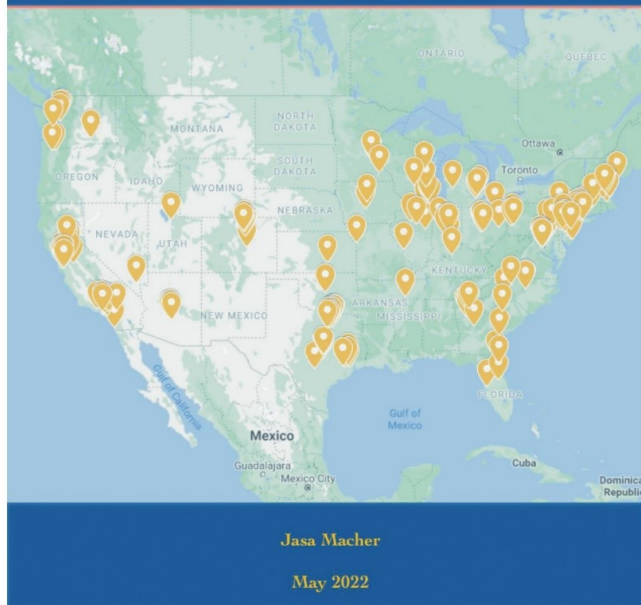


**HINDU NATIONALIST
INFLUENCE IN THE UNITED
STATES, 2014-2021:
THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF
HINDUTVA MOBILIZING**
(Jasa Macher , Released via sacw.net,May 2022)

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

The Infrastructure of Hindutva Mobilizing



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SALIENT POINTS OF THE REPORT

- 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.”
- Hindu nationalists in India have become mainstreamed through winning elections and gaining control of the national and several state-level governments.
- 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 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:
 - ❖ Lynching and criminalizing minorities (especially Muslims, Dalits, and Christians);
 - ❖ Work, education, and housing discrimination against religious and caste minorities;
 - ❖ Police brutality against Muslims and caste-oppressed communities;
 - ❖ Religion- and caste-based segregation and the targeting inter-faith families;
 - ❖ Attacking, destroying, and shutting down non-Hindu places of worship;
 - ❖ Targeting movement leaders, journalists, and watchdog groups;
 - ❖ Disintegrating the independence of the judiciary;
 - ❖ Assassinating high-profile critics of Hindu nationalism;
 - ❖ Citizenship law changes that target certain minorities, especially Muslims;
 - ❖ Building “foreigner” detention camps;
 - ❖ Chilling of the freedom of speech and freedom of the press (India ranked 142 out of 180 on the 2020 World Press Freedom Index);
 - ❖ Forms of ethnic cleansing in Assam, and genocidal actions against Muslim-majority Kashmir.
- In India, the major Sangh Parivar groups include: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Bajrang Dal.
- 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:
 - ❖ cast Sangh groups as cultural gatekeepers and representatives of Hindus,
 - ❖ fund Sangh groups in India,
 - ❖ insert support for Hindutva histories into U.S. academic institutions and textbooks,
 - ❖ shift U.S. domestic and foreign policy pertaining to South Asia, e) finance Sangh-friendly politicians, and
 - ❖ target their critics

FINDINGS

- 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.
- 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).
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 saffron zing South Asian history. To “saffronize” is to bring an institution or social sector into closer alignment with Hindu nationalism.

- 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.
- 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 disincentives scholars from participating in public processes relevant to their areas of expertise, such as public school textbook revisions.
- 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.
- Per Federal Election Commission filings, from 2012 to 2020, HAPAC reportedly spent more than \$172,000 toward influencing U.S. elections.
- Per Federal Election Commission filings, between 2015-2020 Congress member Raja Krishnamoorthi reportedly received more than \$117,000 from Hindu American Political Action Committee and Sangh-affiliated individuals. Between 2014-2019, Congress member 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, Congress member Brad Sherman received more than \$27,000.
- 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.
- 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.
- Per to tax filings, the Bhutada Family Foundation reportedly gave over \$1.7 million to Sang 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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. That hope appears to be fading as the new 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. Civil society groups have turned out into the streets to speak out against such “genocide mongers,” but given the long record of a “culture of impunity” for anti-minority violence in India, more forms of international solidarity and response are needed.

Table 3. Sangh Credentials of Selected Charitable Groups

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

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

Full report: https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/22041101/20220523_hninfluenceusa.pdf