy.<sup>503</sup> In 2020, a *Religion News Service* article reported that the HAF's Executive Director Suhag Shukla found Brandeis's new policy "deeply problematic," further adding that "caste identity is largely irrelevant in [Hindus'] day to day lives and interactions with one another,"<sup>504</sup> dismissing the findings of the Equality Labs report. According to the Pew Research Center 2016 study on Black and white people's perception of racial relations in the United States, those with privilege may have a vastly different perception of issues of discrimination and exclusion from those who are targets.<sup>505</sup>

The second example: after extensive work by caste-oppressed groups and their allies, the California State University (CSU) system added caste as a "protected category" to its anti-

discrimination policy in January 2022.<sup>506, 507</sup> The CSU system consists of 23 campuses and 485,000+ students as of 2020.<sup>508</sup> Its new policy follows similar changes at Brandeis, Harvard,<sup>509</sup> and the University of California at Davis.<sup>510</sup>

[As a point of clarification: the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems are distinct from each other. While both are funded in part by public monies,<sup>511, 512</sup> the UC system's ten campuses and higher-tuitioned education are more focused on academic and scientific research and the CSU's more affordable education is focused on building practical job skills and careers.<sup>513</sup>]

In response to the movement to add caste to the CSU's anti-discrimination policy, and to prevent caste from being added as a protected category to the collective bargaining agreement between the CSU and its faculty union, the HAF released a letter from 80 CSU faculty (without individual faculty names) against this change to the agreement, per reporting from *The Hindu*.<sup>514</sup> The letter stated that the new anti-discrimination policy would "unfairly target" (presumably caste-privileged) Indian and South Asian faculty. HAF also sent letters against the change to the CSU Board of Trustees and Chancellor.<sup>515</sup>

After a few hundred persons wrote in support of adding caste as a protected class to anti-discrimination protections, including faculty and others from trade groups and rights organizations, the CSU board of trustees voted unanimously on January 25, 2022, to add caste to the protected categories in the faculty collective bargaining agreement.<sup>516</sup>

The HAF's shifting stance on caste since 2005 and the conflict its 2011 report on caste brought among Hindu nationalist groups requires a much deeper exploration than is possible here.<sup>517</sup> As of 2021, its stance on caste in the United States appears to be: it stands with the caste-privileged, while continuing to claim targeting and victimhood for the caste-privileged.

## Hindu Nationalist Impact on U.S. Domestic & Foreign Policy

In mid-June 2018, *Firstpost* reported that India-based Hindu nationalist groups Bajrang Dal and VHP raised objections against the United States Central Intelligence Agency's annual publication, the *CIA World Factbook*, for labeling them as "militant religious organizations" in India's section of the *Factbook*.<sup>518</sup> A VHP representative informed the press, "We have asked the government of India to intervene and speak to us on the CIA report."<sup>519</sup> Within two weeks, the entire *Factbook* section on "political pressure groups" that contained references to the Bajrang Dal, VHP, and RSS was removed from the *Factbook*'s India page; according to Archive.org's website snapshots, the section disappeared between June 19<sup>520</sup> and June 25 of that year.<sup>521</sup>

Of significance is that the contested section on political pressure groups has been in the *CIA World Factbook* India page since at least 2007 (Figure 13). In 2007, the labeling of the Sangh Parivar groups was even more indicting: Bajrang Dal, VHP, and RSS were all designated "religious or militant/chauvinistic organizations."<sup>522</sup> In fact, Bajrang Dal and VHP were labeled as "militant religious organizations" and the RSS as a "nationalist organization" from 2016 and through the entirety of 2017, per Archive.org.<sup>523</sup>

As such, it appeared that by 2018 the Sangh Parivar had the power, likely through the Indian government apparatus, to shift the Trump Administration's CIA on the labeling of Sangh

Parivar groups on the *Factbook*'s website. It is difficult to identify another reason for the disappearance of that section in that time frame. Whether this influence was due to President Trump's friendly<sup>524</sup> relations with Prime Minister Narendra Modi or other factors, it appears that there are institutions and persons in the U.S. government apparatus that appear receptive to Hindu nationalist pressure.

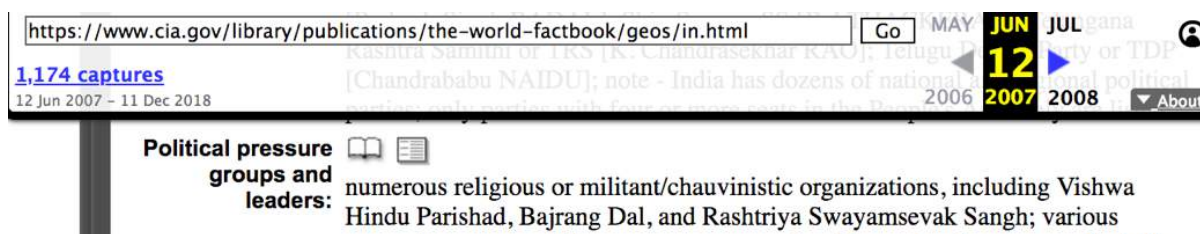
The United States political system receives a constellation of pressure efforts from different interests, including U.S.-based internal interest groups as well as from foreign powers. This section discusses three forms of Hindutva pressure that could be documented via publicly available materials: the first is in the form of the briefings and social campaigns carried out by non-profit advocacy groups like the Hindu American Foundation and the Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora (FIIDS); the second is campaign financing for U.S.-based politicians by individuals and HAF's sister organization Hindu American Political Action Committee; and the third is direct lobbying by the Indian government.

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*In 2007, the [CIA World Factbook] labeling of the Sangh Parivar groups was even more indicting: Bajrang Dal, VHP, and RSS were all designated "religious or militant/chauvinistic organizations."<sup>525</sup>*

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Figure 13. Screen Capture from India's Page in the CIA World Factbook, 2007



### ***HAF and FIIDS: Platforming and Amplifying Hindu Nationalism on Capitol Hill***

Some of HAF's Sangh credentials were laid out as early as 2013 by Coalition Against Genocide.<sup>526, 527</sup> Its further linkages with the Sangh include, per their websites and tax filings:

- ❖ The HAF has reportedly received at least \$142,000 from the HSS-affiliated Uberoi Foundation from 2012-2016 (Table 7).
- ❖ The Sangh-affiliated Bhutada Family Foundation (see section below on family foundations) has apparently given more than \$392,000 to Hindu American Foundation from 2006-2018.<sup>528</sup>
- ❖ HAF founder Mihir Meghani was once a member of the VHPA's National Governing Council, per the VHPA's website.<sup>529</sup>
- ❖ The HAF reportedly awarded the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) with the "Dharma Seva [Service] Award" in 2019.<sup>530</sup>
- ❖ HAF apparently facilitated the channeling of material aid to a VHP project in India, via the Pakistan Hindu Refugee Relief Program.<sup>531</sup>
- ❖ HAF reportedly partnered with Sangh-affiliated Sewa International in 2014 to send aid to a group in Pakistan.<sup>532</sup>

**Table 7. Uberoi Foundation Grants to Hindu American Foundation (HAF), 2012-2016**

Year	Amount
2012	\$17,000 <sup>533</sup>
2013	\$30,000 <sup>534</sup>
2014	\$35,000 <sup>535</sup>
2015	\$30,000 <sup>536</sup>
2016	\$30,000 <sup>537</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$142,000</b>

The Hindu American Foundation's connections with Hindu nationalism have largely been overlooked by Indian and Indo-American

press until recently. In 2020, an *Economic Times* article explicitly named Hindu American Foundation as "among the most active Hindutva organisations working in the US."<sup>538</sup>

According to its website, HAF reportedly organizes events on Capitol Hill,<sup>539</sup> lobbies individual politicians,<sup>540</sup> and issues public statements on U.S. and world events.<sup>541</sup> It publishes reports on human rights violations against Hindus in South Asia and educational materials on Hindu Americans and Hinduism.<sup>542</sup> The HAF's work, using the language of human rights and multiculturalism, has allowed it to gain platforms and partnerships with legitimate civil and human rights groups, such as the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, where the HAF is a coalition member.<sup>543</sup>

Similarly, the Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies (FIIDS) established itself as a think tank that reportedly holds speaker panels and conferences on security and conflict in Asia, also per its website.<sup>544</sup> Among the FIIDS leadership is Khanderao Kand,<sup>545</sup> at one time the National Public Relations Coordinator for the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh.<sup>546</sup>

According to its website, FIIDS provides a platform for BJP and Sangh figures, including Arun Jaitley,<sup>547</sup> who later became India's Finance Minister<sup>548</sup>; then-BJP president Rajnath Singh;<sup>549</sup> Ajit Doval,<sup>550</sup> the National Security Advisor<sup>551</sup> to Narendra Modi in 2020; and Ved Nanda, the President of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh.<sup>552</sup> Further research is needed to look at the effectiveness of such actions to influence the U.S. government.

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*The HAF's work, using the language of human rights and multiculturalism, has allowed it to gain platforms and partnerships with legitimate civil and human rights groups, such as the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.*

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The second form of political influence is campaign financing by political action committees and individuals.

### Hindu Nationalist Campaign Financing

According to the Federal Election Commission (FEC), U.S. political campaigns are prohibited from accepting contributions from foreign nationals, including those who are working as a “conduit or intermediary for foreign national contributions.”<sup>553</sup> In short, the Indian government and India-based Sangh groups are not permitted to contribute directly to U.S. political campaigns. U.S. citizens connected to India, however, are permitted to do so as individuals or through organizations called political action committees.

As a non-profit charity under Internal Revenue Code 501(c)3, the Hindu American Foundation cannot make donations to political campaigns, but its sister organization, the Hindu American Political Action Committee (HAPAC) has reportedly spent \$172,000+ toward influencing U.S. electoral politics from 2012-2020 (see Table 8).<sup>554</sup> HAF leaders Mihir Meghani, Nikhil Joshi, Sheetal R. Shah, and Rishi Bhutada all serve in leadership position in HAPAC (see Table 9), per both groups’ websites.

*The Hindu American Political Action Committee has reportedly disbursed \$172,000+ toward influencing U.S. electoral politics from 2012-2020.*

Where did this money go? According to news reporting and elections filings, recipients included Congressman and Presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard,<sup>555</sup> Congressmembers Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ed Royce, and Brad Sherman, as well as Congressional candidate Srinivas Rao Preston Kulkarni,<sup>556</sup> among others (see Table 10). The FEC also requires campaign contribution disclosures from all political campaigns for public office, including from individual donors and groups, which enables the public to have a more granular understanding of who and how much money is involved in funding and/or attempting to influence elected officials. Below is a table of reported HAPAC contribution to selected political campaigns, as well as the contributions of HAF leadership as individuals, including members of the Bhutada and Meghani families, per FEC filings.

**Table 8. HAPAC  
Total Disbursements, 2012-2020**

2-Year Periods	Amount
2019-2020	\$49,936.49 <sup>557</sup>
2017-2018	\$63,457.48 <sup>558</sup>
2015-2016	\$31,338.85 <sup>559</sup>
2013-2014	\$25,178.55 <sup>560</sup>
2011-2012	\$2,120.00 <sup>561</sup>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$172,031.37</b>

Source: U.S. Federal Election Commission’s campaign finance lookup<sup>562</sup>

**Table 9. Overlap in HAF and HAPAC Leadership, 2020**

Name	HAF	HAPAC
<b>Mihir Meghani</b>	Co-Founder <sup>563</sup>	Chair <sup>564</sup>
<b>Rakhi Israni</b>		Board Member <sup>565</sup>
<b>Nikhil Joshi</b>	Co-Founder <sup>566</sup>	Board Member <sup>567</sup>
<b>Sheetal R. Shah</b>	Managing Director & CFO <sup>568</sup>	Board Member <sup>569</sup>
<b>Rishi Bhutada</b>	Board member <sup>570</sup>	Treasurer <sup>571</sup>

Sources: Websites of HAF and HAPAC, 2020



Table 10. Selected Recipients of Sangh Campaign Financing, 2014-2020

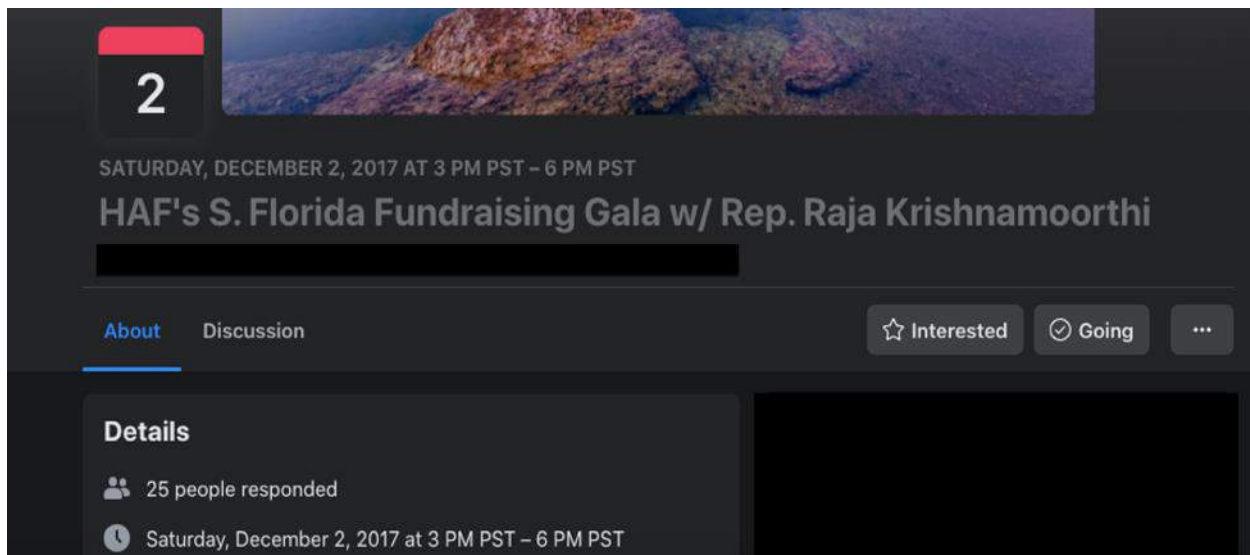
Name	HAPAC Endorsement (Selected)	HAPAC contributions <sup>572</sup>	Individual contributions from HAF leadership and families**	Total
Brad Sherman	2014 <sup>573</sup>	\$15,600 (2014-2019)	\$12,200 <sup>574</sup> (2019)	\$27,800 (2014-2019)
Ed Royce	2014 <sup>575</sup>	\$1,000 (2016)	\$250 <sup>576</sup> (2014)	\$1,250 (2014-2016)
Raja Krishnamoorthi	2020 <sup>577</sup>	\$30,000 (2015-2019)	\$87,152 <sup>578</sup> (2015-2020)	\$117,152 (2015-2020)
Srinivas Rao Preston Kulkarni	2020 <sup>579</sup>	\$22,500 (2018-2019)	\$72,851 <sup>580</sup> (2018-2020)	\$95,351 (2018-2020)
Tulsi Gabbard	2014 <sup>581</sup>	\$7,500 (2015-2017)	\$103,392 <sup>582</sup> (2014-2019)	\$110,892 (2014-2019)

Source: Federal Election Commission contributions lookup site.<sup>583</sup> For the “HAF leadership and families” column, the donations included are of: Arjun Bhagat, Kiran Bhutada, Ramesh Bhutada, Rishi Bhutada, Shraddha Bhutada, Nikhil Joshi, Rajiv Pandit, Abul Meghani, Jyoti Meghani, Mihir Meghani, Tanvi Meghani, Sheetal Shah, Aseem Shukla, and Suhag Shukla.

**\*\* Sangh credentials of the named persons in the “HAF leadership and families” column:**

- HAF leadership, per the HAF’s website: Arjun Bhagat, Rishi Bhutada, Nikhil Joshi, Rajiv Pandit, Sheetal Shah, Aseem Shukla, and Suhag Shukla.<sup>584</sup>
- Bhutada Family: Kiran Bhutada, Ramesh Bhutada, Rishi Bhutada, Shraddha Bhutada all reported the same Texas address in their campaign donations, according to 2020 FEC filings.<sup>585</sup>
- Meghani Family: Abul Meghani, Jyoti Meghani, Mihir Meghani, Tanvi Meghani all reported the same California address in their campaign donations, according to 2019-2020 FEC filings.<sup>586</sup>

Figure 14. Facebook Event for HAF's S. Florida Gala with Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi



Source: Facebook event page for the event<sup>587</sup>

What might be some effects of these contributions on U.S. politicians? Some indications can be found in the actions of Democratic Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi from Illinois, who received at least \$117,000 from HAPAC and via individual contributions from Sangh-affiliated individuals. Whether the campaign contributions are inducements, rewards, or something else, Congressman Krishnamoorthi's pattern of actions indicate some level of support and approval of the Sangh Parivar, including the India-based Sangh Parivar, an assessment shared by progressive organizations such as Chicago South Asians for Justice, which February 2020 stated, "This is why we are demanding that Raja Krishnamoorthi come clean and disavow his Hindu nationalist ties."<sup>588</sup>

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*Between 2015-2020 Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi reportedly received more than \$117,000 from Hindu American Political Action Committee and Sangh-affiliated individuals.*

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According to news reporting and the HAF website, Krishnamoorthi's apparent pattern of contributing to the mainstreaming and legitimization of Hindu nationalist interests in the U.S. includes:

- ❖ In 2017, he wrote to California's State Board of Education in support HAF and the Hindu Education Foundation's efforts to insert Hindu nationalist content into California textbooks.<sup>589</sup>
- ❖ He headlined or attended multiple HAF events and fundraisers, including in South Florida (2017),<sup>590</sup> Houston (2018),<sup>591</sup> Washington D.C. (2018,<sup>592</sup> 2019<sup>593</sup>).
- ❖ In September 2018, he attended the World Hindu Congress, a large conference featuring the head of the RSS, Mohan Bhagwat, despite immense pressure not to do so from activists.<sup>594</sup>
- ❖ Krishnamoorthi was the only Indo-American Congressman to attend the 2019 "Howdy Modi" event honoring Prime Minister

Narendra Modi, also attended by President Donald Trump and other U.S. politicians, including House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (Democrat) and Senators John Cornyn and Ted Cruz (Republicans).<sup>595, 596</sup>

- ❖ He attended a 2019 Chicago celebration for the founding of the RSS.<sup>597</sup>

### ***Hindu Nationalist Policy Goals in the U.S.***

While there is no clear evidence that the HAF and HAPAC are taking direct orders from the Government of India or India-based Sangh leadership, the HAF has been identified by some U.S. press as a "pro-India advocacy group."<sup>598</sup> This section examines three India-related issues, which would benefit from a more comprehensive review of Hindu nationalists' U.S. policy goals in the future (Table 11).

**House Resolution 417** (2013) "commend[ed] the United States Government for deny[ing] a United States visa to Narendra Modi on the grounds of religious freedom violations."<sup>599</sup> The U.S. State Department's ban on Narendra Modi was in connection with the 2002 anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat while he was Chief Minister.<sup>600</sup> According to news reporting, the BJP<sup>601</sup> and OFBJP<sup>602</sup> leadership both wished for the denial to be lifted, and HAF co-founder Aseem Shukla criticized the visa ban publicly, calling it "theatre of the absurd."<sup>603</sup> An *Outlook* article reported that the HAF had visited the office of every Congressional signatory of House Resolution 417, calling the resolution "biased and anti-Hindu."<sup>604</sup> HAF-supported<sup>605</sup> Congressman Tulsi Gabbard called the visa denial a "huge blunder."<sup>606</sup>

**Revising U.S. textbooks to include Hindu nationalist content** was a goal of HAF and other Sangh groups at least since 2005, per scholarly and news reporting.<sup>607, 608</sup> In the latest California textbook controversy in 2016-2017, Congresspersons Tulsi Gabbard and Raja Krishnamoorthi backed the HAF, per the HAF website.<sup>609</sup>

After the Government of India cut off communications in Kashmir in August 2019 and carried out night raids and mass detentions of Kashmiris, including of children,<sup>610</sup> **House Resolution 745** “[urged] India to end the restrictions on communications and mass detentions in Jammu and Kashmir... and preserve religious freedom for all residents.”<sup>611</sup> Both the Indian government<sup>612</sup> and the HAF<sup>613</sup> considered

Kashmir an “internal matter” to India, and *The Intercept* reported that the HAF later claimed credit for mobilizing people to contact Congress to stall the progress of the resolution.<sup>614</sup> Neither Congresspersons Gabbard nor Krishnamoorthi supported this resolution.<sup>615</sup>

**Table 11. Political Stances of the HAF, BJP, and Tulsi Gabbard and Raja Krishnamoorthi on 3 Issues**

	Summary	BJP	HAF	Gabbard	Krishnamoorthi
<b>House Resolution 417 (2013)</b>	“Commends the U.S. government for ...deny[ing] a U.S. visa to Narendra Modi.” <sup>616</sup>	BJP president wished to appeal to US for visa for Modi. <sup>617</sup> OFBJP criticized the visa denial to Modi. <sup>618</sup>	HAF reportedly visited the office of every Congressional signatory of House Resolution 417, calling the resolution “biased and anti-Hindu.” <sup>619</sup>  Anti HR 417 <sup>620</sup>	Gabbard once called denying to a visa to Modi was a “huge blunder.” <sup>621</sup>  Anti HR 417 <sup>622</sup>	Not in office.
<b>Inserting Hindu nationalist histories into U.S. textbooks</b>	Support or reject Hindu nationalist content in U.S. textbooks.	Continued support for Hindu nationalist textbook content in India. <sup>623</sup>	Supported Hindu nationalist content in U.S. textbooks. <sup>624, 625</sup>	Supported Hindu nationalist content in U.S. textbooks. <sup>626</sup>	Supported Hindu nationalist content in U.S. textbooks. <sup>627</sup>
<b>House Resolution 745 (2019)</b>	“Urging ... India to end the restrictions on communications and mass detentions in Jammu and Kashmir... and preserve religious freedom for all residents.” <sup>628</sup>	Kashmir is an “internal matter” to India. <sup>629</sup>	Kashmir is an “internal matter” to India. <sup>630</sup>  Anti HR 745 <sup>631</sup>	Did not co-sponsor <sup>632</sup>	Did not co-sponsor <sup>633</sup>

A snapshot of HAF's alignment with the BJP government's interests is HAF's amplification of the Indian government's talking points in defense of alleged Indian state violence against Kashmiris in India-occupied Kashmir (see Figure 15 for a graphical summary). On October 22, 2019, the U.S. House of Representative's Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs held a hearing on human rights violation in South Asia, with a panel focusing on India-occupied Kashmir.<sup>634</sup> At the hearing, scholars Angana Chatterji and Nitasha Kaul highlighted the Indian government forces' human rights violations in the region:

**Angana Chatterji:** "In Shopian, local community members worry about detentions, warrantless arrests and custodial torture. Community members state how cries of pain of a torture victim were broadcasted via a mosque's speaker system, and how government forces raided their home and destroyed property and mixed food with kerosene."<sup>635</sup>

**Nitasha Kaul:** "Newspapers have reported about the general environment of militarisation, torture, beatings, pellet injuries, and fear. Thousands of young persons including children have been arrested, and some of them sent to prisons in far off places of India preventing their parents from visiting them without considerable hardship. From the government's own estimate, the youngest person detained is 9 years old."<sup>636</sup>

On the same panel, journalist Aarti Tikoo Singh, in her prepared statement, placed the blame of human rights violations on Pakistan and militant groups, asking the U.S. to "[stop], directly or indirectly, helping the cruel, brutal, and unjust Islamic Republic of Pakistan in causing relentless violence against ordinary Kashmiri Muslims and other communities in India."<sup>637</sup>

During the hearing, Congresswoman Ilhan Omar rejected Aarti Tikoo Singh's narrative, stating, "In your version of the story, the only problems in Kashmir are caused by what you call militants, the only people protesting to break away from India; and are all nefariously backed by

Pakistan. You also make the incredibly dubious claim that the Indian government's crackdown in Kashmir is good for human rights. If it was good for human rights, Ms. Singh, it wouldn't be happening in secret."<sup>638</sup>

Singh's statements aligned very closely to the narrative of the Indian government, as observed by Markandey Katju, a former Indian Supreme Court Justice and ex-chair of the Press Council of India. Katju had read her statement and wrote in an online news portal: "I regret to say that Aarti Tikoo Singh has acted more as a spokesperson of the Government of India rather than as an objective, neutral and fair journalist in her address to the US Congress."<sup>639</sup>

Two days after the hearing, the Hindu American Foundation hosted Aarti Tikoo Singh at Washington's National Press Club and provided her narrative further amplification and legitimacy, per the HAF website.<sup>640</sup> The HAF's headline for its press release was Aarti Tikoo Singh was "[countering] false reporting on Kashmir"<sup>641</sup> while the Organization for the Minorities of India, reported the same event as giving a platform to an "Islamophobia-Denying journalist."<sup>642</sup> In HAF's press release on the event, Executive Director Suhag Shukla stated: "The Hindu American Foundation is delighted to host an accomplished journalist like Aarti Tikoo Singh here in the United States... Today, she offered a powerful voice for the truth to the Western media narrative on Kashmir that has, unfortunately, gotten so many things wrong."<sup>643</sup>

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*"I regret to say that Aarti Tikoo Singh has acted more as a spokesperson of the Government of India rather than as an objective, neutral and fair journalist in her address to the US Congress."*

*~ Markandey Katju, former Supreme Court Justice and former chair of the Press Council of India<sup>644</sup>*

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The third form of pressure on U.S. officials is through direct lobbying by the Indian Government.



Figure 15. HAF's Alignment with the Government of India on Kashmir



### *Government of India's Lobbyists in the United States*

If a U.S. group seeks to act in the interest of a foreign organization or government, it must register with the U.S. government, and such groups are required to document all communications to all other persons connected to the registrant's work, which are expected to be made available to the Justice Department during an inspection.<sup>645</sup> Per news reporting and government filing, in late August 2020, the Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party officially registered with the Justice Department as a foreign agent under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, stating explicitly OFBJP is an agent of India-based Bharatiya Janata Party.<sup>646,647</sup> It is unclear exactly what event triggered OFBJP's sudden registration as a foreign agent; the U.S.-based group's website has been in existence at least since 1998,<sup>648</sup> and as recently as January 2020, it stated that OFBJP was not "an overseas wing" of the BJP.<sup>649</sup> The organization has held large social events across the U.S.<sup>650</sup> and had contact with U.S.

elected officials, including with Congressmember Tulsi Gabbard in 2014, per news reporting.<sup>651</sup>

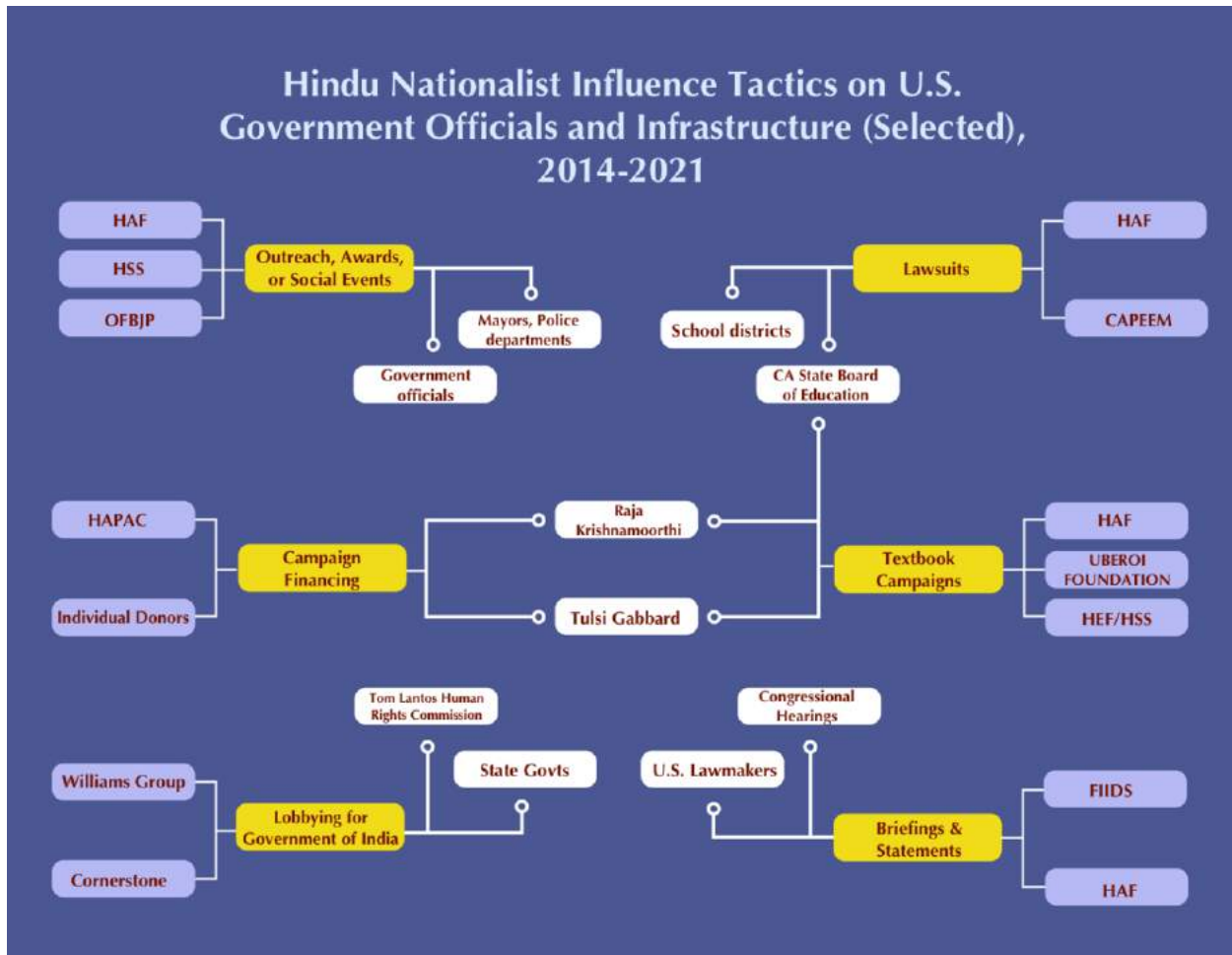
Meanwhile, the Indian government, like governments of other countries, has employed U.S.-based lobbyists to advocate for its interests in the United States, as reported by *The Intercept*.<sup>652</sup> Under U.S. transparency laws, lobbyists for foreign governments must register with the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the filings are open to public review through the DOJ website or the watchdog website OpenSecrets.org. Below in Table 12 is a non-comprehensive list of firms that have registered with the Department of Justice as agents of the Government of India in the last decade; on average, the Government of India paid these lobbyists between approximately \$15,000/month to about \$58,000/month to work on India-related matters connected to U.S. policy and academic institutions, according to filings.

See Figure 16 for a graphical summary of Hindu nationalist tactics to influence U.S. government officials.

**Table 12. Government of India's Lobbyists in the U.S. (Selected), 2010-2020**

U.S.-based Lobbying group	Targets or areas of influence	Duration of contract(s)	Amount of money pledged by Indian Government
<b>The Williams Group</b>	"[Policy] matters before the U.S. Government, the U.S. Congress, and select state governments, as well as academic institutions and think-tanks." <sup>653</sup>	October 1, 2020-March 31, 2021	\$90,000 <sup>654</sup>
<b>BGR Group (Since 2005)</b>	Likely Republicans <sup>655</sup>	January 1, 2020- March 31, 2020  April 1, 2020-September 30, 2020	\$175,000 <sup>656</sup>  \$350,000 <sup>657</sup>
<b>DiNino Associates, LLC<sup>658</sup> and Cornerstone Government Affairs<sup>659</sup></b>	Democrats, including members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. <sup>660</sup>	December 1, 2019-February 29, 2020  June 1-August 31, 2020	\$120,000 <sup>661</sup>  \$120,000 <sup>662</sup>
<b>Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck</b>	"Policy matters before the U.S. Government, the U.S. Congress, and select state governments, as well as academic institutions and think tanks." <sup>663</sup>	November 20, 2017-May 19, 2018	\$350,000 <sup>664</sup>
<b>Podesta Group<sup>665</sup> (2010-2017)</b>			\$4.7 million <sup>666</sup>

Figure 16. Hindu Nationalist Influence Tactics on the U.S. Officials (Selected), 2014-2021



CAPEEM = California Parents for the Equalization of Education Materials; FIIDS = Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies; HAF = Hindu American Foundation; HAPAC = Hindu American Political Action Committee; HEF = Hindu Education Foundation; HSS = Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh; OFBJP = Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The information here is discussed in depth throughout this report.

**For elaboration on each tactic, please see the following pages in this report:**

1. Outreach, Awards, or Social Events: See pages 17, 41, and 46.
2. Campaign Financing: See pages 35-37.
3. Lobbying for Government of India: See page 41.
4. Lawsuits: See pages 30-31.
5. Textbook Campaigns: See pages 23-24, and 38.
6. Briefings & Public Statements: See page 34.

## Where Does the Money Come From?

Major sources of funds for the U.S. Sangh non-profit groups discussed in this report appear to be: philanthropists, traditional fundraising channels, family foundations, and U.S. taxpayers.

### *Philanthropists*

Per news reporting and the Dharma Civilization Foundation's website, some examples of major donors connected to the DCF include: **Mira and Ajay Shingal**,<sup>667</sup> **Irma and Ushakant Thakkar**,<sup>669</sup> **Drs. Harvinder and Asha Sahota** and **Drs. Meera and Jasvant Modi**.<sup>670</sup> As well, the Infinity Foundation's 2019 tax returns made available the names of its major donors, offering a view into the group's financial landscape (see Table 13). Wealthy diasporic philanthropists' contributions to Sangh groups do not necessarily point to a donor's ideological allegiance to Hindu nationalism; their motivations and path to funding Hindu nationalist projects would benefit from further study.

### *Traditional Fundraising Channels*

Sangh charitable groups operate like other charitable groups, using traditional forms of fundraising. Per its website, HAF has held galas across the U.S.,<sup>671</sup> <sup>672</sup> <sup>673</sup> and Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA and Sewa international have held well-publicized fundraisers.<sup>674</sup> <sup>675</sup> <sup>676</sup> Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation's website also encourages its potential donors to use other traditional channels: e.g. corporate matching gifts, volunteer grants, corporate grants, and in-kind donations.<sup>677</sup>

### *Family Foundations*

Wealthy Sangh-affiliated families have also funded Sangh groups via family foundations in diaspora. Per its tax filings, the **Bhutada Family Foundation** officers include Ramesh Bhutada, board member of Sewa International,<sup>678</sup> Ramesh Bhutada's spouse Kiran Bhutada, and their son

Rishi Bhutada,<sup>679</sup> who is on the board Hindu American Foundation.<sup>680</sup> <sup>681</sup> The **Puran Devi Aggarwal Family Foundation** is headed by Braham R. Aggarwal, a one-time VHPA office-bearer, according to Florida state filings.<sup>682</sup>

According to tax records, these two family foundations' grants to selected Sangh-affiliated groups from 2006-2018 totaled approximately \$2 million (see Table 14), with \$392,000+ going to HAF from the Bhutada Family Foundation from 2006-2018.<sup>683</sup>

Figure 17 is a graphical summary of a few of the reported funding and influence pathways of Hindu American Foundation.

### *U.S. Government & Taxpayers*

Many Hindu nationalist organizations named in this report have received "tax exempt" status under the U.S. tax code section 501(c)3, meaning they may be exempt from paying certain types of federal taxes.<sup>684</sup> As well, donors to tax exempt groups can "write off" or deduct charitable donations from the donors' own taxable income, in so doing reduce the amount of tax they owe.<sup>685</sup>

In April 2021, *Al Jazeera* reported that five U.S.-based groups—Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA, HAF, Infinity Foundation, Sewa International, and VHPA—received approximately \$833,000 of U.S. federal COVID relief funds, via the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Advance, Disaster Assistance Loan, and Paycheck Protection Program under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act.<sup>686</sup> Hindus for Human Rights co-founder Sunita Viswanath stated with concern that the groups named in the article "are sympathetic to the Hindu supremacist ideology."<sup>687</sup> It was reported that HAF filed a defamation suit in May 2021 against activists in connection with the article, which the article author Raqib Naik has characterized as a SLAPP suit—a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation lawsuit—deployed to silence critics.<sup>688</sup> The HAF's attorneys in the suit is from Harder LLP, per HAF's website.<sup>689</sup>



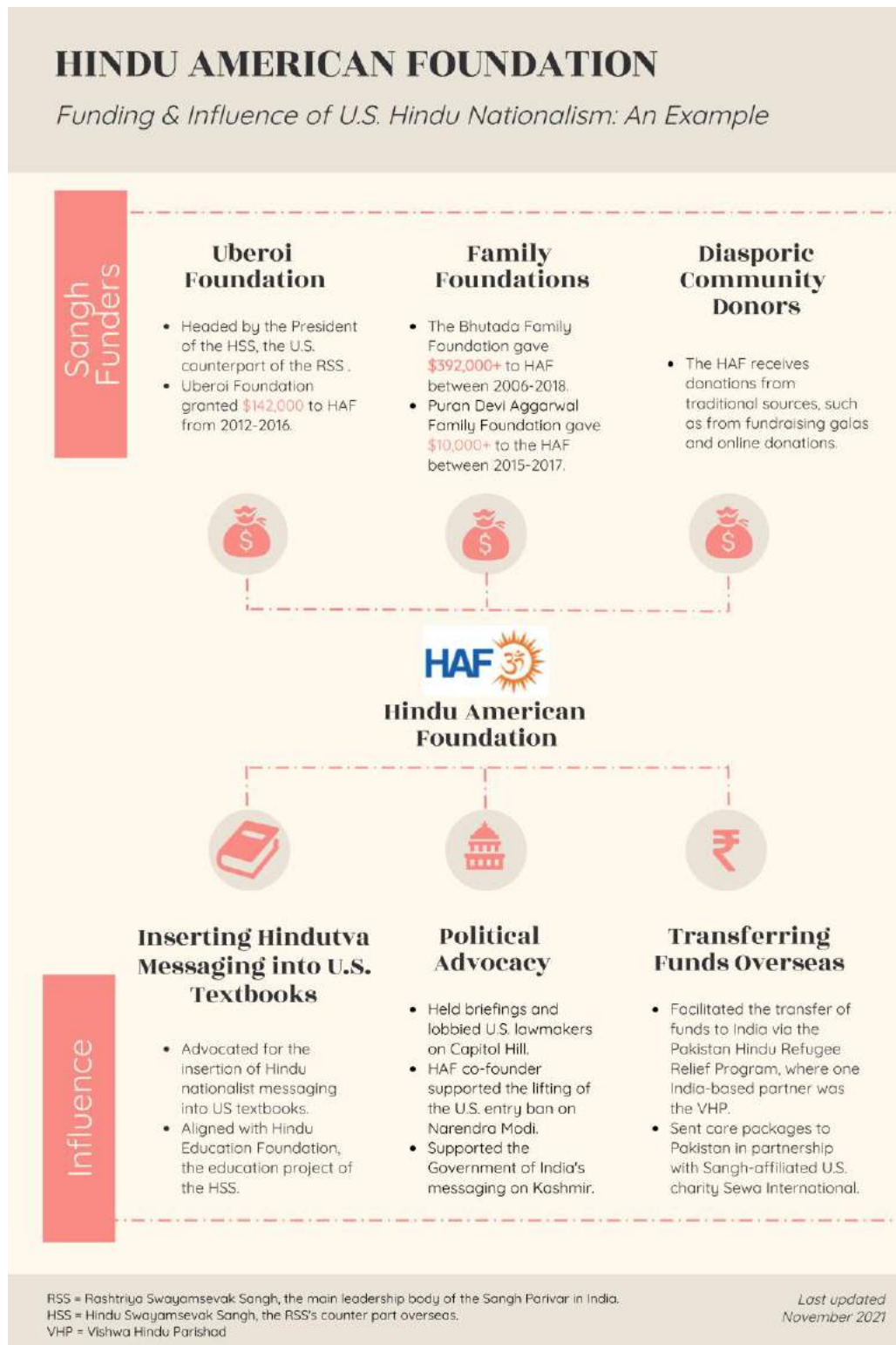
**Table 13. Infinity Foundation's Major Donors, 2019<sup>690</sup>**

	<b>Donor</b>	<b>Amount</b>
<b>1</b>	Shankar Iyer	\$70,000
<b>2</b>	Mahesh Krishnamurthy	\$25,000
<b>3</b>	Sashi Kejriwal	\$25,000
<b>4</b>	Shrita Charitable Foundation	\$25,000
<b>5</b>	Kamala Kant Vijai	\$15,000
<b>6</b>	Prashant Banerjee	\$15,000
<b>7</b>	Rama Shankar	\$10,001
<b>8</b>	Phanidhar Kandala	\$5,808
<b>9</b>	Priti Chatter	\$5,000
<b>10</b>	Jayasree Reddi	\$5,000
<b>11</b>	DB Chandora	\$5,000

**Table 14. Two Family Foundations' Grants to Sangh Affiliates, 2006-2018**

	<b>Bhutada Family Foundation<sup>691</sup></b>	<b>Puran Devi Aggarwal Family Foundation<sup>692</sup></b>
<b>Ekal Vidylaya Foundation of USA</b>	\$152,565	\$40,451
<b>Hindu American Foundation</b>	\$362,241	\$10,404
<b>Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh</b>	\$304,605	\$41,103
<b>Param Shakti Peeth</b>	\$94,000	\$153,200
<b>PYP Yog Foundation</b>	\$239,275	\$5,000
<b>Sewa International</b>	\$517,095	\$20,000
<b>Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America</b>	\$43,313	\$2,500
<b>Total</b>	\$1,743,094	\$272,658

Figure 17. HAF: Funding and Influence of the U.S. Sangh



## **Hindu Nationalism and the Biden-Harris Administration**

In 2008, it was reported that the selection of Sonal Shah, Ramesh Shah's daughter, to be on then-President-elect Barack Obama's Transition Team sparked denunciations from progressive groups,<sup>693, 694</sup> due to her connection to the VHPA.<sup>695</sup> International media reported on VHP's violence since at least 1992 with the destruction of the Babri Mosque.<sup>696</sup> *Hindustan Times* later reported Shah was eventually appointed in 2009 as the head of the Social Innovation Office in the Obama-Biden White House.<sup>697</sup> The Sonal Shah controversy indicated that affiliation with Hindu nationalism held some liability in U.S. politics, though her later appointment illustrated the limited nature of that liability. In 2014, President Obama lifted the State Department's nine-year entry ban on Narendra Modi, reportedly in part to facilitate India's entry into the Paris Accord on climate change, and in part to "restrain some of Modi's nationalist instincts," according to former Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes.<sup>698</sup> After the lifting the ban, however, Modi and Hindu nationalism were mainstreamed on the world stage. A clue to the Biden-Harris administration's relationship to Hindu nationalism is the possible appointment of Sangh-affiliated individuals as officials in the administration.

This section provides brief notes on four persons with Hindu nationalist affiliations in, or close to, the Biden-Harris administration. The administration of Donald Trump (2017-2021) and its connections to Narendra Modi and Hindu nationalism are not covered here.

### **Sonal Shah**

Despite her experiences in 2008, Sonal Shah has continued to support Sangh-affiliated fundraisers, specifically those of Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA (2018)<sup>699</sup> and Sewa International (2015), per reporting and Ekal's website.<sup>700</sup> In July 2019, presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg chose Shah as his national policy director.<sup>701</sup> After Buttigieg ended his campaign, candidate Joe Biden named Shah to serve on one

of the Biden-Sanders Unity Task Forces.<sup>702</sup> In March 2022, Shah was announced to be a member of the Department of Homeland Security's Advisory Council.<sup>703</sup>

### **Amit Jani**

When Joe Biden's campaign hired Amit Jani in 2019 to be its Asian American Pacific Islander national vote director,<sup>704</sup> critics of Hindu nationalism created at least two petitions for Jani's removal from the Biden campaign, due to his and his family's support of Narendra Modi, per the petitions.<sup>705, 706</sup> According to *The Intercept*, Amit Jani's father, the late Suresh Jani, was one of the founders of the U.S. chapter of the Overseas Friends of the BJP.<sup>707</sup> His mother, Deepti or Dipti Jani, was also a member of the OFBJP as of 2017.<sup>708</sup> When President Obama lifted the nine-year entry ban on Narendra Modi in 2014, Amit Jani wrote a Huffington Post article apparently rehabilitating Modi's image.<sup>709</sup> In June 2017, according to *The Intercept*, Amit Jani met with Narendra Modi in person during one of Modi's visits to the United States.<sup>710</sup> As of January 2021, it does not appear that he has been appointed to a position in the Biden-Harris administration.<sup>711</sup>

### **Sri Preston Kulkarni**

Srinivas Rao Preston Kulkarni was noted earlier as a major recipient of funds from Sangh-affiliated groups and individuals in his unsuccessful bid for a Congressional seat in Texas in 2020.<sup>712</sup> The Americorps website reported that Kulkarni was appointed in February 2021 as the Chief of External Affairs of the Americorps Agency in the Biden-Harris administration.<sup>713</sup>

### **Vivek Murthy**

Vivek Murthy's association with Hindu American Foundation appears limited. As the U.S. Surgeon General during the Obama-Biden Administration and after his tenure, he spoke at two HAF events, per HAF's website, accepting an award at one of them, contributing to the HAF's status.<sup>714, 715</sup> In March 2021, he was confirmed as the Surgeon General with the Biden-Harris administration.<sup>716</sup>

## Financial and Administrative Irregularities

Several apparent irregularities in the operation of some Sangh groups may provide openings to further investigations.

1. The tax-exempt **Global Indians for Bharat Vikas** (GIBV) apparently organized Indians in the U.S. to contact and encourage people in India to vote for the BJP. See Table 15 for GIBV leadership's linkages to the U.S.-based Sangh Parivar.

**Table 15. Global Indians for Bharat Vikas's Links to the U.S. Sangh**

Name	Role in GIBV	Affiliation with the Sangh
<b>Mahesh Mehta</b>	Chair of Board of Directors <sup>717</sup>	Mahesh Mehta is the founder of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) of America <sup>718</sup>
<b>Gaurang Vaishnav</b>	National Convener <sup>719</sup>	Executive Vice President of VHP of America in 2010 <sup>720</sup>
<b>Kanchan Bannerjee</b>	Secretary of the Board <sup>721</sup>	One-time Hindu Students Council leader <sup>722</sup> and VHPA leader <sup>723</sup>
<b>Gokul Kunnath</b>	Public Relations <sup>724</sup>	RSS member <sup>725</sup>
<b>Vimal Sodhani</b>	Treasurer <sup>726</sup>	VHP of America's Vice President of Finance in 2021 <sup>727</sup>
<b>Ramesh Shah</b>	Co-convener of GIBV <sup>728</sup>	Vice President of the Overseas Friends of the BJP <sup>729</sup>

Though the group's mission in 2021 is stated as the "organic development of villages and slums in India" on its website,<sup>730</sup> *The Times of India* reported in 2014 that GIBV "volunteers in Texas started mobilizing [non-resident Indians], asking them to call home to make two appeals to their relatives - first to vote and second to vote for Modi." GIBV reportedly also coordinated volunteer meetings in India.<sup>731</sup> Reportage on events organized by the GIBV found that "[all] attendees committed to reaching out to their friends and family to convince them to vote for BJP in the upcoming elections" in India.<sup>732</sup> The 2014 version of GIBV's website reflects their electioneering activities, which appear to be in violation of 501(c)3 rules against "participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office."<sup>733</sup> The term "NAMO" in the below screen capture refers to Narendra Modi.

**Figure 18. Screen Capture of GIBV's 2014 Website<sup>734</sup>**

PLEDGE TO SUPPORT NAMO IN 2014	MISSION-2014
<p>Dear Friend,</p> <p>Please take a few seconds to complete this very short poll.</p> <p><a href="http://bit.ly/NaMoPM2014">http://bit.ly/NaMoPM2014</a></p> <p><b>Pledge to support NaMo</b></p> <p>Please forward this pledge to your friends and family.</p> <p>GIBV Team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage Voter Registration by calling Indian citizens and ensure that all eligible voters are registered to vote.</li> <li>• Change of government in 2014 national elections</li> <li>• Bring NaMo as PM of India for Good Governance</li> <li>• Ask Voters to Vote for BJP to usher in Narendra Modi as the PM of India</li> <li>• Register now as a Volunteer - <a href="#">Click here</a></li> </ul>

2. Per tax returns, at least three tax-exempt groups (India Development and Relief Fund, Vivek Welfare and Educational Foundation, and Bhutada Family Foundation) reportedly lent millions of dollars to for-profit companies, Park Square Enterprises and Aggarwal Holdings. Park Square Enterprises is headed by one-time VHP of America leader,<sup>735</sup> Braham R. Aggarwal, and Aggarwal Holdings is likely, but not certainly, headed by him.<sup>736</sup> Further investigation into these loans is needed into whether there is misconduct and may yield a better understanding of how these groups operate.



Table 16. Loans from Sangh-affiliated Nonprofits to For-Profit Entities

Year	Tax Exempt Lender	Sangh Affiliation	For Profit Recipient	Amount
2004	India Development and Relief Fund	IDRF's Sangh affiliations were documented in the 2002 report, <i>The Foreign Exchange of Hate: IDRF and the American Funding of Hindutva</i> . <sup>737</sup>	Park Square Enterprises	\$4,000,000 <sup>738</sup>
~2005	Vivek Welfare and Educational Foundation	Braham Aggarwal was once a VHP office bearer, per the 2014 SACW report. <sup>739</sup>	Park Square Enterprises	\$23,816,830 <sup>740</sup>
2015	Bhutada Family Foundation	This is the family foundation <sup>741</sup> of Rishi Bhutada (Treasurer of the HAF <sup>742</sup> ) and Ramesh Bhutada (Board of Directors of Sewa International <sup>743</sup> )	Aggarwal Holdings <sup>744</sup>	\$2,200,000 <sup>745</sup>

3. **PYP Yog Foundation.** B.R. Aggarwal was reportedly a one-time VHPA office-bearer<sup>746</sup> and is a Trustee and the Chair of **PYP Yog Foundation** from 2011-2019, according to the respective organizations' government filings.<sup>747</sup> According to tax returns, PYP Yog Foundation is apparently an overseas funding channel to the organization **Patanjali Yogpeeth** in India.<sup>748</sup> On the PYP Yog Foundation's 2013 tax return, it documented a grant of \$140,000 that went to "Patanjali Yogpeeth, a non profit organization in India, for Flood Relief that happened in northern India in June 2013."<sup>749</sup> This India-based group is reportedly headed by yoga celebrity and businessman **Baba Ramdev**, who, according to *Reuters*, "sent his supporters into the streets to help propel Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to power in 2014" and whose India-based Patanjali organization has benefited from discounts on 50,000+ acres of land in states ruled by the BJP and BJP allies.<sup>750</sup> Baba Ramdev is listed as a director in the group's founding IRS filings in 2008, at the Patanjali address in Uttaranchal.<sup>751</sup>

One strange note is that PYP Yog Foundation, though its stated primary goal is to spread awareness of yoga's practice, apparently gave significant portions of its annual expenses to disaster relief in India, with 2013 seeing the largest amount, according to tax filings. While disaster relief is clearly a charitable category of work, such a drastic departure from the stated mission of the group and how those funds were used warrant further investigation.

Table 17. PYP Yog Foundation's Funding Flows to India

Year	Purpose of the group, per statements on tax return	Total expenses	Amount routed to relief work	Purpose of foreign funding
2013	"The mission of PYP Yog is to enhance the awareness of the practice of Yoga in accordance with ancient scriptures & teachings in the US with the goal of helping people live healthy serene & stress free lives" <sup>752</sup>	\$206,693 <sup>753</sup>	\$140,000 <sup>754</sup> (67% of expenses)	Flood relief <sup>755</sup>
2014	"The mission of PYP Yog is to enhance the awareness of the practice of Yoga in accordance with ancient scriptures & teachings in the US with the goal of helping people live healthy serene & stress free lives" <sup>756</sup>	\$88,634 <sup>757</sup>	\$40,000 <sup>758</sup> (45% of expenses)	Natural Calamity <sup>759</sup>
2015	"The mission of PYP Yog is to enhance the awareness of the practice of Yoga in accordance with ancient scriptures & teachings in the US with the goal of helping people live healthy serene & stress free lives" <sup>760</sup>	\$163,081 <sup>761</sup>	Amount unclear, though grants for the year was \$115,000 <sup>762</sup> (70% of expenses)	Natural Calamity <sup>763</sup>
2016	"The mission of PYP Yog is to enhance the awareness of the practice of Yoga in accordance with ancient scriptures & teachings in the US with the goal of helping people live healthy serene & stress free lives" <sup>764</sup>	\$73,919 <sup>765</sup>	\$40,000 <sup>766</sup> (54% of expenses)	Natural Calamity <sup>767</sup>

There also appears to be some inconsistencies in PYP Yog Foundation's tax returns between what is stated as the previous year's contributions and the figures actually disclosed on the previous year's tax returns, even though the same tax preparation firm handled the paperwork. Further investigations are needed into the discrepancies, which are in the six-figure range.

**Table 18. Discrepancies in the Reported Contributions to PYP Yog Foundation**

	Stated as Previous Year's Contributions (Part I, Line 8)	Actual contribution on previous year's tax return (Part I, Line 8)
<b>2016 tax return</b>	2015: \$122,183 <sup>768</sup>	2015: \$321,238 <sup>769</sup> - discrepancy
<b>2015 tax return</b>	2014: \$359,484 <sup>770</sup>	2014: \$487,688 <sup>771</sup> - discrepancy
<b>2014 tax return</b>	2013: \$487,688 <sup>772</sup>	2013: \$213,098 <sup>773</sup> - discrepancy
<b>2013 tax return</b>	2012: \$83,990 <sup>774</sup>	2012: \$83,990 <sup>775</sup>
<b>2012 tax return</b>	2011: \$47,568 <sup>776</sup>	2011: \$47,568 <sup>777</sup>
<b>2011 tax return</b>	2010: \$202,021 <sup>778</sup>	2010: \$202,021 <sup>779</sup>
<b>2010 tax return</b>	2009: \$323,035 <sup>780</sup>	2009: \$323,035 <sup>781</sup>
<b>2009 tax return</b>	2008: blank	2008: \$2,296,259 <sup>782</sup>

4. The Hindu American Foundation has apparently facilitated the delivery of material aid to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in India via a project called the Pakistan Hindu Refugee Relief Program (PHRRP). The PHRRP website header names HAF as a U.S.-based partner and the VHP as an India-based one (see Figure 19).<sup>783</sup> According to posts on the PHRRP website, the HAF reportedly donated materials to the PHRRP in 2013 and 2014.<sup>784</sup> The Project also explicitly states on its website that donations "are not Tax Deductible under 80(G) under India and 501(c)3 under USA."<sup>785</sup>

**Figure 19. Header from the Pakistani Hindu Refugee Relief Program Website**

*Pakistani Hindu Refugee Relief Program is an umbrella program of multiple USA based Hindu organizations. Partners include World Hindu Council of America (VHPA) aka. Vishwa Hindu Parishad Of America, Hindu American Foundation (HAF), Global Hindu Foundation (GHF), Hindu Congress of America (HMSA), US Sindhi Alliance and allied Sindhi groups. In India the program is supported by volunteers of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Hindu Help Line, Hindu Empowerment Office and associated Hindu organizations. Goal of program is to provide relief assistance to Pakistani Hindu Refugees Based in India. In house media partners are World Hindu News and Vishwa Hindu Samachar.*

According to the PHRRP's website, the Board of the PHRRP included two Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America leaders, Abhaya Asthana and Rahul Chandra, and two HAF leaders: Jay Kansara and Samir Kalra.<sup>786</sup> HAF's partnership with the PHRRP itself appears strange, as PHRRP is not a tax-exempt group in India or the U.S., per its donations webpage,<sup>787</sup> and HAF is already a tax-exempt organization that has been actively raising funds for Pakistani Hindu refugees via its website, in partnership with another India-based group, the Universal Just Action Society.<sup>788</sup> The question raised is why the HAF was facilitating the transfer of funds through an organization that self-identifies as not tax-exempt.

**5. Tax-exempt Vivek Welfare and Educational Foundation appeared to be involved in a series of land and money transfers between different entities, according to tax filings.** It is uncertain if there is any misconduct here, but further investigation into these transactions may yield a better understanding of how these groups operate.

Note: Nonprofit Vivek Welfare and Educational Foundation (VWEF)<sup>789</sup> and for-profit Park Square Enterprises (PSE)<sup>790</sup> are both led by B.R. Aggarwal. VWEF was apparently renamed recently to Aggarwal & Gupta Family Foundation Inc.<sup>791</sup>

Year	Event
2005	VWEF appeared to lend Park Square Enterprises \$23,816,830, and Park Square Enterprises offered some land as collateral. The purpose of the loan given on the VWEF's tax return was "Real Estate Development." <sup>792</sup> The \$23 million figure did not appear at the front of VWEF's 2005 tax return; in fact, VWEF's net assets for 2004 and 2005 were less than \$20 million. <sup>793</sup>
2008	It appeared that VWEF received land from PSE toward repayment of PSE's loan, though it is unclear how many parcels or by how much the loan was paid down. <sup>794</sup>
2009	VWEF reported its possession of \$45.9 million of land. <sup>795</sup>
2011	VWEF apparently sold some land to PSE in the amount of \$620,000. <sup>796</sup>
2012	VWEF apparently sold land to PSE in the amount of \$1,407,243. <sup>797</sup>
2013	VWEF transferred \$43,651,419 in land to Vivek Investment Corporation. VWEF owned 100% of Vivek Investment Corporation (VIC) as of 2012. <sup>798</sup> Vivek Investment Corporation appears to be a corporation in Florida. <sup>799</sup>
2014	VWEF apparently received \$11,300 in income in connection with Vivek Investment Corporation's activities. <sup>800</sup>
2015	Vivek Investment Corporation apparently paid a dividend of \$500,000 to VWEF. <sup>801</sup>
2016	Vivek Investment Corporation apparently paid a dividend of \$1,650,000 to VWEF. <sup>802</sup>
2017	VWEF apparently lost \$2,617,741 in connection with Vivek Investment Corporation's activities. <sup>803</sup>

## Closing

With the arrival of the Biden-Harris administration in January 2021, there was hope among observers that a new U.S. White House will be able to join other democratic countries and coalitions to urge India to change its trajectory away from authoritarianism and normalized atrocities.<sup>804</sup> That hope appears to be fading as the new administration's attention appears to be turning toward China<sup>805</sup> and Russia<sup>806</sup> through 2021, even as escalations of anti-Muslim sentiment in India reached the stage of large crowds pledging to kill Muslims to "protect" India, led by Hindu religious leaders.<sup>807, 808</sup> Civil society groups have turned out into the streets to speak out against such "genocide mongers,"<sup>809</sup> but given the long record of a "culture of impunity"<sup>810</sup> for anti-minority violence in India, more forms of international solidarity and response are needed.

It is important here to note that Hindu nationalism does not belong to the Sangh alone, and that many other groups and political parties energize it toward their own interests; critics have noted that the oppositional Indian National Congress<sup>811</sup> and Trinamool Congress political parties sometimes engage in "soft Hindutva" to compete with the BJP in Indian elections.<sup>812</sup> As well, India's march toward authoritarianism is not driven only by Hindu nationalist groups. Per reporting from journalists and human rights groups, the Government of India's treatment of the disputed region of Kashmir has a history of brutal militarization, arbitrary detentions,<sup>813</sup> killings and disappearances,<sup>814</sup> torture,<sup>815</sup> mass graves,<sup>816</sup> sexual and gendered violence<sup>817</sup> that long precedes the rise of the BJP. Without the BJP controlling the Government of India, Indian authorities in 2008 registered a sedition case against Angana Chatterji for her article on mass graves in Kashmir<sup>818</sup> and men in police and paramilitary uniforms attempted to assassinate Kashmiri human rights defender Parvez Imroz.<sup>819</sup> In 2010-2011, *The Hindu* reported that charges were also filed against writer Arundhati Roy in connection with some of her remarks on

Kashmir,<sup>820</sup> and international allies like David Barsamian and Richard Shapiro were refused entry into India, resulting in further isolation of Kashmiris.<sup>821</sup> With the BJP in power and the removal of Kashmir's autonomy status in August 2019 news media have reported:<sup>822</sup> night raids by government forces;<sup>823</sup> and the mass detention of civilians and civil society leaders,<sup>824</sup> including high profile ones like Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society leader Khurram Parvez,<sup>825</sup> whose freedom has been sought by numerous United Nations human rights experts.<sup>826</sup>

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*...hope fades as the [Biden-Harris] administration's attention appears to be turning toward China and Russia through 2021, even as escalations of anti-Muslim sentiment in India reached the stage of large crowds pledging to kill Muslims to "protect" India, led by Hindu religious leaders.*

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In this landscape is the Sangh's proliferating network of groups influencing multitudes of social sectors across India, the U.S. and other parts of the world. In 2019, feminist historian Tanika Sarkar challenged the notion that Hindu nationalist histories had greater appeal only because of their content and messaging, pointing instead to "the quantity, continuity, and intensity of the RSS's historical work, the massive cadre base that generates and teaches history at grass-roots levels, that makes all the difference."<sup>827</sup> This report sought to illuminate, in a preliminary and fragmented fashion, that "cadre base": some of the capillaries, amplifiers, platforms, relays, targets, and institutions of Hindu nationalism in the United States—its "groundwork" or apparatus of social and political influence—with the understanding that much of the work by U.S.-based groups likely is part of a global phenomenon, per the report from the Dismantling Global Hindutva Conference in 2021.<sup>828</sup>

On the India side of the apparatus: according to Chatterji in the 2021 *Breaking Worlds* report on the state of Assam, "absolute nationalism"



is “[e]xtreme xenophobia that consolidates majoritarian rule.”<sup>829</sup> In Assam, according to the 2022 *Breaking Worlds* report, the BJP-led state authorities and dominant communities appear to be routing poor and vulnerable community members, largely Bengali Muslims and Hindus, into a state apparatus and quasi-judicial mechanism that puts them at extreme risk of being “effectively forced out, expelled, exiled, and presumptively rendered stateless,”<sup>830</sup> and possibly imprisoned in a “foreigners” detention center/ concentration camp,<sup>831</sup> running in parallel to policies from other parts of the world.<sup>832</sup>

As such, Hindu nationalism’s playbook was not created in a vacuum, nor does it remain isolated from other social currents and movements. Hindu nationalists’ tactics appear similar to those used by other right-wing groups, as observed by scholars,<sup>833</sup> such as those of white supremacists,<sup>835</sup> Neo-Nazis,<sup>836</sup> Chinese nationalists,<sup>837</sup> and Israeli right-wing adherents.<sup>838</sup> Such tools appear to include the creation of segregated information/news ecosystems;<sup>839</sup> diversified fundraising channels;<sup>840</sup> the development of forms of bonding and social assertions that employ virulent forms of xenophobia, racism, casteism, misogyny<sup>841</sup> and/or Islamophobia;<sup>842</sup> circulation of grievance narratives and histories unconfirmed by independent journalists or historians’ review of evidence;<sup>843</sup> and gaining state powers through building political influence and campaign funding apparatuses. Given such similarities, pro-pluralism and pro-democracy movements responding to these groups have much information and solidarity to share with each other.

This report benefited from the insights and work of scholars and civil society members and groups across disciplinary and issue boundaries, including those who focus on people’s rights in Kashmir and India,<sup>844</sup> caste,<sup>845</sup> pluralism,<sup>847</sup> gendered and sexual violence,<sup>848</sup> Islamophobia,<sup>850</sup> other nationalisms and right-wing movements,<sup>851</sup> mis- and disinformation,<sup>852</sup> hate groups and hate crimes,<sup>853</sup> history and historiography,<sup>854</sup> historical denials,<sup>855</sup> international influence operations,<sup>857</sup> online

and offline harassment,<sup>859</sup> white nationalism,<sup>860</sup> and state-sponsored mass atrocities.<sup>861</sup> Many persons were not acknowledged in this report for fear of reprisals.

Questions for moving forward: Will U.S. government bodies monitor relevant Sangh groups on U.S. soil? Will they vet their political appointees with connections to the Sangh, as numerous civil society groups have requested?<sup>862</sup> How will U.S. universities and state boards of education equip themselves to protect faculty<sup>863</sup> and educators and stand up to Hindu nationalist funding and pressures in the areas of Indian and South Asian history, and “Dharmic” or “Vedic” studies? What will rights coalitions and interfaith platforms that have accepted HAF and other Sangh-affiliated organizations as part of their membership, such as the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights,<sup>864</sup> do with that relationship? Will independent journalists be able to report on Hindutva and its projects without repeating and amplifying its narratives and messaging?<sup>865</sup>

Challenging the Sangh Parivar’s influence work requires identifying its institutions, leadership, strategies, funding flows, apparatuses and targets of influence, and their effects, a project to which this report sought to contribute. The next steps will require strengthening and building progressive organizations and infrastructure for monitoring and challenging such groups, enabling accountability for possible wrongdoing, energizing groups that do healing work with survivors and victims of gendered Islamophobic and casteist violence, working with other anti-extremism organizations to make it easier for people who wish to become whistleblowers or to leave Hindu nationalist groups and seek accountability to do so, and expanding networks of solidarity with pro-pluralism, pro-people’s rights, and pro-democracy groups in South Asia and the United States.

## Acronyms

ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CAPEEM	California Parents for the Equalization of Education Materials
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CSFH	Campaign to Stop Funding Hate
CSU	California State University
DCF	Dharma Civilization Foundation
DOJ	Department of Justice
GIBV	Global Indians for Bharat Vikas
GTU	Graduate Theological Union
HAF	Hindu American Foundation
HAPAC	Hindu American Political Action Committee
HEF	Hindu Education Foundation
HMEC	Hindu Mandir Executives Conference
HSS	Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh
LGBTQIA	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual
OFBJP	Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
UC	University of California
U.N.	United Nations
U.S.	United States
USC	University of Southern California
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad
VHPA	Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America
VWEF	Vivek Welfare and Educational Foundation

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