

THE SAFFRON WAVE MEETS THE SILENT REVOLUTION:
WHY THE POOR VOTE FOR HINDU NATIONALISM IN INDIA

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How do religious parties with historically elite support bases win the mass support required to succeed in democratic politics? This dissertation examines why the world's largest such party, the upper-caste, Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has experienced variable success in wooing poor Hindu populations across India. Briefly, my research demonstrates that neither conventional clientelist techniques used by elite parties, nor strategies of ideological polarization favored by religious parties, explain the BJP's pattern of success with poor Hindus. Instead the party has relied on the efforts of its 'social service' organizational affiliates in the broader Hindu nationalist movement. The dissertation articulates and tests several hypotheses about the efficacy of this organizational approach in forging party-voter linkages at the national, state, district, and individual level, employing a multi-level research design including a range of statistical and qualitative techniques of analysis. In doing so, the dissertation utilizes national and author-conducted local survey data, extensive interviews, and close observation of Hindu nationalist recruitment techniques collected over thirteen months of fieldwork.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Tariq Thachil was born in New Delhi, India. He received his bachelor's degree in Economics from Stanford University in 2003. He began his graduate education in the Department of Government at Cornell University in 2004, and will be a postdoctoral fellow at Yale University's MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies from August 2009.

To
Ma and Suvir
for inspiring me
to follow
in your footsteps

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interviews which were expressly on the record, and have completely avoided quoting those interviewees who preferred their identity be kept anonymous. However the latter are as deserving of thanks, as their insights often guided my fieldwork and subsequently the argument made in this thesis. An equal measure of gratitude is due to the many individuals who agreed to participate in the survey, and who answered a series of questions posed by complete strangers with great patience and tolerance. While I cannot ever repay this debt, it is my sincere hope that this work will serve as a token of my appreciation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazagham
AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress
BJD	Biju Janata Dal
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BKS	Bharatiya Kisan Sangh
BMS	Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CITU	Center of Indian Trade Unions
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI(M)/CPM	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CSDS	Center for the Study of Developing Society
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazagham
ECI	Electoral Commission of India
ENPV	Effective Number of Parties (Votes)
HVP	Haryana Vikas Party
INC	Indian National Congress
JD (U)	Jananta Dal (United)
JMM	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NES	National Election Study
NSS	Nair Service Society
OBC	Other Backward Caste

OLS	Ordinary Least Squares (Regression)
PKS	Prosperous Justice Party
PAS	Pan Malaysian Islamic Party
RJD	Rashtriya Janata Dal
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SC	Scheduled Caste
SMT	Samata Party
SNDP	Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TDP	Telegu Desam Party
TMC	Trinamool Congress
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
VHP	Vishva Hindu Parishad
VKA	Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram

CHAPTER 1

THE PUZZLE OF POOR VOTER CHOICES

1.1 Introduction

Under what conditions will an elite party garner the support of poor voters? How do religiously oriented parties expand their support base in democratic contexts? This project sits at the nexus of these two crucial questions for scholars of comparative politics, by examining a party that is both representative of elite interests, and espouses a religious nationalist ideology.¹ Religious nationalist parties, and the broader movements in which they are embedded, often begin as relatively urban phenomena contained among upper and middle-class citizenry. Yet in order to succeed electorally, these parties are compelled to expand their demographic base beyond these initial pools of support. This compunction is especially salient in countries where poor voters are an electoral majority, requiring religious parties to face the difficult task of having to win over low-income electorates without alienating their elite core constituencies. How is this delicate balancing act accomplished?

To address these questions, this dissertation analyzes the case of the world's largest religious nationalist party, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party [Indian People's Party, BJP], in wooing subaltern Hindu populations across India, specifically Dalit [former 'untouchable' castes] and Adivasi [indigenous 'tribal'] communities.² The BJP offers a particularly compelling case because the party has been historically understood as representing the economic and cultural interests of upper-caste Hindus.

¹ Sections of this chapter are adapted from a previous work: Tariq Thachil and Ronald Herring 'Poor Choices: dealignment, development and Dalit/Adivasi voting patterns in Indian states', *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 16, No. 4, (December 2008), pp. 441-64.

² I employ the terms 'Dalit' and 'Adivasi' because these are the monikers that these communities have largely self-identified with in India, eschewing the more administrative labels of 'Scheduled Caste' (SC) and 'Scheduled Tribe' (ST). These latter labels referred to these populations being identified not by themselves, but by government lists or 'schedules' of caste communities. However, we still use SC and ST terminology when discussing concepts associated with formal governance, such as the demarcation of reserved constituencies.

Moreover, as Chapter 2 will outline in greater detail, Hindu nationalist ideology has offered moral defenses of caste hierarchies and caste practices. Thus scholars of South Asian politics have been extremely surprised by recent empirical evidence suggesting that the BJP has expanded its profile with lower caste voters in certain parts of India.³

The mercurial rise of the BJP in Indian politics (termed the ‘saffron wave’) thus intersects with the increasing political participation of lower castes (termed the ‘silent revolution’) to produce the central puzzle for this dissertation.⁴ However, while the project examines the counterintuitive success of the BJP, it also seeks to explain the variation in this success at both the state and individual voter level. Briefly, I argue that neither conventional explanations of how elite parties win mass support through vertical clientelistic networks, nor arguments about religious parties using ideological appeals (ranging from devotional appeals to polarizing riots) to generate support among the poor, explain the BJP’s pattern of success. Instead, I argue that the BJP’s recent success has been a product of an innovative strategy in which it benefits from mobilizational work performed by its grassroots civil society affiliates in the penumbra of the Hindu nationalist movement.

These organizations use the provision of a wide range of social services to counter the distrust of subaltern communities, and are far more successful at recruiting poor Hindus to vote for the BJP than the party’s own candidates and cadre. Further, this strategy provides a mechanism for subaltern electoral recruitment that does not

³ Aijaz Ahmad, ‘Indian Politics at the Crossroads: Towards Elections 2004’, in Mushirul Hasan (ed.) Will Secular India Survive? New Delhi: imprintOne, 2004: pp. 273-296, p. 282.

Also see K.N. Panikkar, ‘Foreword’ in Anand Teltumbde (ed.) Hindutva and Dalits: Perspectives for Understanding Communal Praxis, New Delhi: Samya, 2005, pp. ix-xii.

⁴ Thomas Blom Hansen, The Saffron Wave: democracy and Hindu nationalism in modern India Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. Christophe Jaffrelot, India’s Silent Revolution: the rise of the lower castes in North India, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

involve making programmatic or ideological compromises to the BJP's platform that would risk alienating the party's original elite constituencies.⁵

The use of a strategy dependent on civil society affiliates to recruit the poor echoes accounts of other religious political formations across Asia and the Middle East. However, the accounts of Islamist parties employing such techniques have been so predominant that analysts might plausibly conjecture whether the approach has some specific affinity to Islam. The BJP's experience, even as it resonates with many accounts of Islamist activities, also problematizes efforts to link this strategy with a specific religious tradition. Collectively, the strategies of these religious parties also provide an important empirical check to generalizations emerging from advanced industrial democracies suggesting the demise of mass organizational parties, and their replacement with spare, professionalized parties focused narrowly on deploying modern technologies to win votes at election time.

While the social service strategy has generated support for the BJP, I argue that it has done so for pragmatic and not ideological reasons, even as the consequence of this support has been to elevate ideological actors to positions of power. Data at various levels of analysis highlights that the level of ideological affiliation with Hindu nationalism has minimal impact on Dalit and Adivasi decisions to support the BJP. Instead the service approach has generated support by generating two forms of linkages with voters. Firstly, service organizations forge strong non-ideological linkages with those who participate in or benefit from their activities. Second, even among many non-participants, service organizations have generated a good opinion of the work of Sangh activists, especially with young voters. Both participatory and

⁵ As my project will make clear, there are different levels of 'recruitment' in operation between Hindu nationalists and Dalit and Adivasi communities. In this project I refer to recruitment in its most broad form, in terms of recruiting an individual's vote at the polls. However I do at points discuss the distinctions between this form of recruitment and the active recruitment of particular individuals into the cadre of the Sangh, although this phenomenon is understandably much more limited in scope.

opinion-based linkages have helped the movement overcome subaltern alienation from Hindu nationalism due to the latter's upper-caste support base, stemming from its Brahminical defense of caste practice.

Yet the strategy has succeeded only in some Indian states, and I argue that this unevenness is explained by underlying differences in local contextual conditions. Firstly, higher levels of social service provision in a given locality help reduce the demand for those offered by the Sangh. Secondly, where lower castes have been politicized horizontally as caste communities, primarily through caste-specific associations, they are far less susceptible to being vertically integrated by the BJP into a pan-Hindu alliance with upper caste electorates.

In the remainder of the chapter, I outline how the broader comparative literature theorizes the ways in which political parties can connect with poor voters, and outline how major Indian parties each utilize different strategies depending on their particular political character. I argue that the BJP's unique situation as an upper-caste party prevented it from deploying any of the more conventional tactics followed by its competitors, forcing Hindu nationalists to turn to a social service based approach in the 1990s. I elaborate hypotheses designed to examine whether this strategy explains the BJP's pattern of success with subaltern voters, and specify the research design used to test these hypotheses. I conclude by providing a brief outline of the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

1.2 Poor Voters in India: The puzzle for party systems theory

This project is centrally concerned with the counter-intuitive instances of poor voters supporting an elitist, religious nationalist party. Poor voters have largely been understood as constraining the BJP's success in Indian politics, not enabling it. The results of the 2004 Indian national elections, where the BJP was voted out of power despite positive public opinion poll results, was a case in point. When the party's coalition lost to one headed by its major national rival, the Indian National Congress (Congress), analysts wrote of the BJP being voted out of power by a rising tide of poor voters.⁶

The BJP's 'India Shining' campaign – built around celebration of anomalously high economic growth rates – was said to not have resonated with poorer sections of the Indian electorate.⁷ Dalits and Adivasis were understood as crucial to the BJP's unexpected demise, since these communities disproportionately represent socially and economically marginalized Indians. Part of the reason that the idea of poor voters ousting the BJP was widely accepted has to do with the conventional understanding of the party as representative of, and supported by upper class, upper caste populations. As Chapter 2 outlines in detail, Hindu nationalism began as a movement among urban, upper castes, and its core ideological doctrine was seen as defending Brahminical traditions favoring privileged Hindus, including those of caste practice.⁸ The early ideologues of Hindu nationalism all initially came from elite Brahmin backgrounds,

⁶ Abhay Datar, 'A vote for secular politics,' *The Hindu*, May 20th, 2004
Yogendra Yadav, 'Radical shift in the social basis of political power,' *The Hindu*, May 20th 2004.
Paul Wallace, 'Introduction: India Shining Trumped by Poverty', in Ramashray Roy and Paul Wallace (eds.), *India's 2004 Elections: Grass-roots and National Perspectives*, Sage: New Delhi, 2007, pp. 1-9.
Also see Ramashray Roy "The Text and Context of the 2004 Lok Sabha Elections in India", in Roy and Wallace *op. cit.* 2007, pp. 9-34.

⁷ India has averaged a GDP growth rate of 6.8% since 1994. Source: World Bank Country Reports various issues.

⁸ For an account of the upper caste bias in the BJP's leadership, see Bruce Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, and Craig Baxter, *The Jana Sangh: A Biography of an Indian Political Party*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1969.

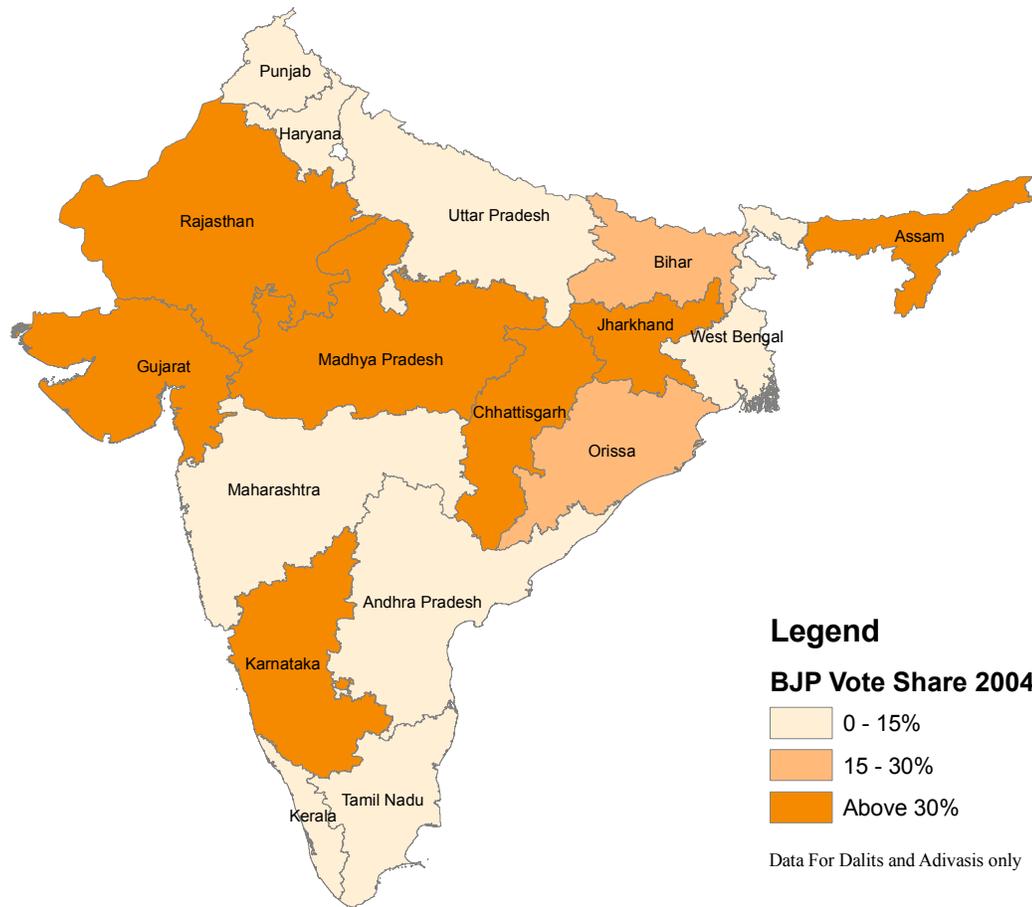
and consequently the BJP, as the party which grew out of this movement, inherited a primarily upper caste support base.

Subaltern communities like Dalits and Adivasis were seen as the least likely to ever cast their lot with a party representing the upper castes who had historically subjugated them. Indeed in many instances, members of these communities do not even see themselves as belonging to the Hindu faith, seeing the religion as a mask for caste exploitation.⁹ Given the BJP's elite profile, and the potential insensitivity of its triumphalist 2004 slogan, it is not difficult to understand the readiness to view its removal from office as the angry response of India's marginalized exercising the most potent tool afforded to them. However, disaggregating the results of the 2004 election suggests that such arguments commit the primordialist ecological fallacy of depicting poorer Indian voters as a cohesive electorate acting collectively at the national level.

However, this dissertation argues that the BJP can no longer be simply conceptualized as an upper caste party in terms of its support patterns. Instead, the data from the 2004 election reveals a puzzle embedded within another. As Figure 1.1 shows, the party performed exceptionally well with Dalit and Adivasi voters in numerous Indian states, but remained unsuccessful in others. This picture prompts two questions:

- 1) What differentiates those *states* where Dalit and Adivasi voters turn to the BJP from those where the party continues to fare poorly with them?
- 2) What differentiates those *individual* Dalit and Adivasi voters who support the BJP from those who do not?

⁹ See Kancha Iliiah, Why I am Not a Hindu, Calcutta: Samya, 1996. Also see discussion in Pralay Kanungo, RSS's Tryst With Politics, New Delhi: Manohar, pp. 145-6.



Note: Map only shows the seventeen major Indian states for which data was obtained for this analysis

FIGURE 1.1: Performance of the BJP with Dalit and Adivasi population (2004)

However, these questions about variable BJP success are embedded within another puzzle for the study of comparative politics, namely why do poor voters exhibit such divergent behavior across Indian states during elections? Dalits and Adivasis largely share conditions of socio-economic marginality, and because of their common circumstances, they have often been homogenized as a national voting bloc. However, increasingly these communities have supported a range of political parties across Indian states. In the 2004 election, the national parties capturing the largest

proportion of votes from Dalits and Adivasis at the state level ranged from the leftist Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M) or CPM), to the more centrist Congress, to the BJP itself. In other states, “lower” caste parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party [Broad Masses/Deprived People’s Party, BSP] in Uttar Pradesh, or regional parties like the Telegu Desam Party [Party for Telugu Land and People, TDP] in Andhra Pradesh or the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam [All India Dravidian Progress Federation, AIADMK] in Tamil Nadu were most successful with both communities.

Thus in addition to the specific puzzle of poor voter support for the BJP, the comparative literature on party systems would find this general variation in Dalit and Adivasi voter behavior across India itself counter-intuitive. Much of this scholarship would expect these communities to vote for the same or similar parties nation-wide. One influential set of explanations understood the development of party constituencies as stemming from the institutionalization of the significant social cleavages within a given polity.¹⁰ Studies of Western European political systems outlined how class or religious differences were determinative of the political axes along which parties organized. Voters accordingly were thought to affiliate with the party that best represented the interests of the members of their religious or class community, a phenomenon most clearly witnessed in the strong ties between social democratic parties and working-class electorates.¹¹

Initially, India did not seem to fit the description of a cleavage-based party system. Instead, for several decades following independence, the Congress typified a

¹⁰ Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, ‘Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: An Introduction’, in S. Lipset, and S. Rokkan, (eds.) Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives, New York: The Free Press, 1967.

¹¹ Stefano Bartolini and Peter Mair, Identity, competition, and electoral availability: the stabilization of European electorates 1885-1985, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

‘catch-all’ party in successfully consolidating support from all caste communities.¹²

De-alignment of Dalit and Adivasi voters made these electorates increasingly available for electoral competition; the response was a continuous and unstable proliferation of parties courting their votes. Caste has been increasingly understood as the central cleavage around which this emerging multiparty system was organized.

Explanations of the *emergence* of this caste-based political system, particularly concerning the electoral behavior of “lower” castes and Adivasis in India, fall into two categories. The first, drawing again from the literature on social cleavages, argued that growing socio-economic tensions polarized and politicized caste (and religious) communities; as a result, opportunistic political parties centered on these cleavages proliferated.¹³ Dalits and Adivasis were understood to ‘no longer accept their position in the social hierarchy’ and accordingly began forming their own political organizations, including political parties, mirroring the practice of the upper castes. As a consequence, India witnessed the emergence of a party system organized primarily on the axis of caste identities.¹⁴

A second strand of scholarship drew on literature that emerged in response to cleavage-based theories, and argued against the conceptualization of parties as emanating deterministically from social divisions and structures. Following Downs’ conceptualization of political parties as a team of strategic actors looking to maximize vote shares in a given electoral space, these accounts portrayed Indian parties as strategically activating caste identities by centering their campaigns on deliberately

¹² Rajni Kothari, ‘The Congress ‘System’ in India.’ *Asian Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 12, Dec. 1964, pp. 1161-1173. Otto Kirchheimer, ‘The Transformation of the Western European Party Systems’, in Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Weiner (eds.) *Political Parties and Political Development*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966: pp. 177-200. Also see Otto Kirchheimer, ‘The Catch-All Party’ in P. Mair, (ed.) *The Western European Party System*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

¹³ Francine Frankel, ‘Middle Classes and Castes in India’s Politics: Prospects for Political Accommodation, in Kohli, (ed.) *India’s Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 225-261.

¹⁴ Myron Weiner, ‘The Struggle for Equality: Caste in Indian politics’ in Atul Kohli, (ed.) *The Success of India’s Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

divisive issues.¹⁵ This scholarship saw the aggregation of distinct *jatis* (local caste communities) into large-scale clusters such as “forward,” “backward,” and ‘scheduled castes (Dalits)’ as a *product* of the strategic manipulations of political parties seeking to construct vote banks.¹⁶

Both sets of explanations for how a caste-based party system emerged have proved useful in making sense of fundamental changes in the political terrain of Indian elections. However, neither approach explains what happens once a caste-based system of political competition is institutionalized. In particular, if caste has become the central cleavage around which parties are based, how can we explain *divergent* patterns of support among *similar* caste groups across Indian states? The literature emphasizing caste-based parties emerging to represent communities engaged in social conflict implicitly assumes that each caste constituency would then support the parties emerging to represent ‘their’ social interests. This expectation has largely gone unfulfilled.¹⁷ Most parties experience differential success in trying to broaden their appeal across different states. The BJP’s mixed record with poor voters is mirrored by the Dalit-led BSP, which has not been found consistent support outside of its Uttar Pradesh stronghold.¹⁸

The alternative account of the emergence of caste-based politics, which stresses the agency of parties in activating caste identities, has provided compelling explanations of how caste becomes a salient political identity. However, this approach also fails to provide an adequate theoretical basis for understanding a particular caste

¹⁵ Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy, New York: Harper, 1957.

¹⁶ Pradeep Chhibber, Democracy Without Associations: Transformations of the Party System and Social Cleavages in India, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.

¹⁷ There remains an important exception, discussed in detail later in the chapter of long-term historical evolution in some states with significant horizontal solidarities and class conflict, most notably Kerala in south India. See Ronald Herring, ‘Stealing Congress Thunder: The Rise to Power of a Communist Movement in South India.’ in Peter Merkel and Kay Lawson, When Parties Fail, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

¹⁸ Kanchan Chandra, Why Ethnic Parties Succeed, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

community's electoral behavior once it has been mobilized. Indeed, we often see situations in which one party has been particularly active in activating a given caste community, but has not received majority or even plurality electoral support from that constituency.¹⁹

Thus neither set of arguments analyzing the *development* of a caste-based Indian party system explicitly tackles the fundamental issue of how this system then plays out. The fact that subaltern caste communities across India have not voted en masse for a particular party, and indeed voters from these communities have supported parties that vary widely in ideological and policy orientations provides a particularly compelling puzzle. The theoretical expectations of both old-fashioned modernization theory and Marxist theories of economic change converge on one possible account for this fracturing of the vote *within* social strata – and by extension within a caste community. This explanation is that the erosion of cleavage-based party systems may result from differentiation of the underlying social divisions that have historically structured the political arena. In Europe, the decline of class-based voting has been understood as a product of the blurring of class boundaries themselves. With the universalisation of education, growing social mobility, and the concomitant shrinking of the European proletariat, scholars argue that class is of diminishing electoral salience.²⁰ Similarly, the growing secularization of European populations explains why religion has played a much smaller role in determining electoral behavior. In theory, ethnic attachments as well wane with cross-cutting identifications and mobility.

¹⁹ For example, the BSP played an active role in politicizing Dalit identity in Madhya Pradesh, but the party has not attained much success with Dalit communities in the state. Similarly, in the 2004 elections, Adivasis in Jharkhand supported the BJP as much as they supported regional parties such as the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), which led the movement for independent statehood, and played a major role in socially constructing an Adivasi electorate in the state.

²⁰ Russell Dalton, Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies, Washington: CQ Press, 2006.

Thus, as the underlying fissures on which parties take positions become less sharply defined, voters are less likely to align with parties on the basis of such cleavages. Yet scholars of democratic party systems would not expect the erosion of cleavage based electorates where socio-economic distinctions remain sharp. In India, class divisions remain extreme and caste identities are highly correlated with these divisions. Poverty rates among Dalits (36.2%) and Adivasis (43.8%) are much higher than amongst the rest of the population (14.3%). Despite being under 18% of the population, 45% of India's poor come from these two groups.²¹ In such a system, political scientists would fully expect evidence of some voting along underlying social divisions, whether of caste, class, or religion, and concomitantly would expect the majority of Dalit and Adivasi voters to continue to support similar parties.²² Western European social cleavage theories do not then generalize well to explaining trends of divergence in the voting patterns of the Indian poor.²³

²¹ For a discussion of the complex salience of class in Indian politics see Ronald Herring, and Rina Agarwala, 'Introduction: Restoring Agency to Class: Puzzles from the Subcontinent,' *Critical Asian Studies*. Vol. 38, No. 4, December 2006, pp. 323-357.

²² Indeed recent work on post-communist Eastern Europe has noticed that increasing levels of inequality and rising class differences have facilitated the emergence of class-based voting even in these new democracies. See Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield, 'The Emergence of Class Politics and Class Voting in Post-Communist Russia,' in G. Evans, (ed.) *The End of Class Politics?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 254-280.

²³ The assumption in this line of argument is that parties have credibility, are meaningfully distinguishable on major policies affecting interests of voters, and that voters know of these differences and believe the parties will act as their agents once in power. All these conditions are undermined by the common perception of politicians in mass publics one hears in India: "*sab chor heh* (they are all thieves)." Some analysts of Indian politics have argued that despite the continuing correlation between caste and class, caste is of declining political salience. This formulation is plausible, but is, like mine, largely dependent on survey data; in interaction with investigators, it is entirely possible that individuals downplayed the role of caste in determining their vote, from an understandable desire of respondents to assert their individual autonomy. Moreover, the salience of caste in political behaviour is context-dependent and variable over issue areas and time. When parties take divergent positions on caste-based reservations in educational institutions, e.g., linking material incentives of individuals with members of similar caste backgrounds, the salience of caste rises with the level of public contention. Moreover, Dalits and Adivasis *do* vote in large numbers for a particular party *within* most Indian states. In every case in the sample, over 30% of voters in both categories voted for the same party, and over 40% voted for the same party in a majority of cases, a high number given the high degree of party fragmentation in each state. See Anirudh. Krishna, 'What is Happening to Caste? A View from Some North Indian Villages,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 62 No. 4, November 2003, pp. 1171-93. Also see Philip

The unevenness in the BJP's success with Dalits and Adivasis is thus embedded in a larger phenomenon of variable poor voter behavior across India in supporting a range of political parties. To set the context of the BJP's specific efforts, the next section draws on the comparative literature on party-voter linkages to briefly describe how each major national party in India utilizes a different mechanism to court the poor. Outlining how the BJP's national competitors woo subaltern voters serves two purposes. First it helps provide a sense of the options available to the party, and why a service strategy is preferable to these alternatives for the BJP's specific political needs of balancing elite interests with subaltern voter recruitment. Strategies followed by other major parties were unsuitable because each involved levels of political or economic compromise that the party's upper caste leadership and support base found unacceptable, a dilemma a service-based approach is better equipped to resolve. Second, providing a typology for party strategies to court poor voters is also important in providing a sense of the strategies the BJP is competing against. As the dissertation makes clear, the tactic Hindu nationalists have settled on is more successful when faced with some of these opposition strategies than others.²⁴

Oldenburg, The Thirteenth Election of India's Lok Sabha (House of the People), New York: Asia Society, 1999.

²⁴ Much attention has been paid to trends at the national level, such as the proliferation of 'lower'-caste parties across India, the increased salience of Dalit and Adivasi politicians, or on the increased electoral participation of Dalit and Adivasi voters. See Jaffrelot, *op. cit.*, 2003. However, less attention has been paid to how the variance in Dalit and Adivasi voter preferences *across* states highlights the fact that caste is politicized differently in various state contexts. For an exception see Chandra, *op. cit.* 2004.

1.3 How Do Parties Connect with Poor Voters? Applying Comparative Frameworks to the Indian Case

Indian political parties demonstrate a wide array of the strategies identified in the broader comparative literature as possible means to recruit voters. Drawing on Kitschelt's influential work, in this section I outline three primary types of linkages pursued by Indian national parties to recruit poor voters specifically:

- 1) Programmatic linkages through policy performance.
- 2) Patronage-based clientelistic linkages through selective material incentives to local dominant elites who in turn deliver subaltern votes.
- 3) Ethnic identity-based linkages forged by emerging lower caste leaders with their co-ethnics.²⁵

The next section builds on this typology to argue that the BJP had to devise a fourth strategy to fit its specific electoral needs.

1) Programmatic Redistributive Linkages:

Perhaps the most obvious way for parties to recruit new constituencies is by advocating and implementing policies that serve their material interests. European party analyses have repeatedly noted the central importance of political platforms that are explicitly oriented towards protecting the class interests of poorer voters in order to

²⁵ This last linkage differs from Kitschelt's tripartite linkage typology of programmatic, clientelistic, and charismatic linkages. While charismatic linkages, which are based more on individual leadership's personal appeal, are certainly prevalent in Indian politics, I argue that the major national parties all engage in something more than simply relying on personal charisma. Thus issues of charisma are imbued within, and add to some of these other linkage mechanisms, but do not replace them for *national parties specifically*. Thus the charisma of the 'Gandhi' name for the Congress, or of veteran individual Communist leaders like Jyoti Basu, or the firebrand Narendra Modi for the BJP, certainly helps their respective parties, but does not replace the primary strategies for popular recruitment at a mass level. For smaller, regional parties, issues of personal charisma become much more important (Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu or Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal are good examples here). See Herbert Kitschelt, 'Linkages between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Politics', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 6/7 (August/September 2000): pp. 845-879.

gain their electoral support.²⁶ The historical success of social democratic parties with working class communities in continental Europe was understood to be predicated on their pursuing policies beneficial to these populations, whether in the sphere of labor laws or in the wider provision of social services. Only with declines in the magnitude of class differences has the efficacy of this strategy been weakened.

Scholars have argued that creating ‘programmatic redistributive’ linkages involves implementing public policies that will benefit one *class* or *group* of beneficiaries, usually at the expense of another group.²⁷ In India, a variant of this tactic has been successfully deployed by the leftist CPM in their stronghold states of Kerala and West Bengal.²⁸ The strategies and results have differed somewhat, but in both cases poor voters typically had few doubts about who is on their side. In Kerala, early communist electoral victories centered on promises of education reform and land reform, two spheres of special importance to the socially marginalized. In Bengal, unlike Kerala, the party historically faced no unified opposition; in power, it has held the allegiance of the poor because of its early commitment to land reform and its organizational prowess in rural Bengal.

What is clear in these states is that certain conditions necessary for rational party voting at the state level are lacking at the all-India level.²⁹ When leftist

²⁶ Giuliano Bonoli and Martin Powell, Social Democratic Party Policies in Contemporary Europe, London: Routledge, 2004; Peter Mair, Wolfgang. Müller, and Fritz Plasser, Political Parties and Electoral Change: Party Responses. to Electoral Markets, London: Sage, 2004.

²⁷ Susan Stokes, ‘Political Clientelism’, in Carles Boix and Susan Stokes (eds.) Handbook of Comparative Politics, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 604-628, Kitschelt *op. cit.* 2000.

²⁸ The polarization that resulted from this strategy pitted coalitions of redistributive forces against forces defending the status quo, led by the communists and Congress respectively, with the former garnering a sustained majority of poor voter support. Indeed the Congress in Kerala remained a political force with these communities only because competition with the left moved its policies to the left other state Congress units. Alterations between these two coalitions came to characterize the party system of the state. See Herring *op. cit* 2007, and *op. cit.*, 1988, and Patrick Heller, The Labor of Development, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.

²⁹ The communists in West Bengal may well have the longest running electoral streak in the world, certainly the longest in India: over 30 years of rule. (Manali Desai, ‘Party Formation, ‘Political Power and the Capacity for Reform: Comparing Social Policies in Kerala and West Bengal, India,’ *Social Forces*, Vol. 80, No. 1, pp.37-60). The party’s strategy was described as one of ‘directing efforts

commitment to the poor is credible, and the voters know where they stand, left parties have garnered interest-based support because of their early and long-standing commitment to alleviation of the problems of the poor, and in part due to their *relative* efficacy in pursuing pro-poor policies.³⁰ The left's entrenched support among poor voters in these stronghold states, coupled with their impressive performance in the 2004 elections points to the potential efficacy of this approach. However this mechanism seems predicated on early success: government tenure is a prerequisite for a strategy based on policy performance. Consequently outside of their stronghold states, left parties have not been able to expand their following significantly enough for this particular cleavage-type to have been dominant in Indian politics.

2) *Vertical Clientelist Linkages:*

Another possible mechanism for parties to connect with poor voters is through the workings of patron-client networks, which studies of the developing world have often focused on.³¹ Unlike programmatic linkages, clientelist strategies target channel

towards the consolidation of electoral power by channeling some public resources to the lower agrarian classes' (Atul Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 99). However the case of West Bengal also highlights that policy-based allegiances may prove precarious when the policies themselves change, as happened when the Buddhadeb Bhattacharya regime decided to encourage foreign capital investment, and to forcibly remove poor farmers from areas demarcated for Special Export Zones (SEZs). The subsequent protests and brutal repression by the CPM government created a growing strain between the party and its traditional supporters, as evidenced by the nervousness of the CPM concerning local body elections in Nandigram, the epicenter of the violence around SEZs (Raghu Karnad, 'The Hunting Party Returns,' *Tehelka*, Vol. 5, No. 20, May 24, 2008). While the violence was inexcusable, the decision of the CPM to undertake this project is in part a reflection of the difficulties it faces due to the heterogeneity of interests even within poor electorates, with many urban workers (also the party's core constituents) viewing the SEZs as potentially providing employment.

³⁰ Heller, *op cit.* 1999. Poor voters do seem to note relative efficacy in governmental provision. One farmer laborer who supported the communists told Herring that the party did not do too much for her when in power, but in any event "the most the government can help is Rs. 1000 (about \$20 US)." Herring *op. cit.* 2001.

³¹ The number of accounts outlining clientelist linkages are far too numerous to outline here. For a useful summary of the literature see Susan Stokes . Also see Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson (eds.), 'Citizen-Politician Linkages: An Introduction', in *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007. Prominent accounts of clientelism from

benefits to specific individuals in return for their support. These benefits could be public sector employment opportunities when the party is in government (what some scholars define as patronage), or private resources the party has access to irrespective of its performance.³² In the case of patronage-based systems, clientelism cannot be understood purely as exchange of material goods. Instead, as James Scott has noted the strategy is equally reliant on the politics of domination: parties expand their base by establishing patronage links with key elites, who then ensure the support of the constituencies they control.³³ In India, the hegemony of the Congress Party during the 1960s and 70s was understood as predicated on such a top-down network sustained by transfers of public resources.³⁴ The party's stranglehold on government allowed its machine unfettered, continuous access to sources of patronage. These benefits were channeled to recruit the support of regional and local elites, who in turn delivered the votes of the subaltern communities they exercised socio-economic dominance over.³⁵

These networks functioned largely to serve the interests of the elites running them, and provided minimal substantive gains for poorer constituents. The problem with patronage-based systems is one of aggregation: there is never enough to go around, or serious fiscal crisis if attempts are made. Instead, the loyalty of Dalit and Adivasi communities was maintained through minimal selective benefits to key

different parts of the world include: Eastern Europe: Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markowski and Gabor Toka, Post-Communist Party Systems, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Latin America: Jonathan Fox, 'The difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Mexico', *World Politics*, Vol. 46, (January 1994): pp. 151-84. Kevin Middlebrook, Conservative Parties, the Right and Democracy in Latin America, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. Africa: Leonard Wantchekon, "Clientelism and Voting Behavior: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin", *World Politics*, 55: 399-422, and Nicholas Van de Walle 'Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss? The Evolution of Political Clientelism in Africa' in Kitschelt and Wilkinson *op. cit.* 2007, pp. 112-149.

³² See Stokes, *op. cit.* 2007.

³³ James Scott, 'Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia,' *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 66, (1972): pp. 91-113.

³⁴ Stanley Kochanek, 'Mrs. Gandhi's Pyramid', in Zoya Hasan (ed.), Parties and Party Politics, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002. Also see Kothari, *op. cit.*, 1964, and Myron Weiner, Party building in a new nation. The Indian National Congress. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

³⁵ Weiner, *op. cit.*, 2001, p. 197.

supporters, and a mixture of coercive techniques and the deployment of various inclusive rhetorical frames, ranging from Nehruvian socialism's promise of inclusion during the 1960s³⁶ to Indira Gandhi's populist slogans of *garibi hatao* [remove poverty] during the 1970s.³⁷ However, the Congress model of clientelism depended on a social environment in which subaltern caste voters were effectively controlled by local elites. Under such conditions, clientelist methods made the party very close to the ideal type of a 'catch-all' party, garnering majority support from each caste category.³⁸ However with the increasing salience of caste-based politics in the 1980s and 1990s, and the growing assertiveness of lower caste electorates and leaders, such cross-caste linkages predicated on dominance became increasingly difficult to sustain, which in part explains why the Congress was unable to maintain the support of Dalits and Adivasis nationally.

3) *Strategies of Ethnic-Clientelism:*

Comparative scholarship on party strategies has noted that ideological appeals are often deployed to buttress clientelist techniques of building support.³⁹ The idea of

³⁶ Raka Ray and Mary Katzenstein, (eds.) *Social Movements in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

³⁷ Atul Kohli and Rani Mullen, 'Democracy, Growth and Poverty in India,' in Atul Kohli, Chung-in Moon, and Georg Sørensen, *States, Markets and Just Growth*, Tokyo: United Nations Press, 2003, pp. 193-226. There is of course a fundamental tension in these divergent Congress strategies: strong patron-client systems as mobilizational vehicles presuppose the very dependency and inequality that these rhetorical frames promised to eliminate. *Garibi hatao* as a slogan in fact ran contrary to the material base of clientelism, as programs such as the abolition of debt bondage, or the extension of rural credit through nationalized banks would loosen the grip of local elites and compromise their ability to deliver votes to the party. Not surprisingly the Congress under Indira Gandhi did little to actually implement its populist policies, and focused more on centralizing the vertical chains of command within the party. Atul Kohli, "Introduction" in A. Kohli, (ed.) *The Success of India's Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 1-21.

³⁸ Kirchheimer, *op.cit.*, 1966.

³⁹ In their study of postcommunist transitions to democracy in Eastern Europe, Kitschelt et. al note that parties often rely on ideological appeals to buttress their clientelist strategies (Kitschelt et. al, *op. cit.*, 1999), while Stokes has argued that Argentine Peronists 'combine clientelist gift-giving with ideological appeals' (quote is from Stokes *op. cit.* 2007, study is reported in Susan Stokes, 'Perverse Accountability: A Formal Model of Machine Politics with Evidence from Argentina', *American Political Science Review*, Vo. 99, No. 3, pp. 315-325).

identity politics blending with clientelism produces a very different mechanism for linking to poor voters than the patronage networks described in the previous section. In India, this approach has been followed by new entrants into the electoral arena: parties specifically formed by subaltern caste political leaders, most notably the Dalit-led Bahujan Samaj Party [Oppressed People's Party, BSP]. Riding the 'silent revolution' of increasing lower caste political assertiveness, the BSP has risen quickly over the past two decades to become the fourth largest party in India (behind the Congress, BJP, and CPM), due to electoral backing of Dalit voters, who constitute over two thirds of its supporters.⁴⁰

To win the support of lower caste electorates, parties like the BSP have consciously filled their candidate lists and organizational leadership positions with members of subaltern caste communities. In doing so, these parties have facilitated the development of ethnically 'horizontal' clientelist structures *within* their caste community.⁴¹ Lower caste leaders in charge means benefits are more likely to flow through more accessible channels for subaltern voters than was the case in the Congress patronage system. Thus identity politics of this kind mirrors patron-clientelism: it seeks to circumvent the need to enact actual pro-poor policies, and indeed lower caste parties have continued inadequate expenditure on social services during their reign. However there are differences between these parties and the Congress in that the former do not work through existing social hierarchies by using consensual "big men", and instead create circuits of patronage within deprived communities.

'Identity politics' practiced by ethnic parties is thus not inconsistent with a continuation of selective appropriation of public monies, positions and discretionary

⁴⁰ National Election Studies, Lokniti, New Delhi 1999, 2004,

⁴¹ Chandra, *op. cit.*, 2004.

authority; it is simply a matter of changing the social circuit within which privilege is shared out. Normatively, the position of identity-based parties promoting and benefiting from democratic deepening is that patronage has always been confined to circulation within dominant communities; now it is our turn. However just as the Congress system of clientelism was a mixture of material and non-material (coercive) incentives, the BSP's popularity must in part be understood as resulting from symbolic, and not simply material payoffs to having co-ethnics rule. The symbolic value of shared identities with candidates is especially appealing to constituencies that have been historically denigrated in dominant culture.⁴² As denigration and material deprivation often go hand in hand, identity politics at the bottom of society is not easily separable from material interests, but does have a distinct electoral appeal.

1.4 The BJP's Dilemma

It is beyond the scope of the present project to provide an explanation for why each of the above strategies (programmatic, patronage-based, and ethnic-clientelist) has succeeded in certain parts of India historically. Rather, the preceding discussion is meant to frame the dissertation's central focus on understanding when the least likely suitor, the BJP, successfully woos the poor.

Firstly outlining the puzzle of varied behavior from demographically similar voters breaks the common misconception of a 'national electorate of the poor' in India, and highlights the complexities of the electoral arena *within* these communities across the country. Thus the appropriate level of analysis for this project is at the

⁴² The charismatic appeal of a Laloo Prasad Yadav of the Rashtriya Janata Dal [National People's Party, RJD] in Bihar is not entirely separable from symbolic appeal of the fact that a 'lower' caste Yadav could be Chief Minister of a state in which Yadavs were traditionally denigrated by "higher" castes. Other charismatic party leaders, such as Mayawati (the BSP Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh) and Phool Singh Baraiyya (the party leader in Madhya Pradesh until 2003) have utilized similar appeals to garner support for their party.

subnational level. Viewed this way, India presents multiple comparative units of analysis, embedded within the controlled setting of a similar democratic institutional setting. The question then becomes under what contexts would the BJP succeed in persuading poor voters to support it at the polls? Here the discussion of comparative party strategies provides its second purpose highlighting the inadequacy of these more conventional tactics for the BJP's specific needs as an upper-caste political formation: patronage-based clientelism was waning in efficacy, while both programmatic and ethnic-clientelist linkages would require levels of economic or political compromise unacceptable to the party's upper caste leadership.

For example, Chapter 2 outlines the BJP's preoccupation with upper caste interests when formulating its public policy platforms.⁴³ In fact, the BJP even repudiated certain tenets of Hindu nationalist doctrine regarding economic nationalism when the party realized upper caste voters were supportive of neoliberal reforms.⁴⁴ The party thus faced a structural dilemma: it could not emulate the leftist strategy by dramatically changing its policy positions to cater to poor communities, without risking alienation of its core supporters.⁴⁵ Similarly, the strategy followed by lower caste parties of creating ethnic-clientelist linkages through fielding high numbers of lower caste candidates was briefly pursued by the BJP. However, this tactic was also abandoned because, among other reasons, it necessitated the displacement of upper castes from candidate lists, invoking their ire.

⁴³ 47.5% of voters earning Rs. 20,000 a month or more reported their financial situation as improving under whereas only 18.5% of those earning Rs. 1000 or less said the same. Source: National Election Study 2004, Question 31.

⁴⁴ Pradeep Chhibber, "Who Voted For the Bharatiya Janata Party?" *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 27, No. 4, October 1997, pp. 631-39.

⁴⁵ In this way the BJP may differ from other religious parties, such as Indonesia's Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) or Malaysia's Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), or even Pakistan's Islamist coalition, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), all of which derive support in some measure from centering their platforms on issues of redistributive reform, and even anti-neoliberal rhetoric. See Thomas Pepinsky, R. William Liddle, and Saiful Mujani, 'Islam and Information: Understanding Political Islam's Economic Advantage', working paper (2009), p. 4.

There was thus no question that the BJP faced the most uphill task with Dalit and Adivasi voters, due to its popular legacy of being an upper caste or ‘Brahmin-Bania’ party. There was an alternative strategy available to the party which did not involve actively catering to lower castes, and which most explanations for BJP’s rise have centered on. Panebianco has argued that parties can use ideology to ‘conceal selective incentives whose excessive visibility could compromise the image of a party’.⁴⁶ In the case of Hindu nationalism, scholars have focused on the Sangh Parivar’s [the Hindu nationalist ‘family of organizations’, henceforth Sangh] use of communal mobilizational tactics to overcome their elite-friendly distribution of such selective incentives.⁴⁷ These accounts have focused on the Sangh’s consistent efforts to draw attention to what it saw as a variety of ‘aggressions’ on the part of Muslim and Christian minorities, ranging from attempted conversions of Hindus, to demands for preferential governmental treatment and participation in anti-state insurgencies.

Scholars argued that the party was able to translate the anxiety generated by such allegations into support from a threatened Hindu majority through the manipulative use of symbolic tactics ranging from marches deploying pageantry lifted from Hindu mythology, to mosque demolitions and pogroms directed against Muslims.⁴⁸ However, for reasons outlined in detail in the next chapter, these tactics were largely successful with upper castes, which viewed ‘threats to Hinduism’ as destabilizing the traditions of privilege they had historically benefitted from. However subaltern Hindu communities often had a greater socio-political affinity with Muslim populations, and remained aloof from the Hindu nationalism’s earlier agitations during

⁴⁶ Angelo Panebianco, Political Parties: Organization and Power, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 24.

⁴⁷ I use the term ‘communal’ in the sense in which it is commonly used in a South Asian context to refer to sectarianism, typically along religious lines.

⁴⁸ Hansen, *op. cit.*, 1999. Also see Christophe Jaffrelot and Thomas B. Hansen, (eds.) The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001.

the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁴⁹ The failure of its preferred sectarian mobilizational strategy, coupled with the unsuitability of the tactics of its electoral competitors, prompted the BJP to search for a new approach that balanced elite interests with mass recruitment.

1.5 The Turn to Social Services

1.51 The Appeal of A Service Approach:

The central argument that is advanced in this dissertation is that the BJP's pattern of success with Dalit and Adivasi voters depends on the efficacy of an innovative strategy deployed for recruiting poor Hindus in the 1990s, which depended on work performed by its grassroots civil society affiliates within the broader Hindu nationalist movement. These organizations began rapidly expanding their provision of social services, such as schools and hospices, to help enable Sangh activists to access distrustful subaltern communities. The dissertation's central argument maintains that this 'service' strategy is responsible for the success the BJP has had with marginalized voters at both a state and individual level. However, the project also outlines why this strategy has generally induced support for pragmatic, rather than ideological reasons, suggesting its limited utility in bringing about the Sangh's larger goal of societal conversion to Hindu nationalist beliefs.

While the provision of social services have always been an important part of the Hindu nationalist agenda, the scope of these activities remained fairly limited for most of the movement's history. I present data which indicates that service provision was not initially seen as a tool *for mass political recruitment*, and the use of service as

⁴⁹ For example, in Gujarat, the two communities shared a common placement at the bottom of the class ladder, similar non-vegetarian eating habits, adjoining neighborhoods, and common occupations in manufacturing centers. Human Rights Watch, Report: 'Communalism as Political Strategy', available at <http://hrw.org/reports/2003/india0703/Gujarat-10.htm>

an electoral tactic began only when other strategies to attract Dalits and Adivasis had failed during the 1980s and early 1990s. Simply put, service provision was not the party's preferred method for building support, due in part to its expensive and time-consuming nature.

However, this approach did have clear benefits for the BJP. First, social service organizations provided a less politically charged medium for Sangh activists to access distrustful lower caste communities, which fiery communal rhetoric had proven unable to provide. Perhaps even more importantly, upper caste Hindus, the party's main support base, looked favorably upon a service strategy for a variety of reasons. Crucially, a service approach circumvented the need to actually grant lower castes formal political power or policy-based economic concessions. At the same time, the patronizing rather than empowering 'civilizing' discourse used to frame these services appealed to upper caste communities rhetorically. Further, these activities were understood by elites as a necessary counter to proselytizing efforts of Christian or Muslim religious activists seeking to 'poach' lower castes from the Hindu faith, even as the approach ironically mimicked the techniques and tones of these 'foreign' predations.⁵⁰

1.52 Specifying Hypotheses

The fact that a service approach holds potential benefits for both upper and lower castes does not necessitate that this strategy explains the BJP's pattern of success in forging a cross-caste electoral support base. To empirically test the importance of a service approach in determining the BJP's fortunes with poor voters, I design and test several falsifiable hypotheses which exploit the variation offered by

⁵⁰ Christophe Jaffrelot has referred to this phenomenon as 'stigmatising and emulating "threatening others"', Jaffrelot, *op. cit.* especially pp. 11-27.

India's vast and complex democracy to test causal arguments at both the aggregate and individual level.

TABLE 1.1 Specifying the Hypotheses

H1 (testing if the aggregate presence of Sangh social service organizations matters for overall BJP performance): *A greater proportion of Dalit and Adivasi voters will support the BJP in those states/districts where the Sangh social service organizational network is stronger.*

H2 (Testing if the Sangh is establishing comparative organizational advantages with subaltern voters in the civil society sector): *Dalit and Adivasi individuals who profess membership in non-party associations should be more likely to vote for the BJP than those who are not members of any associations.*

H3: (Testing whether the Sangh service approach creates participation linkages that help the BJP): *Dalit and Adivasi voters who are members, or take part in the activities of Sangh social organizations specifically should be more likely to vote for the BJP than those who are not participants.*

H4: (Testing whether the Sangh service approach creates opinion linkages that help the BJP) *Among Dalit and Adivasi individuals who are **not participants** in Sangh organizational activities, those who have a good opinion of these activities are more likely to support the BJP.*

The argument being tested by these hypotheses has several components.

Firstly, **H1** tests whether the aggregate strength of Sangh organizations is associated with the pattern of the BJP's success with subaltern voters at the state or district level.

The expectation is that in states in which these networks are stronger, the BJP performs better on aggregate with Dalit and Adivasi voters, against a null hypothesis that this presence makes little difference to the party's vote share. At the level of the individual voter, the argument has three observable implications based on the type of linkages the strategy can be expected to forge. For each linkage, two concepts must be measured: the *efficacy* of a given linkage in garnering the support of an individual, and

the *extensiveness* of a linkage in affecting a sufficient number of individuals towards supporting the BJP.

One important mechanism that a service strategy might forge draws on Kay Lawson's concept of a 'participatory linkage', in which parties garner support by providing means for individuals to participate in government.⁵¹ For parties embedded in social movements however, such participation opportunities can be provided not simply through the party machinery, but through their organizational affiliates. Such participation offers the direct benefits of the services themselves, and the more indirect benefits of collective membership and status, especially where these organizations are influential in local political life. **H3** tests whether such a dynamic helps the BJP, postulating that being a formal member of, or even participating in activities organized by Sangh service outfits increases the likelihood of supporting the BJP.⁵²

It is also possible that service help the BJP with voters other than the ones who directly benefit from the activities of its affiliates. Indeed, service organizations might help overcome the distrust subaltern communities have historically exhibited towards Hindu nationalism in ways that help the BJP at the polls. If so, we would expect voters with a good opinion of the work of these organizations to be more likely to support the party than those without a good opinion. **H4** tests this hypothesis against the null that opinion of the BJP's social service affiliates is not an important predictor of subaltern voting decisions. The analysis also checks to see how many individuals in the sample are affected by this mechanism. Finally, **H2** tests whether the Sangh has managed to establish an overall organizational advantage in the sphere of civil society in ways that help the BJP against its competitors. If such an advantage were realized, we would

⁵¹ Kay Lawson, Political Parties and Linkage: A Comparative Perspective, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

⁵² To protect against high correlation between participation in and good opinion of Sangh social service organizations, note that **H4** is specified for those who do *not* participate in these activities.

expect the BJP to hold an edge not just with members of Sangh service organizations in particular, but with members of civil society associations more generally. If **H2** is true, it indicates the Sangh has managed to deliver the BJP a comparative organizational advantage with poor voters in Indian associational life.

We can further hypothesize the relative impact of these different effects. It is plausible that participation-based linkages will be stronger than opinion-based linkages as they involve a greater degree of commitment and involvement. Thus we could expect variables measuring **H3** to exert stronger effects on support for the BJP than those of **H4**. However since both hypotheses are specified to deal with organizations of the Sangh, we would expect each to be more influential than the indicators of **H2**. Based on this preliminary ordering of expectations, we can imagine four different scenarios resulting from testing the hypotheses outlined thus far, which are summarized in Table 1.2.

TABLE 1.2: Implications of Individual-Level Hypotheses

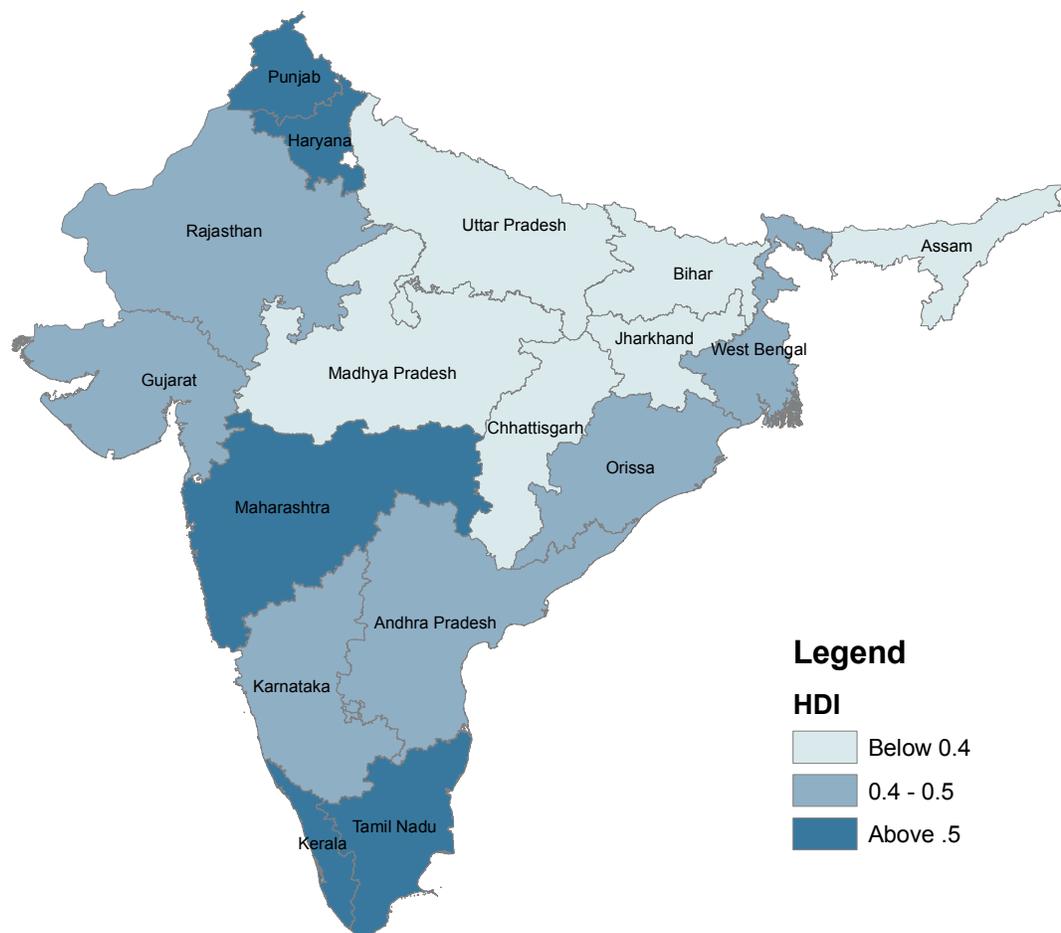
Fail to reject null hypothesis for:	Implication
H2, H3, H4	Sangh social service strategy has no impact at an individual voter level.
H2, H4	Sangh social service strategy only impacts voters through participation, but not through the opinion linkage. Further, the Sangh has not established organizational dominance.
H2	Sangh social service strategy influences voters through both the opinion and participation linkage mechanisms. However, the strategy has not managed to establish comparative organizational dominance of the Sangh.
None	Sangh social service strategy influences voters through participation and opinion linkages, and the strategy is pervasive enough to have established general organizational dominance in the civil society sphere.

In addition to the individual-level hypotheses, it is also imperative to specify analytical expectations about **H1** more precisely. **H1** cannot be easily theorized as postulating a simple positive linear relationship between social service network strength and vote share. Firstly, it is plausible to believe that there will be a certain threshold above which this strategy will have decreasing returns. In essence as Sangh organizational strength in the state increases from some minimal level, the BJP's position should concomitantly improve. However, this process is unlikely to continue until the BJP has captured 100% of the vote: there is bound to be a leveling off after a certain electoral threshold is reached. Intuitively this makes sense. As the Sangh builds its network, it will attract voters not deeply committed to other parties or candidates. However there will likely be some point at which the Sangh will have saturated its yield from this vote pool, and is then left with voters linked firmly to other parties, a population likely to yield far fewer converts. Thus we would expect a curvilinear relationship between Sangh strength and the BJP vote share among subaltern citizens, with success leveling off after this threshold.

Further, this relationship is likely to be influenced by the political context in which the strategy is operating. Specifically two factors can be theoretically expected to affect a service approach's efficacy. First, this tactic's appeal is likely to be influenced by the level of public provision of social services, which varies widely across India, as Figure 1.2 illustrates.⁵³ States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Haryana perform substantially better than Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh in terms of standard outcome-based indicators of basic public service provision. We would expect the Sangh strategy to yield greater rewards in these latter states, where

⁵³ Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen. 1995. *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

demand for services is noticeably higher, especially among the poor. In large part, this is due to the fact that in states with better conditions of human development, ruling parties are more likely to have formed some degree of direct programmatic linkages with poor voters, which may make these citizens more resistant to the Sangh's overtures than those living under more clientelist systems that have historically excluded them.



Source: National Human Development Report 2001,
United Nations Development Programme and Indian Planning Commission

FIGURE 1.2: Variation in Human Development Across Indian States

Another contextual feature can be expected to affect the efficacy of the Sangh's tactics from the 'supply' side. The Sangh's service organizations are not operating in a vacuum, but are embedded in the context of local associational life. As Ashutosh Varshney and Anirudh Krishna's work has shown, the nature of civil society and its associated 'social capital' varies hugely from state to state, and even within states.⁵⁴ There are plausible reasons to expect these differences to affect the BJP's chances of successful electoral recruitment. It is plausible to suppose that a dense associational life could more generally 'crowd out' Sangh service organizations, preventing them from attracting participants.

The logic here would be that if most or many members of a given community were already participating in associational life they are less likely to be available for the Sangh to potentially recruit as participants. However, it is imperative to realize that not all civil society organizations will impede the Sangh equally. It is not simply the density of associational life, but its political character that is crucial to examine. This analysis thus reiterates the need to be cautious about the potential pitfalls of de-politicizing our understanding of civil society, or indeed the related concept of social capital, as certain neo-Tocquevillian accounts have been criticized for doing.⁵⁵ In the Indian case, we can imagine certain associations mobilizing and politicizing citizens in ways that actively deter the Sangh's subsequent recruitment efforts more than others. In particular, lower caste associations that create horizontal ties within caste communities would impede the Hindu nationalist goal of incorporating these

⁵⁴ Anirudh Krishna, Active Social Capital, New York : Columbia University Press, 2002. Ashutosh Varshney, Ethnic conflict and civic life : Hindus and Muslims in India, New Haven : Yale University Press, 2002.

⁵⁵ Most famously of course, in Robert Putnam's seminal Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. For a compelling critique, see Sheri Berman, 'Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic', *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (April 1997), pp. 401-429.

subalterns into a vertical ‘Hindu’ alliance with upper castes, more than non-political hobby clubs.⁵⁶

While Pradeep Chhibber has correctly noted that the overall membership in caste or religious associations in India is quite low, there remains considerable variation in these levels both across and within states, and within the support base of different parties, as data in this dissertation will make clear. Further, it is not always the quantitative level of membership, but the quality of political relations between these caste associations and the Sangh that prove influential in impeding the latter’s attempts to attract poor voters. Lower caste leaders are often vocal opponents of Sangh activists, viewing their efforts to incorporate subaltern Hindus into a pan-Hindu alliance as an attempt to marginalize the very caste-based mobilizations that these leaders depend on for their support. Thus, in addition to the aggregate density of associational life, we would expect the strength of those organizations with political agendas in opposition to Hindu nationalism’s mobilizational attempts to impact the likelihood of the social service strategy’s success. The hypothesized influences of these contextual conditions on the potential success of the Sangh are summarized in Figure 1.3.

Line 1 outlines the expected efficacy of the Sangh service strategy under the most favorable conditions possible, where the prior level of social service provision is low, as is the strength of relevant local associations. As previously explained, the argument expects the strategy to yield electoral dividends until some threshold (T1), and to then level off once the pool of voters relatively uncommitted to other parties is

⁵⁶ There are two ways of conceptualizing associational life, both of which are used in the project at different points. In survey analysis, I focus on non-party associations because this is the sphere in which the Sangh service organizations are operating. However political parties can themselves build up organizational networks that prove important in deterring the Sangh Parivar’s advances, and I consider the importance of such networks, especially in a case study of the state of Kerala (Chapter 5) outlined later in this chapter’s conclusion.

exhausted. However the size of this pool is likely to be smaller in states where these voters have *either* been better provisioned for *or* politically incorporated by alternative caste-based associations (Line 2 with threshold T2), and smaller still where *both* of these conditions hold simultaneously (Line 3 with threshold T3. For a given level of Sangh organizational presence, the relative electoral gains for the BJP for the same will be lower as conditions deteriorate. Further T2 and T3 are to the right of T1, indicating the need for greater effort for to reach even this lower threshold, where voters have been provided for (programmatic linkages) or politicized as caste communities (ethnic clientelist/identity linkages) or both.

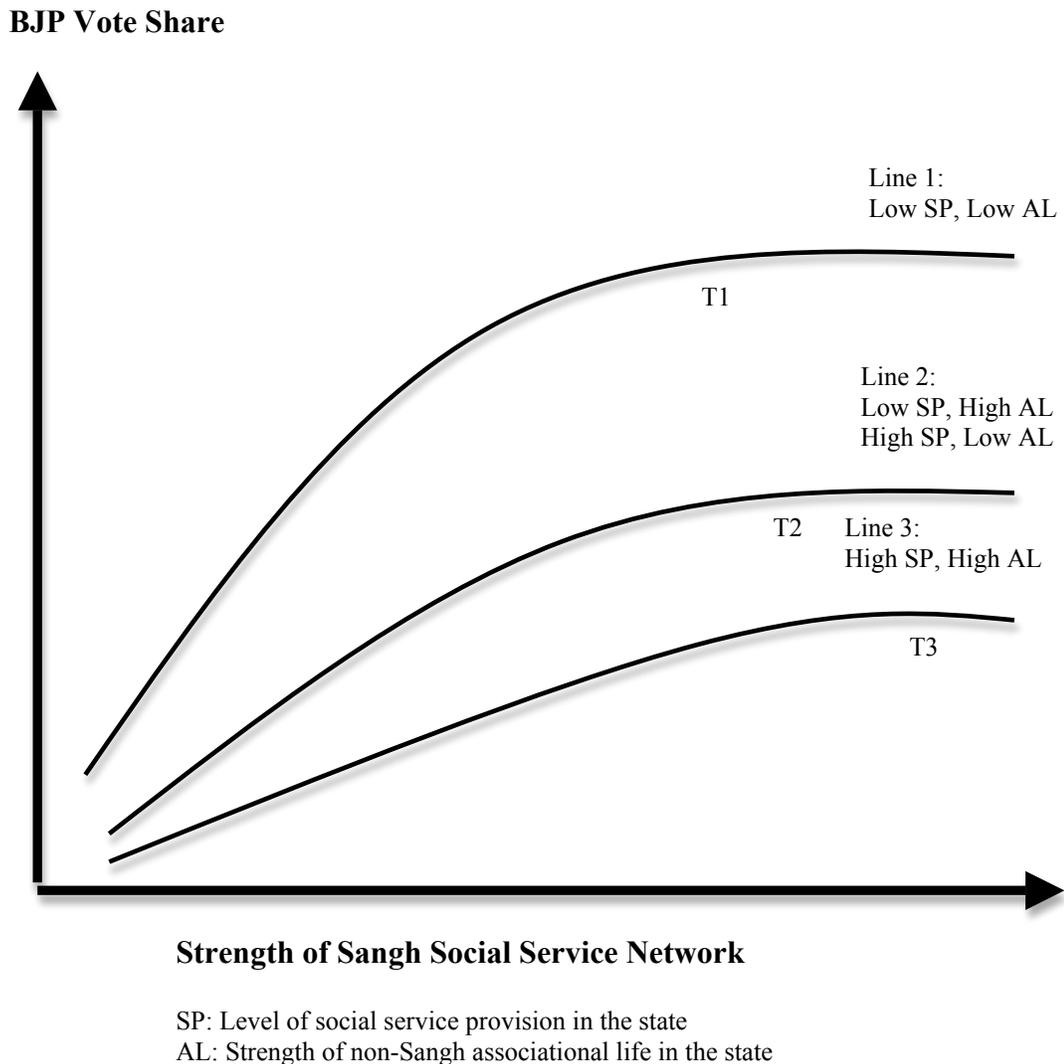


FIGURE 1.3: Hypothesized Impact of Service Strategy on BJP Vote

1.6 Research Design and Chapter Outline:

The rest of this dissertation is divided into five chapters, and employs a multi-level and mixed-methods approach to analyzing the central puzzle of variable BJP support among poor voters. In doing so, this project offers the first systematic analysis of poor voter behavior in the world's largest democracy. Building off of the typology of linkage strategies developed in this chapter, Chapter 2 moves on to first discuss the reasons that Hindu nationalism is understood as representative of upper caste economic and cultural interests, and then looks specifically at the tactics used by the BJP to overcome the narrow support for its doctrine during the past two decades. Through interviews with leaders of various branches of the Sangh, coupled with extensive archival research of Hindu nationalist print materials, I construct an timeline of the various strategies the upper-caste leadership of the movement used to envelop lower castes into their fold. I argue that the early sectarian mobilizational efforts of the Sangh during the BJP's mercurial rise to national prominence were only successful in consolidating upper caste support for the party. Further, I highlight how attempts at adapting the tactics of other parties outlined in this chapter, especially those of lower caste formations, failed as they entailed levels of political and economic compromise unpalatable for the BJP's elite core constituencies.

Faced with successive failures at wooing the poor, the Sangh searched for alternative recruitment techniques. Chapter 3 begins by outlining how the Sangh shifted to expanding the social service wings of the movement during the 1990s. My central argument, developed here, maintains that this 'service' strategy is responsible for the success the BJP has had with marginalized voters. The chapter then tests this explanation using a national survey sample of over 5000 Dalit and Adivasi voters across seventeen Indian states, conducted by the Center for the Study of Developing Society (CSDS) during the 2004 national elections. These surveys, described in more

detail in Chapter 3, constitute the most reliable and representative evidence from Indian elections to date.⁵⁷ The project combines voting data with evidence collected from Sangh social service organizations, the Electoral Commission of India, Human Development Reports conducted at the state level in India, and various other sources. The constructed dataset is then used to analyze the impact of Sangh social services on BJP support patterns at both the state and individual level.

Using a range of statistical analyses, the study examines whether the extensiveness of Sangh social service organizations in a state is associated with the BJP's electoral fortunes (hypothesis **H1** from the Table 1.1) with poor voters during the 2004 elections, and with improvements in the party's vote share over the past decade. The project also uses logistic regression analysis to examine whether the Sangh has been able to establish a comparative advantage in participatory linkages with individual subaltern voters, by examining whether members of non-party associations are more likely to vote for the BJP than for other parties (**H2**). Matching analysis is used to ensure no systematic differences distinguished the sample of voters who professed associational membership from those who didn't across factors commonly thought to influence BJP support, such as religiosity, income, and ideological support for Hindu nationalism. The analysis finds compelling support for the salience of participatory linkages tested in **H2** even when matching on these potential confounding variables.

While the national data provides persuasive evidence in favor of both hypotheses **H1** and **H2**, two shortcomings of the dataset prompt utilizing additional techniques of analysis. Firstly, the national surveys did not ask specific questions

⁵⁷ Survey data was obtained by the author while serving as a visiting researcher at CSDS (2008). Part of the reason that electoral analysis has been difficult to conduct in India is that systematic survey data that reported important demographic indicators of voters, such as caste and income, only started becoming available in the mid 1990s. This relatively new source of data remains woefully under-utilized, as the paucity of systematic scholarly analyses of Indian voters attests to.

about membership in (H3) or opinion of (H4) *Sangh service organizations* specifically, which is crucial information for testing the central argument presented here. Further, macro survey analysis, while useful for uncovering broad patterns and associations, is not suited to uncovering the causal mechanisms linking these associations on the ground.

To address these deficiencies, I carried out detailed case studies of two Indian states (Figure 1.4), selected after completing the national survey analysis and informed by its results. The first case, Chhattisgarh was selected as a case which was ‘on-the-regression-line’, in that it was a state where the Sangh social service network was strong, and the BJP appeared to do quite well with Dalit and Adivasi voters.⁵⁸ Within Chhattisgarh, I designed and carried out a survey of 360 Dalit and Adivasi respondents across 4 districts in the state. The survey included questions measuring participation in and opinion of Sangh social service organizations (for details on procedure for the survey see Chapter 4 and Appendix 1). While the selection of respondents within districts was randomized, the districts themselves were selected to vary on the key independent variable of Sangh service strength. While Chhattisgarh was a place where the Sangh service networks were robust, their strength varied considerably within the state. To take advantage of the controlled setting afforded by within-state variation, I conducted the survey in two districts in which the social service networks were strong, and two where they were relatively weak. This variation provided an opportunity to test the impact of my key causal factor more closely, providing an important additional layer to the analysis. The results lent further support to the importance of service organizational strength in affecting BJP success, this time at the district level.

⁵⁸ Evan Lieberman, “Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research,” *American Political Science Review* (August 2005), Vol. 99, No. 3: pp. 435-52.



FIGURE 1.4: Case Study States

The results highlighted that this aggregate success was achieved through forging effective and extensive participation and opinion-based linkages with individual voters, turning them towards the BJP at the polls. The results also corroborated that ideological values did not significantly distinguish those Dalits and Adivasis supporting the BJP from those who continue not to. This evidence suggests that the social service strategy may be gaining votes for the BJP but not due to ideological attraction to, or conversion of participants to communal causes. The results of the analysis thus serve to problematize assumptions that increasing support for religious nationalist parties is necessarily an indication of the growing ideological

appeal of these parties. Instead, these findings suggest that the opportunities the BJP's affiliates provide in terms of material services and participation opportunities may garner support for more pragmatic reasons, indicating the narrow limits of the project's success.

The second case study, Kerala, was chosen for being the major outlier in the national sample: the one place where Hindu nationalists have put a great deal of effort into building social service wings, but have not reaped electoral dividends. Selecting such an 'off-the-line' case allows me to analyze the conditions under which the social strategy fails. I conducted a second survey of Dalit and Adivasi voters within Kerala, once again selecting districts which differ on my key variable of Sangh service organizational strength. The results indicate that the service chapters are not able to recruit participants with anywhere near the success they had in Chhattisgarh, despite a similarly strong aggregate presence in the state.

Both case study chapters also seek to outline the causal mechanisms linking social service strategy with voter support of the BJP. To do so, I rely on extensive interviews with Hindu nationalist activists, and political leaders within the BJP and rival parties, as well as focus group discussions in both states. In Chhattisgarh, I observe the tactics utilized by Sangh activists, who provided me with valuable clues about the specific methods they employ to overcome the initial animosity most marginalized voters exhibit towards them. Importantly, I learned how 'social work' was deployed as a frame through which to portray apolitical neutrality, which rendered activists even more successful in mobilizing support for the BJP.

In Kerala, interviews with various branches of the Sangh revealed their understanding of the reasons for the failure of the service strategy. Coupled with survey evidence, these interviews revealed how higher levels of public social provisioning of the services offered by Sangh outfits, coupled with the historical

strength of lower caste political associations have dealt a dual body blow to the BJP's efforts in the state. Faced with this failure, Sangh activists discussed their plans for alternative recruitment techniques relying on more traditional methods of social polarization used by the party in earlier eras, but this time hoping to create divides along religious lines *within caste communities*, pitting Hindu Dalits and Adivasis against their Christian counterparts in the state.

The dissertation's conclusion offers some thoughts on the broader implications of the argument articulated and tested in the dissertation. Firstly, I outline how the BJP's strategy offers some interesting new insights into how political scientists might study 'movement parties', and specifically how we might conceptualize the relationship between political parties and social movements in which they are embedded.⁵⁹ I argue that this relationship offers both sides certain costs and benefits, which themselves vary across different local conditions in ways that might create variance in the closeness of the party and its organizational affiliates. I also highlight the parallels offered by Islamist parties operating in other regional contexts to the organizational approach deployed by the BJP. Taken collectively, the tactics of these parties offer an important corrective to attempts to generalize conclusions coming out of the study of advanced democracies positing the decline of 'mass' organizational parties and their replacement with machines concerned solely with securing votes. Instead, this dissertation will highlight how the rise of such parties embedded within religious nationalist movements are proving crucial in defining the contours of democratic politics in many parts of the world.

⁵⁹ Herbert Kitschelt, 'Movement Parties', in Richard S. Katz and William Crotty (ed.) Handbook of Party Politics, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006, pp. 278-90.

CHAPTER 2

RECASTEING HINDU NATIONALISM

2.1 Introduction

How has a party like the BJP which upholds the ideological and material interests of upper castes managed to appeal to communities oppressed by these dominant groups? This question provides the central motivation for this project. I presented a typology of the strategies Indian political parties have used to forge linkages with poor voters, ranging from programmatic redistribution, patronage-based ‘vertical’ clientelism, and ethnic-clientelism practiced by lower caste parties. I argued that the BJP devised a fourth strategy based on service provision that proved better suited to its specific needs as a party representing upper caste economic and cultural interests. The present chapter hopes to build on the introduction by providing a brief history of the Sangh’s efforts with poor voters, thus setting the context for the argument developed in the rest of the dissertation.

The first section of the chapter focuses on establishing why the support of Hindu nationalism by poor Hindus constitutes such a theoretical and empirical puzzle in Indian politics. To do so, I briefly sketch the contours of Hindu nationalist ideology, especially as it relates to the issue of caste practice. I describe the movement’s intellectual lineage and its tactics for addressing perceived ‘weaknesses’ of Hinduism, such as the religion’s lack of firm doctrine, and its non-proselytizing nature. Hindu nationalists sought to present a codified, and even racialized theory of Hinduism that would address some of these weaknesses, and thereby facilitate the creation of a cohesive Hindu community. However, the present chapter outlines how this unifying message was betrayed by Hindu nationalism’s defense of caste practice, which identified the ideology as representative of upper caste socio-cultural interests. I focus

on the resulting central tension between Hindu nationalism's elitist ideology and initial membership, and its desire to gain a popular following with lower castes.

The second purpose of the chapter is to highlight how the arrival at a social service strategy as a means for overcoming this caste problematic was not the result of deliberative genius. In fact, the Sangh first faced successive failures in its attempts to recruit subaltern voters through a variety of techniques. I describe how the party's preferred Hindu nationalist mobilizational strategy, which attempted to secure support by polarizing communities through agitations against perceived 'threats to Hinduism', failed noticeably with subaltern castes. These communities were far less susceptible than upper castes to being mobilized by appeals to 'save' Hindu traditions, given that they had been historically subjugated by its practices.

Confronted with this setback, Hindu nationalists attempted to mimic the approaches of some of their electoral competitors in trying to forge both programmatic and identity-based linkages with Dalit and Adivasi voters. However neither approach was fully adopted within the BJP, as each strategy involved empowering lower castes to a degree the party's entrenched upper caste leadership found unpalatable. Policies popular with subaltern voters were eschewed for those favoring the party's core supporters, and the elevation of lower caste personnel within the party was also curtailed when it appeared these leaders might subvert the existing power hierarchy. Given these repeated failures, the chapter concludes with the observation that Hindu nationalism faced an uphill task in recruiting subaltern votes while maintaining upper caste support. The discussion in this chapter therefore frames the central question addressed in the remainder of the dissertation, namely why and how did the social service strategy succeed in solving the caste problematic where all others have failed, and why did it only succeed in certain parts of India?

2.2 The Upper Caste Roots of Hindu Nationalism

Some of the concerns that provide the basis for Hindu nationalist doctrine predate the formation of the specific ideology itself. The idea that Hindu society was falling prey to more aggressive religious traditions of ‘foreign’ invaders was a concern for socio-religious movements that preceded the formal Hindu nationalist movement.¹ For the purposes of this project however, it is important to note that the specific preoccupation of Hindu elites with the potential predations of other religions on Hinduism’s oppressed predates the formation of a specific Hindu nationalist ideology. Earlier Hindu reformist movements worried that conversions to other religions, particularly among lower caste Hindus seeking to escape their marginalized identities, would inevitably result in sharp declines in the country’s Hindu population.² These reform movements began developing tactics to counter this perceived threat, exemplified by the adaptation of *Shuddhi* [purification] rites originally performed to ‘purify’ higher castes who had been ‘polluted’ by contact with lower castes. These ceremonies were transformed in order to ‘purify’ lower castes themselves, removing their ‘polluted’ status, in the hope that this would prevent them from converting to a non-Hindu faith.³

¹ Most notably, members of the Brahma Samaj in Bengal and the Arya Samaj in Punjab, movements founded in the late nineteenth century by upper caste Hindus, were concerned with maintaining Hindu culture under British colonial rule and administrative law. Certain strategies these movements devised for providing such protection would crucially inform the tactics deployed later by Hindu nationalists. Most importantly, both the Brahma and Arya Samaj leaders recognized the need to reform Hinduism, in order to unify its members into a community capable of withstanding foreign cultural incursions. Raja Rammohan Roy, the Bengali Brahmin founder of the Brahma Samaj, advocated the removal of certain social practices such as untouchability or *sati* (widow-burning), and noted that such oppressions were modern perversions of an essentially egalitarian and tolerant religion. The Arya Samaj shifted the focus of social reform towards the specific purpose of removing from Hinduism the inequalities that provided outside forces such as Christian missionaries with openings through which to appeal to marginalized sections of Hindu society. See Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-religious movements in British India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

² See Madan Mohan Malaviya, ‘Presidential Address (1923)’, in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007, pp. 64-9, p. 69.

³ Swami Shraddhananda, a social activist affiliated with the Arya Samaj, reinvented this tradition, and also performed this ritual with lower-caste Hindus who had converted to other religions in order to integrate them back into Hindu society. The impact of this heritage on current Hindu nationalist

While informed by these earlier movements, Hindu nationalism offered a distinct conceptualization of Hindu identity. V.D. Savarkar, a Brahmin from the state of Maharashtra, is credited as the original architect of the ideology, which he labeled ‘Hindutva’. In his influential 1920 tract *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, Savarkar laid out a logic for linking the cultural tradition of Hinduism, with the political form of the nation-state.⁵ Specifically, Savarkar argued for making India a ‘Hindu Rashtra’ [Hindu nation], arguing that effective nationalism depended on three prerequisites: geographical unity, a common racial heritage, and a common culture, all of which were provided for within his interpretation of Hinduism. Savarkar argued that all Hindus descended from the Aryans, who were the original inhabitants of India, and thus every Hindu looked upon India as his ‘fatherland’, unlike Indian Muslims and Christians whose spiritual homes were located outside of the territory in which they resided.⁷ He also argued that all Hindus possessed a common *racial* heritage, and a shared set of cultural practices that collectively defined what it meant to be not just Hindu, but Indian (indeed the two were necessarily equivalent in Savarkar’s eyes).

Later Hindutva ideologues, such as Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar expanded upon Savarkar’s conceptualization:

race is by far the most important ingredient of a Nation. Even if there be people of a foreign origin, they must have become assimilated into the body of the mother race and inextricably fused into it...for otherwise such foreign races

attempts at recruiting lower castes is evident in the obvious parallels between *Shuddhi* and the Sangh’s recent *ghar vapasi* [returning home] campaign to induct tribal converts to Christianity ‘back’ into the Hindu fold, see Jaffreot, *op. cit.* 2007, pp. 79-85.

⁵ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*, New Delhi: Bharatiya Sahitya Sadan, 1923.

⁷ Savarkar believed that Muslims formed a tight-knit community that was bound by pan-Islamic sympathies generated by the concept of *umma* [wider transnational community of Muslims]. Savarkar He saw the location of Muslim holy sites outside of India as indicative of their supporting Islam rather than a nationalist support for the Indian state, and therefore believed Islam to be inherently anti-nationalist. This belief was strengthened in Savarkar’s eyes by the mobilization among Indian Muslims as part of transnational agitations following the fall of the Ottoman Empire (termed the Khilafat or Caliphate movement).

may be considered at best members of a common state, but they can never form part and parcel of the National body.⁹

One of the purposes of Hindutva's focus on territory and race, and relative devaluing of religious practice was that it provided a means to unify Hindu society, despite the extreme differentiation in the practice of the religion across India.¹⁰ Even more pertinently for the purposes of this study, proponents of Hindutva hoped that a discourse of shared bloodlines would serve to overcome some of the debilitating fissures internal to Hinduism, such as those distinctions caused by caste praxis.¹¹

However despite caste's centrifugal impact, Hindutva did not seek to abolish its practice, thus betraying the ideology's bias towards upper caste interests in ways that circumscribed its appeal. Of particular importance were the views of Savarkar and other Brahmin leaders towards the Laws of Manu, a controversial second century tract written by an influential Brahmin philosopher concerning Hindu praxis, which included a moral defense of the denigration of lower castes:

One occupation only the lord prescribed to Shudras [Dalits] to serve meekly these other three [higher] castes. A Shudra, who insults a high caste man with gross invective, shall have his tongue cut out for he is of low origin....No collection of wealth must be made by a Shudra...for a Shudra who has acquired wealth gives pain to Brahmanas [Brahmins].¹²

The fact that Savarkar and other Hindu nationalist ideologues defended the Laws of Manu immediately positioned Hindutva as an elitist defense of casteism. Savarkar defended the division of Hindu society into four caste groups [the *chaturvarna*] as

⁹ Jaffrelot, *op. cit.* 2007, p. 102

¹⁰ Christophe Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 27

¹¹ Jaffrelot, *op. cit.* 1993, p. 28.

¹² From F. Max Mueller (ed.) The Laws of Manu, New Delhi: Low Price Publication, 1996 (first edition 1886), as quoted in Shamsul Islam, 'Dalits in Theory and Practice of Hindutva', in Anand Teltumbde (ed.) Hindutva and Dalits, Delhi: Samya, 2005: pp. 23-45, pp. 25-26.

necessary to ‘regulate [Hinduism’s] noble blood on lines believed- and on the whole rightly believed.’¹³ Golwalkar echoed this defense, famously defending the myth of a Hindu people as parts of a *Virat Purusha* [Divine Man/first incarnation of the Hindu god Brahma] in which ‘the Brahmin is the head... and Shudras the feet.’¹⁴ Another Hindutva ideologue, K.R. Malkani, notes that Golwalkar in fact ‘saw no reason why Hindu law should break its links with *Manusmriti* [the laws of Manu]’.¹⁵

As a result, the incorporation of lower castes by the Sangh had to overcome the Brahminical underpinnings of the ideology itself. The ‘central problematic’ for the Sangh became how to reconcile the tensions inherent between the twin tasks of recruiting subaltern caste voters while protecting upper caste interests. The task was difficult as evidenced by the case of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh [National Organization of Volunteers, RSS], which was founded by another Brahmin, K.B. Hedgewar, and expanded by Golwalkar, to spread the message of Hindutva through a network of dedicated volunteers running *shakhas* [centers] throughout the country.¹⁶ However, since all the early ideologues for the movement came from Brahmin backgrounds, they focused their initial recruiting efforts to members of their caste communities. Consequently the first generation of enrollees in RSS *shakhas* were urban, dominant-caste youth. Tanika Sarkar notes that early founders of the RSS even

¹³ Savarkar, *op. cit.* (1923), p. 85, as quoted in Islam *op. cit.* 2005, p. 31.

¹⁴ Madhav Shadashiv Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1939, p. 36.

¹⁵ K.R. Malkani, *The RSS Story*, New Delhi: Impex India, 1980, p.73, as quoted in Subhash Gatade, ‘The Ideological and institutional Incorporation of Dalits Into Hindutva maelstrom’, *South Asia Citizens Wire*, 27 January 2009. Accessed February 2nd, 2009

¹⁶ For a comprehensive overview of the RSS, see Walter K. Anderson and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*, New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1987. Also see Walter K. Anderson and Shridhar D. Damle, ‘RSS: Ideology, Organization, and Training’, in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.) *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 23-55.

referred to their volunteers not as *swayamsevaks* [volunteer workers], as they are now popularly known, but as ‘Brahmin youths’.¹⁷

Compounding the problem was the fact that the Brahmin personnel of the RSS came from communities that had historically actively oppressed lower caste and tribal communities. Walter Anderson and Sridhar Damle argue that the only lower castes who were attracted to the movement were those who sought to mimic Brahmins, and in doing so raise their own social profile, (a process which M.N. Srinivas has termed ‘sanskritisation’).¹⁹ However, this strategy was severely constrained by the fact that it depended on a particular active desire to emulate upper castes organically manifesting in the consciousness of lower caste individuals.

Early attempts of Hindu nationalists to expand the movement’s appeal did not adequately grapple with the severity of the tension between the movement’s Brahminical doctrine and the need for subaltern support. The movement’s focus was on building an organizational network dedicated to spreading Hindutva among all Hindus (see Figure 2.1). While this network did include specific wings devoted to the recruitment of women, students, farmers, laborers, and Adivasis, there was little thought given to the need to adapt the doctrine preached within these organizations to appeal to poorer communities.²⁰ As a consequence, Hindu nationalism was constantly susceptible to being marginalized by political leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, who were vociferous opponents of the movement.²¹

¹⁷ Paola Bacchetta, ‘Hindu Nationalist Women as Ideologues’, in Jaffrelot *op. cit.* 2005, pp. 108-147, p. 140 footnote 7.

¹⁹ See Anderson and Damle, *op. cit.* 2005, p. 45. Also see M. N. Srinivas, Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952. Also M.S. Srinivas “A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization.” *Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 15, (1956), pp. 481-496.

²⁰ These wings included: Rashtriya Sevika Samiti [National Association of Female Volunteers, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad [All India Students Association, ABVP], Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh [Indian Worker’s Association, BMS], Bharatiya Kisan Sangh [Indian Farmer’s Association, BKS], Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram [Center for Tribal Welfare, VKA], and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (Worldwide Hindu Association, VHP).

²¹ Nehru critiqued Hindu nationalism numerous times from public platforms:

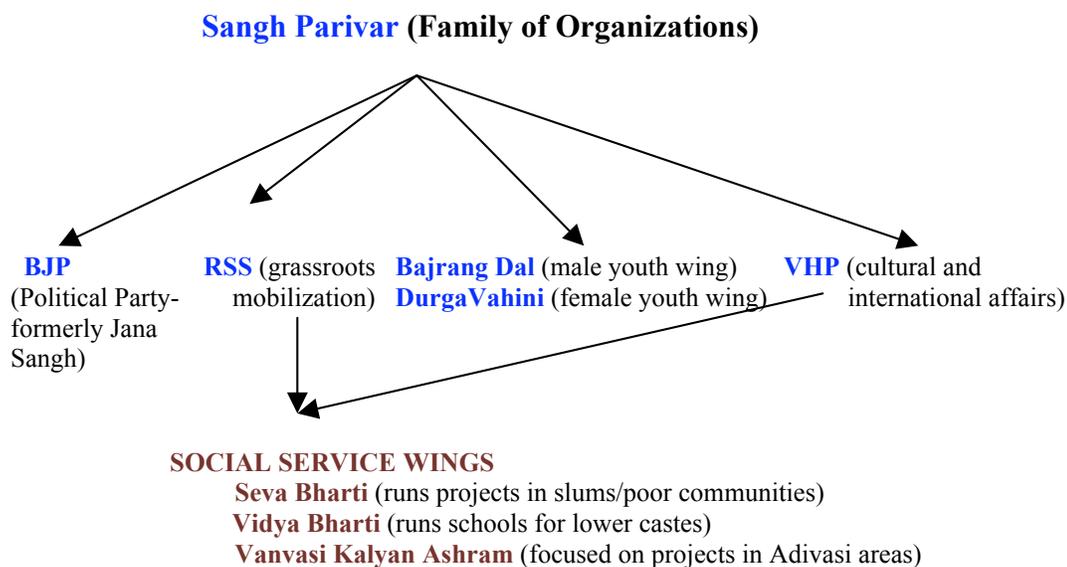


FIGURE 2.1 Organization Chart of the Sangh Parivar

In response to its socio-political marginalization by a hegemonic Congress party, the RSS decided to develop an explicitly political wing, the Jana Sangh [People’s Organization], the precursor to the BJP. This move itself signaled an important shift in the thinking of Hindu nationalists away from their prior commitment to remain uninvolved in politics. The Jana Sangh depended heavily on the RSS during its period of formation. The actual internal structure of the party mirrored that of its ‘parent’ organization’, and so did the party’s support base.²² Available evidence

I cannot imagine a more narrow-minded attitude. It [Hindu nationalist sentiment] can mean only one of two things. Either the people who are behind the movement do not understand anything or they follow rules which have nothing to do with any logic...I am convinced that if unfortunately their psychology works and they succeed in getting power into their hands, they will most certainly ruin India.

Speech at a gathering of the workers of the Congress Party in the Prime Minister’s House, New Delhi, 25 May 1953. From *Sahi Rasta* (published by Friends of New Kashmir Committee), Mahakoshal PCC Papers, NMML, Original in Hindi.

²² The lowest level bodies were the local working committees, the rough equivalent of the *shakha* in the RSS. Four to five of these bodies constituted a *mandal* committee or block, again paralleling a similarly named body in the RSS. Members in the *mandal* committees then elected representatives at the *zila* or district Level, which corresponded to the administrative districts of India. These district bodies then elected state representatives, who then in turn voted for the national Central Working Committee. At the same time Golwalkar, the head of the RSS, loaned several of his full timers (*pracharaks*) to the Jana Sangh to act as an informal secretariat for the party, the *sangathan mantris* or organizational secretaries.

suggests the Jana Sangh's pattern of support reflected the limitations of the movement it was embedded within. A 1967 survey provides the only evidence of caste-wise voting for this era, and suggests that merchants and voters in other elite-occupation sectors formed the dominant support base of the Jana Sangh.²³

Part of the problem these earlier phases of organizational expansion faced was that emphasis was placed on a broadly targeting all of Hindu society with a message of 'unity'. The movement's leaders had yet to comprehend the significant variability in such an appeal across different caste communities, and consequently did not specifically focus attention on how to adopt particular strategies and rhetoric to overcome the hostility subaltern Hindus might specifically show towards the Sangh. Some early voices had cautioned that a neglect of the specific case of lower castes could prove debilitating for upper castes themselves:

The Harijans [Dalits] have, by and large, the same set of religious beliefs and rituals as the [upper] Caste-Hindus and they are Hindus. I wish and hope that they would remain that way. However, it is for the thinking ones among the Caste-Hindus themselves to see how they would be able to keep the Harijans knitted firmly in the Hindu Samaj if the incidents of glaring oppression against Harijans keeps recurring... There can be nothing more suicidal for Caste Hindus than to go on maltreating Harijans.²⁴

Despite such warnings, it took the mass conversion of 1000 Dalits to Islam in the village of Meenakshipuram, Tamil Nadu, in 1981 to shake the Sangh Parivar into a sense of urgency in their quest for effective strategies to appeal to subaltern castes.²⁵

Bruce Graham, 'The Leadership and Organization of the Jana Sangh: 1957 to 1967', in Jaffrelot *op. cit.* (2005), pp. 225-67, p. 246.

²³ 1967 National Election Survey, Center for the Study of Developing Society, New Delhi.

²⁴ Ahmed Rashid Shervani, 'A Warning to Caste Hindus', *Organizer*, June 1st, 1980, p. 5

²⁵ This conversion was widely understood as orchestrated by the Muslim League, and was viewed by the RSS as exemplifying the ways in which proselytizing religions could prey on Hinduism's downtrodden. The Bharatiya Janata Party [the new name for the Jana Sangh, adopted in 1980] sent a

In the 1980s and 1990s, concerted efforts were made to find ways to specifically spread Hindutva's appeal with Hinduism's poor. The remainder of this chapter outlines these attempts of the Sangh Parivar to 'recaste Hindutva' and overcome the pigeonholing of Hindu nationalism as an upper caste phenomenon. I outline four strategies that were available to the Sangh Parivar and its organizational affiliates to appeal to lower caste communities, ranging from sectarian agitations designed to polarize communities along religious lines, to mimicking lower caste parties by elevating subaltern candidates to positions of prominence within the BJP.

While the chapter outlines each of the strategies separately for conceptual clarity, the account is not meant to imply a neat chronological ordering. While some of the strategies were deployed due to the perceived failure of earlier options, there were temporal overlaps in the implementation of these approaches. However, I do wish to draw attention to the fact that *each* of these approaches failed to reconcile the tensions between the movement's need to recruit mass support while serving elite interests. Instead it was a different service-based strategy, outlined in Chapters 3-5, which was better suited to address these twin goals, and which proved influential in changing Hindutva's political fortunes with the poor.

2.3 The Politics of Polarization: The Ram Movement

In the party's 1985 National Executive meeting, BJP leader Atal Beharee Vajpayee emphasized the need for the party to adopt new techniques to widen its base beyond upper castes. He suggested that an emphasis on slow, deliberate recruitment

team led by party president Atal Beharee Vajpayee down to Meenakshipuram shortly after the conversions to investigate the reasons behind them. Vajpayee delivered a speech insisting that 'there was no justification for mass conversions', but also denouncing the practice of untouchability, which he said was not part of Vedic-era Hinduism, and should be abolished immediately 'Press Statement by Shri A. B. Vajpayee, President Bharatiya Janata Party, at Madras on 17/7/1981, Nehru Memorial Library Clippings Collection.

through organizational building had failed to gain widespread popularity for the Sangh.²⁶ Another National Executive Report explicitly noted this failure, arguing that ‘this cadre party by itself will not enable us to reach our goal’.²⁷ The same report advocated the party work to ‘promote specific issues and programmes that can interest and attract major sections of the society’. Two years later the RSS mouthpiece, the *Organizer*, noted that even seven years after the Meenakshipuram warning, the need to bridge the ‘Hindu-Dalit gap’ was still pressing.²⁸

Revealingly, BJP internal reports at the time recommended the utilization of protest politics as a useful tool for drumming up support with a wider base than could be contacted through the everyday organizational activities of the *shakha*:

... a national-level agitation once or twice a year. Sufficient time between the date of decision and the date of agitation should be given to enable the leaders at various levels to build up the right climate and prepare the volunteers for the agitation to make it a success.²⁹

This thinking marked the beginning of a phase in which the Hindu nationalist leaders shifted the focus of the movement from building up an organizational network to using sectarian agitations to gain support. Ironically, this tactical move was facilitated by the rival Congress party attempting to exploit communalism* to regain popularity it had lost due to ineffectual policy performance, rising corruption, and Indira Gandhi’s controversial status as a leader following her politically motivated decision to declare a State of Emergency in 1975. The Congress’ shift was made in the early 1980s, at a

²⁶ A.B. Vajpayee, Address to BJP National Executive, Calcutta, 1985, published in Presidential Speeches Part II, New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party Press, 2005, p. 213.

²⁷ ‘National Executive Resolution, 1985’, Bharatiya Janata Party Press, 1985, p. 36.

²⁸ ‘Hindu-Dalit gap needs to be bridged’ *Organizer*, January 3, 1988, p. 5

Also see Anand ‘Some Thoughts to Ponder for our Harijan Brothers’, *Organizer*, August 3, 1987

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 38.

* I use communalism in the sense in which the term is used in South Asian political studies to denote sectarianism along religious lines.

time when the BJP was still a minor electoral factor, but had registered enough of a presence in urban India to get the dominant party's attention. Indira Gandhi explicitly dipped into Hindutva's ideological pool, and began to use pro-Hindu rhetoric to regain the support her party was losing during this period.³⁰

While the Congress did benefit electorally from this strategy, its actions made Hindutva more acceptable, and in doing so provided an opportunity for the Sangh Parivar to openly campaign against perceived 'minority' aggressions against Hinduism.³¹ The Parivar moved quickly to create new militant wings, the Bajrang Dal [Army of Hanuman] and Durga Vahini [Army of Durga], to mobilize young men and women respectively into forces capable of 'protecting' Hindu culture.³² At this juncture, the Sangh began deploying an aggressive symbolic tactic, which adapted

³⁰ Indira Gandhi found that in the wake of the Bangladesh War, the combination of international factors such as a successful war with a Muslim country, coupled with domestic factors such as the growing impact of the Sangh's rhetoric of 'Hindu vulnerability' provided a valuable political opening. Gandhi saw an opportunity to cash in on the Hindu vote that the BJP had worked so hard to organize, simultaneously boosting her base and undercutting that of a rising political threat. The RSS weekly *Organizer* noted the remarks of Indira Gandhi's Congress (I) Party General Secretary, C.M. Stephen, defending her decision to inaugurate a Bharat Mata Mandir [Mother India temple] built by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, indicating her aggressive overtures to some of the Sangh organizations in order to outflank the BJP with its own affiliates (*Organizer*, November 27th, 1983).

³¹ One of the areas in which these aggressions were constructed was in the arena of jurisprudence. In 1985, the Sangh was given its big opportunity when the case of a Muslim woman's right to receive alimony came before the Supreme Court. The Court held instead that the Quran in fact 'does impose an obligation on a Muslim husband to make provision for or to provide maintenance to the divorced wife. Shah Bano, the woman filing the case, had been thrown out of her house by her husband, to whom she had been married to for thirty years. Her husband argued that he should not have to make payments beyond a three-month time period (known as *iddat* under Muslim Personal Law). Case details from Kirti Singh *Women's Rights and the Reform of Personal Laws* in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.) Hindus and Others. New Delhi: Viking, 1993 p. 193-5. In the wake of strong protests against the decision on the part of Muslim organizations, the Congress government came out strongly against this decision and responded by passing the Muslim Women's Protection Act in 1986, which sought to limit the divorced wife's entitlement to a three month period. The BJP capitalized on this decision by the Congress by portraying the latter as willing to make special exemptions in national laws (such as those asserting the rights of a divorced woman to maintenance) for Muslim communities. When Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi proclaimed that equality was a Western concept not applicable to all facets of the Indian context, it was not hard for the BJP leadership to argue that such thinking exemplified the minorityism the Congress indulged in.

³² Hanuman refers to the monkey god who plays a significant role in the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*, in which the god Ram is helped by an army of monkeys to defeat the demon-king Ravana who has kidnapped Ram's wife Sita. Durga meanwhile is revered as the militant form of the wife of the Hindu god Shiva, who is famous for defeating the demon Mahishasur.

yatras (pilgrimage) to significant Hindu sites of worship into agitational processions designed to polarize communities. Placing idols on *raths* or chariots, the Sangh managed to mobilize massive processions across great swaths of territory. Part of the goal of these belligerent displays of Hindu ‘unity’ was to attract lower castes to the processions, and then to the movement.

The most famous of these agitations was the *Rath Yatra* [chariot pilgrimage], in which BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani traveled several thousand miles in a Toyota Jeep meant to symbolize a chariot from Hindu mythology to the fabled birthplace of the god Ram at Ayodhya. The town in Uttar Pradesh was the site of a major dispute concerning a local mosque, the Babri *masjid*. Hindu nationalists believed the mosque stood at what had previously been the site of a temple for Ram, which they claimed had been demolished by the (Muslim) Mughal emperor Babur in the sixteenth century. In 1985, a group of Hindu activists demanded that Hindus be allowed to worship inside the mosque. The Sangh Parivar took this demand a step further, calling for the mosque to be replaced by a temple, and worked hard to publicize the issue by organizing the collection of bricks, both across the country and abroad, for a temple at the site. These bricks, termed *Ram Shilas*, were collected in large, often frenetic religious ceremonies, where the stones were blessed before being sent to Ayodhya.

From 1985 onwards the *Ramjanmabhoomi* [birthplace of Ram] movement kept gathering steam. The BJP’s selection of the hawkish Advani to replace the more moderate Vajpayee also resulted in official discourse of the BJP becoming far more aggressive.³³ The concept of ‘positive secularism’ was developed by the Sangh to counter the Indian state’s version of secularism, which the BJP believed was actually minority appeasement (or what Advani famously dubbed ‘pseudo-secularism’).

³³ The party’s manifesto in 1991 was perhaps its most aggressive till that point, evidenced by its provocative title ‘Towards Ram *Rajya* [rule]: Midterm Poll to Lok Sabha: Our Commitments’.

Positive secularism was defined in contrast as ‘justice for all but appeasement of none’.³⁴ Advani argued that minority communities were ‘becoming increasingly aggressive and ominously reminiscent of the pre-1947 years.’³⁵ He argued that ‘these threats have to be met head on and squarely spiked’.³⁶

Tensions over Ayodhya kept mounting, and eventually culminated with the destruction of the Babri *masjid* by mobs led by Sangh Parivar footsoldiers on December 6th, 1992, with many senior BJP leaders watching the destruction and appearing to exhort the crowd. A full account of the destruction and its aftermath, which included communal rioting across India, are beyond the scope of this chapter. However it is important to note that the episode marked the crest of the ‘saffron wave’ of Hindu nationalism.³⁷ Riding this aggressive brand of nationalistic politics during the run-up to the mosque’s demolition, the BJP had begun to make political inroads into the Indian electorate. However, as Hansen notes:

Polls suggested that the large constituency won by the BJP was generally fairly young, predominantly male, urban, and upper-caste, though the party also gained a considerable rural constituency, particularly among upper-caste communities in the north, ... and [the party was able] to make itself a “respectable” choice in the fast-growing middle class in many provincial cities.³⁸

Indeed, the BJP’s communal tactics helped to consolidate its position with Hindu elites. The party quickly rose from garnering a grand total of 2 votes with 7.74% of the

³⁴ Lal Krishna Advani, Presidential Address to National Council Meeting, Bombay, 25th September 1989, published in Presidential Speeches Part II, New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party Press, 2005, pp. 97-113, p. 113.

³⁵ Advani is referring to the period of increasing demands by Indian Muslims for social and political autonomy, which contributed to the pressures for the creation of separate states of East and West Pakistan, in addition to special considerations for Muslim communities remaining in India.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 112.

³⁷ Thomas Hansen, The Saffron Wave, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999

³⁸ Hansen, *op. cit.* (1999), p. 167

vote in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections to 85 seats from 11.36% of the vote in 1989. By 1991, the year before the mosque fell, this share had gone up to 120 seats from 20.08% of the vote. However upon closer analysis, this mercurial rise appears to have been fuelled largely by upper castes: a prominent national poll estimated that the BJP enjoyed a lead over the Congress only with upper castes, capturing 33% of this electorate as opposed to the Congress' 29%.³⁹ Considering that the BJP had begun the 1980s as a virtual non-factor with *every* electoral group, its rapid overtaking of the still dominant Congress with respect to upper castes was impressive.

The wave of anti-Muslim mobilizations however did not seem to be as successful in recruiting Dalits and Adivasis into the movement. The reasons for this failure were perhaps best articulated by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, architect of the Indian constitution, and the country's pre-eminent Dalit political figure:

There are many lower orders in the Hindu society whose economic, political and social needs are the same as those of the majority of Muslims and they would be far more ready to make a common cause with the Muslims for achieving common ends than they would with the high caste Hindus who have denied and deprived them of ordinary human rights for centuries.⁴⁰

While upper castes may have understood the 'threats' to Hinduism as destabilizing to the power relations that had historically privileged them, poor Hindus felt no such natural ideological attachment to the project of Hindutva.

Even the explicit attempts in the *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement to recruit lower castes focused more on symbolic gestures of inclusion rather than doctrinal reform to address subaltern concerns.⁴¹ For example, the *shila* [brick]-gathering initiative asked

³⁹ 'MARG poll', *India Today*, 31st May 1996, p. 27.

⁴⁰ D.C. Ahir, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches Vol 8.*, New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 2007, p. 359, as quoted in Gatade, *op. cit.*(2009).

⁴¹ Examples include the organization of a camp by the Vishva Hindu Parishad in July of 1982 in Andhra Pradesh, where 100 Dalits were trained as priests for performing religious rites and performing worship

for individual donations of a very small amount (Re. 1.25 or \$.03), in order to be accessible to even the poorest contributor. Other moves included the Vishva Hindu Parishad [Worldwide Hindu Organization-an arm of the Sangh, see Figure 2.1] ensuring that a Dalit officer in its organization was the person to lay down the foundation stone for the Ram temple in Ayodhya, and the appointment of a Dalit priest at the Hanuman temple in Patna.⁴² However, even these overtures have often served to expose the casteist nature of the movement's leadership. For example, a Brahmin Sangh activist balked at handing over the *shilas* to a lower-caste activist who had been given the responsibility by the movement to oversee the project.⁴³

The limitations of communal mobilization were brought home to the BJP most forcefully during the 1993 assembly elections, when the party believed it could win a convincing mandate in north and central Indian states where the Ayodhya mobilizations had been strongest. Instead the party suffered major defeats:

Explaining the scenario, a member of the party's national executive said today: 'We were so confident of victory that we did not bother to chalk out a strategy for defeat. And now we are totally unable to cope with the reverses'.⁴⁴

These defeats exposed the BJP's glaring inability to appeal to lower caste voters:

Less than a year after the [Sangh's] euphoria following the demolition of the Babri Masjid, a part of the energy of 'plebian' assertion proliferating

at temples, tasks which were traditionally reserved for twice-born caste groups ('Lakhs contribute to the Rs. 5 crore Fund to Protect Dharma', *Organizer*, August 1st, 1982, p.4). Another example was the student union Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad's decision to observe the death anniversary of Dalit leader Babasaheb Ambedkar as Social Equality Day ('ABVP to work for Harijans, tribals' *Organizer*, November 16th, 1980, p. 15).

⁴² Rakesh Sinha, 'Sangh Parivar and the Dalits', *Times of India*, 11th July 1994

⁴³ See Udit Raj (chairperson of the All India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations), 'A Hindu Rashtra? Sangh Parivar is daydreaming', *Indian Express*, 31st December 2002; T K Arun, 'See, hear and speak no evil, let evil prevail', *Economic Times*, 21st March, 2002.

⁴⁴ 'No BJP strategy in "defeat"' *Hindustan Times*, 13th December 1993

throughout the political field began to turn against the Hindu nationalist movement itself in the legislative assembly elections in several states.⁴⁵

...there has been no consolidation of these [lower] castes in a self-conscious and prideful Hindu identity which is integral to the upper caste Hindu identification with this [Hindu nationalist] cult. Even less has there been a Hindu consolidation among the lower castes. . . . The BJP cannot integrate upper castes and backward castes into a consolidated Hindu party. It cannot . . . become the regional party of north Indian Hindu nationalism, let alone a ruling all-India party of the Hindus.⁴⁶

The much-publicized saffron wave generated by sectarian agitations failed to reach Dalit and Adivasi vote banks. A new tide would need to be generated.

2.4 The Impossibility of Programmatic Ties:

Appealing to subaltern voters through pro-poor policies offered a potential alternative to ideological mobilization for the BJP, but not one the party ever considered seriously. Forging programmatic linkages with the poor entailed a level of compromise that would alienate the BJP's upper caste core constituencies, and thus the party could never strongly advocate the kinds of redistributive demands made by leftist or even some regional political formations. The only real avenue available to the Sangh on this front was to appeal to poor voters by strategically using the party's support of economic *swadeshi*, or self-reliance to find common ground with poor voters. The Sangh had historically virulently opposed economic liberalization of any kind, arguing that such policies went against Hindutva's conception of building

⁴⁵ Hansen, *op. cit.* (1999), p 188.

⁴⁶ Paul Brass, 'The Rise of the BJP and the Future of Party Politics in Uttar Pradesh,' in Harold Gould and Sumit Ganguly (eds.) *India Votes: Alliance Politics and the Ninth and Tenth General Elections*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), p 258.

cultural strength internally, and of constructing a national sense of pride against the image of invasive and exploitative foreigners seeking to weaken India. In 1987, Advani made the party's position clear when he noted that:

..the solution to our economic problems does not lie in credits or technology from abroad, but in giving a boost to domestic production and exports based on total mobilization of national resources...

While the BJP's economic nationalism was ideologically motivated, there was potential for the party to forge popular support with poor voters based on its anti-liberalization stance. Opinion polls showed that lower-income voters consistently disapproved of privatizing reforms that were being undertaken by the Congress government in the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁴⁷ The Congress leadership had embraced neoliberal reforms, including import liberalization, and its potential for unleashing a technological revolution in India, and this provided an opportunity for the BJP to portray itself as the party of the *aam aadmi* [common man] who was being further marginalized by the sudden changes.

Instead however, the party grew increasingly concerned about losing its upper caste base, who were being won over by the opportunities neoliberal reforms were unleashing for them.⁴⁸ In an analysis of the party's economic policies, Salim Lakha notes that by 1992 the BJP shifted towards supporting *internal* economic liberalization, or the relaxation of restrictions within India. The party believed this position would strike a balance between a *swadeshi* line favored by its Sangh affiliates

⁴⁷ For example, a survey in 1996 showed only 19.41% of Dalits and 16.04% of Adivasis agreeing with privatizing public sector utilities (question 34e on National Election Study 1996).

⁴⁸ Anand Teltumbde notes the Sangh's 'fear of losing its political base in view of the middle class increasingly favoring globalization...made the BJP an aggressive implementer of neoliberal globalization', in 'Hindutva, Dalits and the Neoliberal Order', in A. Teltumbde (ed.) *op. cit.* 2005, pp. 46-74, p. 52.

and its electoral concerns with losing elite support.⁴⁹ However, pressed to maintain their electoral core, the BJP leadership decided to fully embrace liberalization quite quickly after reforms were implemented by the Congress government.⁵¹ By 1993, party president L.K. Advani made the break complete, announcing that:

the concept of *swadeshi* as enunciated by the RSS-inspired Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) was unacceptable to the party, and said the idea of boycotting foreign goods was no longer as relevant as it was before independence.⁵²

Not surprisingly, this decision strained relations between the BJP and its partners, who saw *Swadeshi* as a core part of Hindu nationalist doctrine, and the opening of markets as antithetical to the core message of Hindutva.⁵³ Following intense pressure from anti-liberalization Sangh lobbies, BJP officials equivocated on their official stance on globalization for much of the 1990s. However, when in government by 1999, the BJP realized the popularity of reforms with India's business community, from whom the party culled much of its support. Consequently, the BJP government largely continued pursuing policies to open up Indian markets, lifting quantitative restrictions on consumer imports, opening up the insurance sector to foreign capital, and promoting the increase of foreign direct investment.⁵⁴

Despite the Sangh's cognizance of its failures with recruiting the poor, considerations of the interests of these voters was markedly absent in the BJP's internal debates over policy choices. The party's concern was over the tension between its ideological commitments to organizational affiliates and its elite electoral

⁴⁹ Salim Lakha, "From Swadeshi to Globalization: The Bharatiya Janata Party's Shifting Economic Agenda" in John McGuire and Ian Copland (eds.), *Hindu Nationalism and Governance*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007 pp. 106-31, p. 109.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 109.

⁵² Prasun Sonwalkar, 'Advani clarifies stand on "swadeshi"', *Times of India*, 14th September 1993.

⁵³ In 1992, the RSS launched a *Swadeshi Jagran Abhiyan* [Awareness-Raising Movement for Self-Reliance], forcing the BJP to take an explicit stand on liberalization.

⁵⁴ Lakha, *op. cit.*, (2007), pp. 110-111.

base's interests. The subsequent decision to cater to upper caste voters however hurt more than the party's relations with its movement partners: it also came at the price of a missed opportunity to forge a platforms with at least some appeal to subaltern communities. With the BJP orienting its economic platform to cater to Hindu elites even when this ran counter to Hindutva ideology, Dalits and Adivasis were even less likely to support the party.⁵⁵

The pigeonholing of the BJP as a promoter of upper caste policy interests was further reinforced when the party did not support reservations in public sector jobs for members of lower caste communities.⁵⁶ Upper castes were virulently opposed to such reservations as they necessarily shrank the pool of positions for which they could apply. Here at least, the BJP was made aware of the cost of its policy choices, as its position received widespread attention in the press, which in turn further undermined any chance of the party promoting an image of its concern for the interests of subaltern populations. Thus, the BJP's positioning on the crucial issues of liberalization and reservations betrayed the fact that the BJP leadership had clearly prioritized protecting the interests of their upper caste base over subaltern recruitment.

While communal mobilization had failed to account for the ideological distance between poor Hindus and a project to defend Hinduism, attempts to create programmatic linkages with these electorates were never even seriously pursued, as they invariably entailed the direct compromise of entrenched upper caste interests. Shortcomings in efficacy and acceptability thus rendered both techniques unsuitable

⁵⁵ See Pradeep Chhibber, 'Who Voted for the Bharatiya Janata Party', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 27, No. 4, October 1997, pp. 631-39. Francine Frankel, 'The Challenge of Hindu Nationalism to India's Constitutional Democracy', in *India's Political Economy 1947-2004*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 693-788.

⁵⁶ In 1990, the coalition government in Delhi (of which the BJP was not a part) said it would implement the recommendations of the independent Mandal commission, which had recommended that 27% of posts in government administrations and corporations would be reserved for members of the Other Backward Castes (OBC, who fall one rung 'above' Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the caste hierarchy-SCs and STs already had such reservations in place).

for the BJP's electoral needs. As a consequence, the party's success among Dalit and Adivasi electorates remained woefully behind that of its rivals. The party's 11% vote share with Dalit voters and 17% vote share with Adivasi voters significantly trailed the Congress' 31% and 47% respectively. The party's failure was also reflected in its lackluster performance in constituencies reserved for Dalits (SCs) and Adivasis (STs). In 1989, the party won a combined 18 SC and ST constituencies out of the 117 that were reserved for these populations. By 1991 this number had only increased to 22.⁵⁷

A leading BJP ideologue during this period confessed that the party 'desperately needed a mechanism through which to appeal to lower caste populations.'⁵⁸ The Sangh, for the first time, began looking to their competitors for inspiration, and crafted a new strategy that was informed by the rising success of lower caste led parties that had recently announced their arrival onto the Indian electoral scene.

2.5 Social Engineering

The adoption of this new approach, termed 'social engineering', came after the failure of the BJP during a series of State Assembly elections in 1993. Praful Bidwai notes that at this low point, the party decided on a radically different strategy:

To reconcile the inherent tensions between the two agendas [of Hindutva and lower caste empowerment], the BJP devised what it called "social engineering". It would give prominence to leaders from the intermediate and low castes in campaigning for Hindutva. This would at once help the BJP to free itself from the confines of its traditional identification with upper-caste

⁵⁷ Data from Electoral Commission of India, www.eci.gov.in. Accessed September 20th, 2007.

⁵⁸ Interview with K. Govindacharya, New Delhi, May 15th, 2008.

Hindus, sink roots among the lower castes, and further an ideological-political vision.⁵⁹

The man who developed this strategy was then BJP general secretary K.N. Govindacharya. Govindacharya's mercurial rise within the party was due largely to his skillful organization of *rath yatras* in connection with the building of a temple at Ayodhya, described earlier in the chapter. From the outset, Govindacharya, himself a Brahmin, set about thinking of ways to expand the party's following among lower castes:

We needed a mechanism which took into account lower caste populations. So in 1991 I mentioned during the Ram [Ayodhya] movement, that their participation in the movement was largely ceremonial. And ultimately in 1993 the results [of the State Assembly elections in five states] were so loud that no one could ignore it. We had the slogan '*aaj panch pradesh, kal sara desh*' [today five states, tomorrow the whole country] and then were wiped out in the Assembly elections. So I used to say a kind of social engineering is needed within the party- *chal, charitra, chehera* [the walk, character, and face] must change. In the functioning of the party itself there has to be a radical change so that those sections not represented should be able to feel at home and look towards this party with a feeling of belonging.⁶⁰

Govindacharya convinced the party to promote candidates from lower caste backgrounds to positions of power, and was instrumental in fostering the rise of leaders like Kalyan Singh, Vinay Katiyar, Narendra Modi, Uma Bharati and Bangaru Laxman.⁶¹ The strategy of social engineering was informed by the success of lower

⁵⁹ Praful Bidwai, 'End of social engineering', *Frontline*, Vol. 22, No. 26, Dec. 17 - 30, 2005.

⁶⁰ Interview with K.N. Govindacharya, New Delhi, May 15th, 2008.

⁶¹ Many of these leaders, Singh and Bharati in particular, managed to win elections for their party in the key states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh respectively.

caste parties like the Dalit-led Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in key states like Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP had suffered during the 1993 elections in large part due to its inability to broaden its appeal beyond upper castes in the state. As outlined in Chapter 1, parties like the BSP relied on elevating lower caste leaders to positions of prominence. This tactic sought to appeal to lower caste voters both through symbolic appeals based on shared identity, and through the forging of clientelist networks within lower caste communities, thereby giving subaltern voters access to channels of patronage they had historically been denied by elite-dominated parties.

The BJP's mimicry sparked significant controversy. The adoption of a 'social engineering' strategy became another massive point of contention between the BJP and the larger Sangh Parivar. The RSS, the BJP's main organizational affiliate, opposed any efforts to explicitly strategize on the basis of caste, since doing so broke with their efforts to 'unify' Hindu society.⁶² Other wings within the Sangh felt that the movement should limit outreach to gestures of symbolic inclusion of lower castes, rather than active political promotion.⁶³ Even certain leaders within the BJP, such as former party president Murli Manohar Joshi, were openly disdainful of Govindarcharya's program. Joshi argued that 'if the party has to change its character, thinking, etc., it means that the party is not worth it.'⁶⁴ He went on to say to the extent that social engineering 'means disturbing something or throwing up something based on purely caste considerations, then it has its own implications...that are not good for the party.'⁶⁵ Joshi tried to use his position as party president to counter

⁶² 'BJP runs into OBC reality', *Statesman*, November 1999.

⁶³ For example, in 1994 much was made of several VHP leaders paying a visit to Sandip Rai Chawdhury, the Dom Raa of Varanasi (or head of the Doms who are considered at the bottom of the caste hierarchy due to their traditional profession of cremating the dead) and breaking bread with him. Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, 'Sangh Clan's New Plan', *Free Press Journal*, 28th March 1994.

⁶⁴ Interview with Murli Manohar Joshi, *Sunday*, 26 January, 1997. Transcript available at: <http://inhome.rediff.com/news/feb/04joshi.htm>

⁶⁵ Interview with Murli Manohar Joshi, *op. cit.*, 1997. Also see 'The Lotus Wars' Yubaraj Ghimire and N.K. Singh, *India Today*, May 15th, 1992.

Govindacharya's influence by outlining how the party's primary message would always be Hindu unity over caste-based politicking.⁶⁶

The arguments against 'social engineering' were mostly framed as disruptive of Hindu unity, but this rhetoric masked growing concern among upper castes that the approach would empower subaltern politicians, necessarily at the former's expense. Shortly after its implementation, reports surfaced indicating that 'Brahmins are feeling stifled with the BJP because of the "social engineering theory"'.⁶⁷ Even social engineering 'stars' like Uma Bharati and Kalyan Singh, who delivered electoral successes for the BJP, were sources of worry for upper castes. Party elites were perpetually anxious that these leaders would break ranks with the party's Hindutva platform and begin campaigning on caste lines to appeal to their constituencies as independent candidates.⁶⁸ In response, the party began marginalizing the very leaders they had earlier elevated. For example, both Singh and Uttar Pradesh Governor Suraj Bhan (a Dalit) were replaced, both by upper caste leaders. These replacements followed statements by Singh and Bhan in 1996 demanding heavier reservations for lower castes than the party was willing to consider (indeed Singh demanded that 75% of the BJP's candidates in Uttar Pradesh be from lower caste backgrounds). The existing upper caste leadership of the party was obviously reluctant to pursue such radical prescriptions for internal party reform.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ In his 1991 Presidential Address, Joshi noted "The BJP has always advocated special concessions for the backward and oppressed classes. But we do not look upon them as a vote bank. We look upon them as a part of a big family." Murli Manohan Joshi, Address to National Council, Jaipur, 1st February 1991, in Presidential Speeches Part II, New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party Press, 2005, p. 43.

⁶⁷ Mukhopadhyay, *op. cit.* (1994).

⁶⁸ Interview with Vidya Subraminiam, Political Editor, *Hindu*, New Delhi, February 3rd, 2008. Ms. Subraminiam was basing her comments on an interview with Ms. Bharati. *Indeed* as a consequence of Bharati's vociferous campaigning for OBC reservations, the BJP first removed Bharati from her Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh in 2003, shunting her into an organizational post before eventually removed her from their party ranks, with several upper caste leaders calling her 'a loose canon' and 'unfit for public life', (Neena Vyas, "BJP suspends Uma Bharati", *Hindu*, December 1, 2005).

⁶⁹ P. Raman 'Growth pangs in the BJP', *Business Standard*, July 26, 1996.

Consequently the leadership ‘felt forced to rework its strategy to first consolidate its traditional support base before attempting to reach out to others’, and demoted or removed vocal lower caste leaders.⁷⁰ Nand Kumar Sai, the first Adivasi to become a state-level president for the BJP complained that more assertive lower castes struggled within the upper-caste echelons of power within the party:

It was a real struggle to be an Adivasi in the party-- I won't lie to you. I wanted to run for the Vidhan Sabha [State Assembly] a few elections ago, but I wasn't given a ticket. Then another time when I was state president they wanted me to step down, and thought maybe they [the BJP leadership] should put someone who would just be a rubber stamp for them. They thought to make someone more junior the Chief Minister, and they were afraid that I would buck their interests. Therefore they wanted to bring someone who would run their program.⁷¹

The problem for the BJP was that it had adopted a strategy that it was structurally unsuited to implement. For lower caste parties like the BSP, the elevation of lower caste personnel did not displace existing upper caste leadership. These subaltern candidates could then construct their own networks relatively unfettered by entrenched elites. However within the BJP, even when lower caste candidates were selected for advancement, it was with the presumption that they would not disturb existing networks privileging upper castes, that they would ‘run their program’. Sai complained that Adivasis who did display independence and did not bow to upper caste leaders in the party were simply not promoted, mentioning the case of the party’s

⁷⁰ Neena Vyas, ‘The BJP Riding Two Horses’, *Hindu*, Nov 12, 2000.

⁷¹ Interview with Nand Kumar Sai, New Delhi, March 17th, 2008.

star campaigner in Jharkhand, Babulal Marandi, who he felt was not actively promoted for the Chief Minister post in the state during the 2005 assembly elections.⁷²

Govindacharya backed Sai's argument, saying that current Dalit and Adivasi leaders in the party were given positions of prominence because of their non-assertiveness:

I wanted that these *Morchas* [mobilizational wings set up by the BJP] for Dalits and Adivasis to be aggressive organizations and the leadership should be from their own communities and self-guiding. But that freedom is difficult to digest. Satyanarayan Jatiya [a Scheduled Caste leader within the BJP] will be liked by the top BJP leadership because he will never assert his own rights, has no initiative, and will not challenge for power.⁷³

Jatiya, the leader of the BJP's Scheduled Caste *Morcha*, offered a curious defense of the party exercising control over lower caste personnel:

See socially, educationally, and economically, they are backward, and so the people who come out are not going to be *chamakdar* [impressive/charismatic] at first. As a result, they will necessarily not be great, and *will need help in learning how to govern* [emphasis added]. But what is the problem with this? We need to learn how to look at this positively--- this is developing the SC/ST community, so that the next generation of leaders will be better.⁷⁴

Interestingly, Jatiya refers to his own community (Scheduled Castes) as 'them', distancing himself from the 'backwardness' he describes. The patronizing view of lower castes he articulates indicates the terms on which lower caste inclusion would be considered palatable for the Sangh. Incorporation was acceptable only if understood as

⁷² In these elections, the BJP had partnered with the Janata Dal (U), and the latter's leader, Nitesh Kumar, became Chief Minister following the alliance's victory in 2005.

⁷³ Interview with K.N. Govindacharya, New Delhi, May 15th, 2008.

⁷⁴ Interview with Satya Narayan Jatiya, April 30th, 2008.

stemming from the paternalistic benevolence of upper castes intervening to ‘develop’ lower caste communities and imbue them with requisite education and ‘charisma’, and presumably a correspondingly appropriate appreciation of the ‘correct’ policies to advocate.

It is important to recognize the interplay of interests and ideology here. While upper castes resisted elevating vocal lower caste leaders who threatened to destabilize the former’s position of power within the Sangh, they also rejected the idea that lower castes were sufficiently culturally equipped to serve as leaders. Further, an important aspect of the difficulties ‘social engineering’ faced was the cultural aversion upper caste cadres displayed towards those Dalit and Adivasi candidates selected under the strategy, as Govindacharya himself recalled:

I came from seeing a campaign in Madhya Pradesh, and the campaigners were there in a jeep, and after they got down, and I had introduction of all the workers, in that I found the person sitting in the jeep were forward castes who were workers, and the candidate who was Scheduled Caste (Dalit) was made to sit in the back. Therefore this [social engineering] strategy could not take hold with SCs and STs (Adivasis) because how can effective leaders emerge from those communities in such conditions of tension?⁷⁵

In addition to a conflict of interests, an internalization of casteist hierarchies by the BJP’s upper caste cadre made effective campaigning under this approach logistically infeasible.

Thus the social engineering strategy was inconsistently deployed, and even when it was genuinely successful, rising subaltern figures were reigned in or cut loose by nervous upper caste leadership. To avoid such dilemmas, the party increasingly did not pick genuinely charismatic lower caste leaders to help expand the party’s base.

⁷⁵ Interview with K.N. Govindacharya, New Delhi, May 15th, 2008.

Instead, the BJP deliberately picked quiescent lower caste politicians to promote, and even permitted the social marginalization of these candidates within their own campaigns. In so doing, the very core of the social engineering idea, which was to recruit effective lower caste leaders to appeal to poorer social segments, was undermined from its inception.

2.6 Running Out of Options: Electoral Outsourcing and Attempted Appropriations

2.6.1 The BJP-BSP Alliance Experiments:

The fact that ‘social engineering’ was unable to deliver electorally for the BJP furthered the Sangh’s dilemma, particularly as lower caste parties like the BSP grew in political clout in important BJP strongholds. The BJP was forced to consider alternative tactics to counter the growing self-mobilization of deprived communities. One such strategy was to ally with these new lower caste parties, or even with regional parties that had a wider base of support among the poor than the BJP itself.⁷⁶ The trendsetters in this regard were the multiple efforts made by the BJP in Uttar Pradesh to ally with Dalit-led BSP in 1995, and then again in 1997 and 2002.⁷⁷ The BJP’s desperation, prompted by the failure of earlier strategies, prompted the party to make significant concessions to reach agreements with the BSP, including allowing the BSP leader Mayawati to head a government in which the BJP won nearly three times as many seats as her party (176 to 67).⁷⁸

⁷⁶ The party made alliances with a variety of partners, ranging from the Trinamool Congress [Congress of the Downtrodden, TMC] in West Bengal, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam [All India Dravidian Progress Federation, AIADMK] in Tamil Nadu, the Samata Party [Equality Party, SMT] in Bihar, the Jananta Dal (U) [People’s Front, JD (U)] in Karnataka, the Haryana Vikas Party [Haryana Progress Party, HVP] in Haryana, the Biju Janata Dal [Biju People’s Front, BJD] in Orissa.

⁷⁷ ‘Mayawati-led BJP-BSP Government in UP to be sworn in on Friday’, *Hindustan Times*, 20th March, 1997.

⁷⁸ Data from Electoral Commission of India, www.eci.gov.in. Accessed on July 20th, 2008.

This ‘outsourcing’ of electoral work was gradually expanded to other states, and yielded some success for the party, enabling it to form the government in states like Punjab, Orissa, Haryana and Karnataka where its troubles with lower castes was preventing it from attaining power.⁷⁹ In the 1996 national elections, the party’s alliance with the Haryana Vikas Party, which was far stronger with lower caste voters, helped the party win a majority of seats in the state.⁸⁰ The party’s performance in Bihar, in which it had a seat-sharing alliance with the Samata Party, was similarly improved.⁸¹ However, while forging strategic partnerships has certainly helped the BJP electorally in specific cases, alliances suffer from some major limitations as the centerpiece for a social expansion strategy. Most obviously, this strategy has made the party vulnerable to the vagaries of coalition politics, which is particularly explosive in the Indian context.⁸² This unpredictability has hurt the BJP in numerous cases, with many alliances failing at either the national or state level.⁸³

⁷⁹ ‘UP model may be a trendsetter’, *Hindustan Times*, 24th March, 1997.

⁸⁰ For example, the HVP won 34.4% of the OBC vote (compared to the BJP’s 18.8%). National Election Study, 1996, Center for the Study of Developing Society, New Delhi.

⁸¹ Here the BJP-SMT combine won a staggering 73.7% of the vote of two large subgroups (*jatis*) within the state’s OBC population, the Kurmis and Koeris, enabling it to compete with the opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal’s popularity with the largest OBC subgroup (the Yadavs). Subsequent alliances with the Janata Dal (U) in the state have enabled the BJP to remain an electoral presence in Bihar despite only having a strong backing from upper castes in the state.

⁸² Virginia Van Dyke’s study of coalition governments in Indian states notes that parties do not hold to expected conventions regarding coalitional procedure, with the result that Indian coalitions are inherently more unstable and short-lived than their Western counterparts. One of the ways in Van Dyke (argues Indian coalitions do not conform to Western theory is their consistent repudiation of the ‘Minimum Winning Coalition’ theory, which posits coalitions will form when no one party can win a simple majority. In India, parties often enter into alliances even when they have a simple majority, as the Shiromani Akali Dal did with the BJP following the 1999 Elections. There are various reasons, including the strategic value for a regional party to have a national party ally, as well as internal factions within the winning party that push factional leaders to pursue allies outside their own parties. In the case of the Akali Dal, the party included the BJP in order to ensure opposing factions within the party did not gain sufficient support to bring the ruling coterie down. In return the BJP incorporated a member of the ruling faction as a minister in the Central government. Such arrangements are thus founded on subjective relationships far more than the cold calculus of electoral math, rendering them far from reliable winning techniques. Virginia Van Dyke, ‘Jumbo Cabinets, Factionalism and the Impact of Federalism: Comparing Coalition Governments in Kerala, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh’ in Roy and Wallace *op. cit.* (2007), pp. 116-151, p. 116.

⁸³ In its 1999 national coalition to form the central government, the BJP lost a key ally in the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, when its leader Jayalalitha withdrew suddenly following her annoyance at the BJP’s

Perhaps more importantly, alliances are unsuitable mechanisms for parties with transformative ideologies to achieve their goals. In the case of the Sangh Parivar, the project of winning lower caste votes is just one step in the conscription of poor Hindus into the Hindutva ideological camp. However many of these electoral partners have pressured the BJP to moderate its Hindutva rhetoric, suggesting that while alliances can on occasion help win votes, they do not act as conduits for a transfer of allegiance to the BJP. Here the party's experience with the BSP is particularly instructive. The alliance in 1995 lasted only four months, and the 1997 and 2002 alliances were similarly short-lived. The BJP actually had realized the advantages the BSP had in appealing to poorer voters:

See look at these smaller parties like the BSP. When they first mobilize lower castes they are only looking to that section to build a base so they can hate against other sections of society with their propaganda--- but we are a national party looking to build a 'Hindi Rashtra' [Hindu nation] not a 'Bahujan Samaj' [lower caste social alliance]-- we can't do what they do with the goal of integration in mind. Because we are more moderate, they [Dalits] won't come to us first. They will always go to these smaller parties first.⁸⁴

Recognizing this tactical disadvantage, even the BJP's organizational affiliates, which are normally reticent of forging political alliances that might potentially dilute the ideological purity of the movement, had backed the move. The RSS believed the alliances might provide an opening for the eventual recruitment of lower castes into Hindutva's fold:

refusal to use its power at the center to dismiss the Tamil Nadu government headed by her rival, the Dravida Munnetra Kazagham. More recently the BJP entered into an alliance with the Janata Dal (U) in Karanataka, whereby the Chief Ministership was meant to rotate between the two. However after the JD(U)'s candidate completed his tenure, the party was reluctant to relinquish control to the BJP, and ultimately withdrew from the coalition and forced re-elections (which the BJP won).

⁸⁴ Interview with Satya Narayan Jatiya, New Delhi, April 30th, 2008.

What is more important is the social fall-out of the exercise. The BJP-BSP alliance should lead to social harmony and Hindu consolidation. It ought to reduce the alienation of the deprived sections of the society. It is in this context that it is a pleasing development *from the RSS point of view*' [emphasis added].⁸⁵

However, the experiment backfired badly for the Sangh leadership. Both Mayawati and her political mentor Kanshi Ram's habit of attacking upper castes even from within the coalition seemed to directly counter the BJP's hopes for the alliance helping to unify Hindus.⁸⁶ Further, the BSP's leaders repeatedly voiced their concerns about the partnership, and indeed 'gave the impression of not being unduly bothered about the longevity of the coalition.'⁸⁷ Thus, while the Sangh believed the alliances would help the BJP gradually poach lower caste populations into its own vote bank, the party instead found itself outflanked by its new partner.⁸⁸ Instead, it was the BSP which used the alliance with the BJP to expand its base with non-Dalits in the state, while continuing to pigeonhole its coalition partner as representative of upper-caste interests.⁸⁹

Outmaneuvered, the BJP even tried returning to a form of the discarded 'social engineering' strategy in appointing its first Dalit national party president, Bangaru Laxman in 2000. Laxman explained that the BJP at this point considered ways to politically capitalize on fissures *within* Dalit and Adivasi electorates. For example, in

⁸⁵ Shyam Khosla, 'Significance of the BJP-BSP tie up in UP', *Organizer*, April 5th, 1997, p. 5

⁸⁶ Subhash Gatade, 'Subverting the Sudra-Ati Sudra Revolution: The Uttar Pradesh Way', in Teltumbde *op. cit.* 2005, pp. 187-207.

⁸⁷ S. Rajagopalan, 'A Marriage of convenience,' *Hindustan Times*, 30th March, 1997.

⁸⁸ As Hindutva ideologue Prafull Goradia answered in response to whether electoral bases can be expanded through alliances, 'It does not expand it shrinks-- because Mayavati's Dalits will remain loyal to Mayavati-- you may think you have their support, but that is only when you are in alliance with Mayavati-- the moment that alliance ends, the voters will not support you.' Interview with Prafull Goradia, New Delhi, April 17th, 2008.

⁸⁹ Seema Mustafa, 'BJP in a mess in UP: RSS', *Asian Age*, 29th October, 2002

Uttar Pradesh the RSS is trying actively to improve the BJP's standing with Dalit voters from outside the 'Chamar' *jati*, the Dalit sub-caste which comprises the BSP's traditional base.⁹⁰ The Sangh has been looking particularly to the next biggest Dalit subgroup, the Jatavs:

There was an attempt in UP by the BJP to consolidate non-Chamar votes—SC [Dalit] reservations within the party lists were categorized by *jati* [sub-caste] by [current BJP president] Rajnath Singh when he was Chief Minister of UP. He tried to make the differences in *jati* official so that the differences could come out in the open. But Mayawati immediately removed this when she came into government because she was looking to consolidate the SC vote so she wanted to play down *jati* differences. I recruited many Jatavs, and Mayawati was alarmed that non-Chamar SCs might be going over to the BJP. So she gave a statement that Bangaru Laxman is not a Jatav or even a Chamar, but a Valmiki [a much less influential Dalit subcaste], and said this all over UP.⁹¹

The political canny of the BSP leader once again thwarted the BJP's efforts to establish a direct link to lower caste voters.

Quite apart from the BSP's attacks, the BJP also exhibited self-destructive tendencies in its attempts at social outreach. Even the move to promote a Dalit to party president ended up exposing the casteist nature of the party's leadership. Bangaru Laxman was quickly exposed to be little more than a token president, with few organizational powers, as evidenced by his absence from important party functions during his tenure.⁹² Further, Laxman was implicated in a bribery scandal in 2001 when he was captured accepting bribes on tape during a sting operation planned by an investigative news journal. The BJP's professed egalitarian ethos was called into

⁹⁰ Rajeev Deshpande, 'A fine net widely cast', *Times of India*, 24th October 2005.

⁹¹ Interview with Bangaru Laxman, New Delhi, July 10th, 2008.

⁹² Vivek Kumar, 'No Dalit equality in Sangh parivar', *Pioneer*, 6th November 2000.

question, including by the ever-astute Mayawati, when Laxman was forced to resign from his post while George Fernandes, an upper caste leader exposed by the same operation was allowed to continue in his party post.⁹³ This treatment of Laxman is still viewed by senior Dalits within the BJP as highly disillusioning.⁹⁴

2.62 Appropriating Subaltern Leaders

The BJP's efforts with the BSP had boomeranged. The Sangh more than ever was being painted as an upper caste outfit, especially in states where the BSP was a strong presence. To counter the devastating attacks of BSP politicians, the Sangh went through a painstaking re-thinking of its rhetorical treatment of prominent lower caste leaders like Jyotibha Phule and B.R. Ambedkar. Subhash Gatade notes that initially, the Sangh largely stigmatized these leaders as divisive in their misplaced focus on caste. Acts like Ambedkar's highly publicized organization of mass Dalit conversions to Buddhism were characterized by the Sangh as explicitly anti-Hindu. However, as the movement failed to win over lower caste voters, there has been a change in this strategy of stigmatization to one of manipulation and co-option of these figures.

Specifically, the Sangh has looked for ways to appropriate figures like Ambedkar within the framework of Hindutva, looking to find 'a new commonality between the ideas of Ambedkar and Golwalkar [former head of the RSS] or [to] find Ambedkar to be an extension of Hedgewar [founder of the RSS]'.⁹⁹ Satya Narayan Jatiya, the current president of the SC Morcha [Dalit organizational cell] of the BJP, articulated this new vision in his description of his organization's mission:

⁹³ Mukundan C. Menon, 'Mayawati deplors singling out Bangaru Laxman', March 27th, 2001, available at www.ambedkar.org/News/TehelkaMayawati.html. (Accessed 2/15/2009). Also see 'Tehelka tapes appear to be true: RSS', *Hindu*, 17th March 2001, and "Flunking the Test", *Times of India*, 19th March 2001.

⁹⁴ For example, PM Velayuthan, the leader of the Kerala branch of the BJP's SC Morcha, confessed he was 'very disappointed by the party's decision to remove Laxman', interview, Ernakulam, 8th August, 2008.

⁹⁹ Gatade, *op. cit.* (2009)

The main message of the SC Morcha is to bring social equality with national integration. In doing so we follow two leaders, mixing the message of equality of Dr. Ambedkar, with the message of Dr. Hegdewar, which is to remove differences within society. The SC Morcha works to raise awareness for these joint messages.¹⁰¹

The ‘social equality’ demands of lower caste social movements were blended into Hindutva’s more conventional call for national (i.e. cross-caste Hindu) integration in an attempt to convince subalterns that their demands could be met within the framework of Hindu nationalism, and in alliance with upper castes.

The RSS also launched an organization called the Samajik Samrasata Manch [Social Assimilation Platform], specifically to attract Dalits for the purposes of Hindu Unity. The organization was founded on the birthday of Ambedkar, which fortuitously (for the Sangh) coincided with that of Hegdewar.¹⁰² In these attempts to appropriate Ambedkar, the RSS has argued that the former’s organization of mass conversions to Buddhism was more to ensure Dalits did not accept Islam and Christianity, which he considered ‘anti-national’. The Sangh worked hard to educate its young recruits in this new interpretation of Ambedkar’s politics, while its leaders reiterated their commitment to (their interpretation of) Ambedkar’s vision.¹⁰³ The current *sarsanghchalak* [supreme leader] of the RSS even went so far as to say that Ambedkar had been impressed with Sangh activities, extending a claim the RSS has often made with regards to Gandhi.¹⁰⁴ Thus the RSS and BJP hoped to obscure Ambedkar’s

¹⁰¹ Interview with Satya Narayan Jatiya, New Delhi, April 30th, 2008.

¹⁰² Ghanshyam Shah, ‘The BJP and Backwards Castes in Gujarat’ *South Asian Bulletin*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1994.

¹⁰³ ‘RSS to educate swayamsevaks on Ambedkar’s views’, *Hindustan Times*, 7th January 2003. ‘RSS chief showers praise on Ambedkar’, *The Free Press Journal*, 3rd October 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Wipe out caste barriers: RSS’ *Deccan Chronicle*, 13th Dec 2005. Another more recent example came during the 2009 National Election campaigning, when BJP Prime Ministerial candidate L.K. Advani accused the Congress party of ‘not doing justice’ to Ambedkar, by not nominating him as a member of

scathing critique of Hindu upper caste exploitation of Dalits, and appropriate him instead as a ‘Hindu’ reformer.

However, the efforts to distance Hindutva from a Brahminical worldview have continually stumbled due to the inability of Sangh leaders to maintain a consistently progressive line on caste. Ultimately the Sangh remained unsure of how to pay attention to issues of caste without acknowledging histories of caste based exploitation. Even as the upper caste leaders were paying lip service to Dalit leaders, they also remained wedded to the Brahminical roots of Hindutva described earlier, and continued to offer defenses of the underlying principles of caste. The resulting contradictions prevented the Sangh from offering a clear message capable of attracting Hinduism’s oppressed.

Acharya Girija Kishore, a senior leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the ‘cultural affairs’ wing of the Sangh Parivar exemplified this rhetorical ambivalence during the course of an interview. At first the Acharya outlined how caste hierarchies were a non-Hindu invention:

We tell Dalits and Adivasi that you were never an Adivasi, or a Scheduled Caste-- this was a creation of the medieval period. This was created by Muslims and Christians-- a myth-- see its like this-- those people who were defeated by Muslim invaders-- they were turned into lower castes.

However, immediately after this proclamation, when asked if caste should be abolished as a social practice, the Acharya immediately backtracked:

No. This [abolishment] is not a good idea. After all it [caste] is such a good thing-- that is why it has been alive all this time. See today you make a club and invite members-- that is all *jati* is-- a club, a network-- and that is very

the Constituent Assembly to write the national constitution following independence. See ‘Congress did not do justice to Ambedkar: Advani’, *Hindu*, April 14th, 2009.

useful-- if I want to go to a new city and find a place to stay, then I will stay with people of my own caste-- it is natural.

Such contradictions were equally evident in the speeches of current RSS head K. S. Sudarshan, who on the one hand has called for the ‘wiping out of caste barriers’, and less than a month later offered a standard Brahminical defense of caste practice¹⁰⁵:

Sudarshan said that the earlier caste system was ‘non-discriminatory’ and every caste was given ‘job reservation’ under it. “The caste system used to be like a fence around the farm. Those who violated its rules were ostracized. It was not discriminatory. Rather, it provided for job reservation. Every caste was given reservation in a particular job. A mason could not do a carpenter’s job and a carpenter could not do a sweeper’s job,” he said.¹⁰⁶

These inconsistencies in the Sangh’ leaderships views on caste practice put the BJP at an even greater disadvantage vis a vis lower caste parties armed with an explicitly pro-subaltern rhetoric.¹⁰⁷

2.7 Conclusion:

The caste problematic has interrupted the too-often linear political narrative concerning the mercurial rise of Hindu nationalism during the 1980s and 1990s. As this chapter has tried to outline, this rise has not been uniform across the social groups the movement sought to unify. Dalits and Adivasis in particular, remained outside of

¹⁰⁵ ‘Wipe out caste barriers: RSS’ *Deccan Chronicle*, 13th Dec 2005.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Old Caste System not all that bad: Sudarshan’, *Hindustan Times*, 28th January, 2006.

¹⁰⁷ To add insult to injury, the anti-Brahmin rhetoric made famous by the BSP continues to give lower caste leaders *within* the BJP itself a frame with which to acquire leverage within the party at the expense of upper caste leaders. Most recently, in April, 2008, Maharashtra BJP leader Gopinath Munde attacked his chief rival within the party, Brahmin state president Nitin Gadkari, by claiming his attempts to make the BJP ‘more Bahujan [oppressed peoples]-oriented’ were not being appreciated. Munde was clearly borrowing from the BSP’s lexicon to attack the Sangh’s credibility where it was most vulnerable “Defiant Munde Keeps BJP guessing: plays caste card, meets Bhujbal Thackeray”, *Indian Express*, 22nd April 2008, and “Crisis helps Munde emerge stronger”, *Indian Express*, 23rd April 2008.

the Sangh Parivar's mobilizational grasp. Communal mobilization 'in defense of Hinduism' failed to appeal to subalterns historically denigrated by Hindu traditions. Tactics explicitly pursued to expand the Sangh's following with poor Hindus, such as social engineering or economic nationalist policies were ultimately undermined by upper castes unwilling to compromise their socio-economic interests. The BJP needed a different solution to overcome being a party of the rich in a democracy filled with poor voters. Yet the results of the 2004 elections presented in the introduction clearly show the BJP *has* succeeded in wooing lower castes in some Indian states. Given the inefficacy of the tactics outlined here, what strategy if any was responsible for this turnaround? What possible method was able to solve the caste problematic and reconcile upper caste interests with subaltern recruitment?

CHAPTER 3

ORGANIZING NATIONALISM: UNCOVERING THE POTENCY OF *SEVA*

3.1 Introduction

In the introductory chapter, I outlined the broader comparative literature's understanding of the mechanisms through which political parties might forge electoral linkages with socio-economically marginalized groups. Bringing this wider literature into conversation with more specific accounts of party strategies in Indian democracy, I outlined three main mechanisms that various parties have deployed: programmatic, clientalist, and identity-based strategies of mobilization.¹ I outlined the reasons why the Bharatiya Janata Party's profile as an upper-caste, Hindu nationalist party prevented it from deploying any of these tactics, constricting its support base to elite Hindu electorates. During the 1980s however, as the BJP rose to national prominence on the back of increasing upper-caste support, the party, and the Hindu nationalist movement it was embedded within, began to realize the limits of remaining an elite party. The movement began to look for ways to actively broaden its appeal with subaltern Hindu populations.

The previous chapter provided a historical overview of how the BJP and the larger family of Sangh organizations attempted to expand their electoral and socio-cultural base to include marginalized communities of Dalit and Adivasi voters. I traced how the different strategies the BJP used, from the symbolic politics of religious polarization to 'social engineering', to forging strategic alliances with lower caste parties, simply did not work in fundamentally expanding the BJP's social profile. The party's explosive 'communal' mobilizations in the 1980s and early 1990s, while

¹ For a fuller discussion of this specific argument, see Tariq Thachil and Ron Herring, 'Poor Choices: de-alignment, development and Dalit/Adivasi voting patterns in Indian states', *Contemporary South Asia*, 16(4), (December 2008): 441-464.

successful with spreading its appeal among upper castes, appeared to have done little to improve the BJP's standings with Dalit and Adivasi electorate who saw little reason to rush to the 'defense' of religious traditions that had historically oppressed them.² Social engineering and electoral alliances represented at best partial solutions, which have yielded mixed results and increased the political dependency of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) on outside actors.

Yet at the same time as the BJP was pursuing these political strategies, its affiliates in the larger Hindu nationalist Sangh Parivar ('family of organizations) began pursuing a different approach to wooing lower caste communities. This strategy relied on expanding *seva*, the provision of social services directly targeting Dalit and Adivasi constituencies, in order to win them over to Hindutva's cause. In this chapter I argue that the deployment of this strategy helps account for the success of the BJP with poor voters at both the state and individual voter level.

The chapter tests this explanation using a national survey sample of over 5000 Dalit and Adivasi voters across seventeen Indian states, conducted by the Center for the Study of Developing Society (CSDS) during the 2004 national elections. This voting data is combined with evidence collected from Sangh social service organizations, the Electoral Commission of India, Human Development Reports conducted at the state level in India, and various other sources. The constructed dataset is then used to analyze the impact of Sangh social services on BJP support patterns at both the state and individual level.

Using this national data, I first examine whether the extensiveness of Sangh social service organizations in a state is associated with the BJP's electoral fortunes at the *state* level. I then use logistic regression analysis to examine whether the Sangh's

² As mentioned in Chapter 2, I use the term 'communal' as it is commonly employed in the literature on South Asian politics to connote religious nationalist, anti-minority sectarianism.

organizational work with subaltern communities has helped the BJP with individual voters by testing whether associational membership makes a voter more likely to support the BJP. Matching analysis is then used to ensure no systematic differences distinguished the sample of voters who professed associational membership from those who didn't across factors commonly thought to influence BJP support, such as religiosity, income, and ideological support for Hindu nationalism. The results presented seem to indicate that Sangh organizations appear to be significantly responsible for the BJP's pattern of success. In subsequent chapters I use detailed case studies to further test the arguments presented here, as well as examine the potential causal mechanisms linking the associations revealed by the statistical analyses in this outlined in this chapter.

3.2 The Turn to a Service Strategy

It bears mentioning at the outset of this section that the Hindu nationalist movement has *always* had an affinity for an organizational approach. Indeed, the previous chapter noted that the movement historically gave precedence to building a solid network of activists over diluting its message with populist appeals in order to win the party a broad base. The earlier *avatar* [incarnation] of the BJP, the Jana Sangh, repeatedly eschewed opportunities to popularize the party's message, choosing instead to focus on promoting strictly Hindu nationalist appeals, and hoping its grassroots allies would transform Hindu society to bring it in line with this narrow message.³ The movement sought to utilize a vast network of *shakhas* (community-level centers) to construct an 'imagined community', by ensuring that each *swayamsevak* (volunteer) would carry out the same daily rituals in the *shakhas* at the

³ For the best analysis of the Jana Sangh's political history, see Bruce Graham, [Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh](#), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

same time.⁴ This simultaneous shared practice thus enabled the construction of a ‘Hindu Rashtra in miniature’.⁵

Yet the early organizational efforts were extremely limited in their demographic scope. The early expansion of the Sangh’s organizational network during the 1970s and 1980s primarily served the upper-caste, Brahmin communities from which most *swayamsevaks* came. The primary expansion was of *shakhas*, which were located mostly in upper-caste urban communities, and did not offer concrete social services such as healthcare or education, focusing instead on cultural and recreational activities designed to popularize Hindutva’s core doctrine. Not surprisingly, the cadre generated by these activities was itself primarily upper caste. Therefore, the BJP’s comparative organizational advantage over other parties, especially the Congress, did not necessarily translate into an improved showing among Dalits and Adivasis specifically.

Yet as the imperative to attract lower caste and tribal voters intensified during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and with other strategies failing to generate support, the Sangh began to emphasize building organizations catering specifically to the social service needs of marginalized constituents:

In the early '90s, there was a realisation in the Sangh and the BJP that it was imperative to have Dalits on their side to win elections. Subsequently, Dalits, unemployed youths and those rendered jobless by the closure of textile mills in cities like Ahmadabad were co-opted by the RSS, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal [all three major Sangh Parivar organizations].⁶

⁴ I borrow this term of course from Benedict Anderson’s classic text, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism, London: Verso, 1983, p. 39.

⁵ I borrow Christophe Jaffrelot’s formulation here: Christophe Jaffrelot, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 64.

⁶ Davinder Kumar, “Poisoned Edge: The Sangh exploits Dalit and tribal frustration to recruit soldiers for Hindutva’s ‘war’”, *Outlook*, June 24th, 2002.

In addition to developing specific wings devoted to recruiting subaltern populations through service work, at a broader national level the Sangh Parivar directed its many subsidiary organizations to emphasize their social welfare activities, and not simply focus their efforts on mobilizing religious demonstrations as they had during the Ram Mandir agitation of the 1990s (Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2 had highlighted the relationship between some of the major arms of the Sangh, including the place of the social service wings Seva Bharati [Service for India] and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram [Association for the Welfare of Tribals]).⁷

As the previous chapter notes, many of these service wings were founded decades ago, but were very limited in their scope. M.S. Golwalkar, a leading proponent of Hindutva, in his *Bunch of Thoughts*, outlined the need for social work to make Hindu nationalism a mass phenomenon that would reach even the poorest Hindus⁸ :

It is now up to us to go to those neglected brethren of our society and strive our utmost to better their living conditions. We will have to work out plans by which their primary physical needs and comforts could be satisfied. We will have to open schools, hostels and training courses to equip them to benefit from these schemes. Alongside this physical amelioration love and pride in Hindu *Dharma* and the spirit of identity with the rest of Hindus have to be rekindled in their minds.⁹

⁷ For a discussion of this process, see Pralay Kanungo, *op. cit.*, 2002, pp. 140-78.

⁸ I define Hindutva at greater length in Chapter 2, but I use it primarily to refer to the central tenet of Hindu nationalist doctrine, which conceives of Hinduism as being more than religious belief. Instead Hinduism is defined as having an ethno-territorial dimension that facilitates the idea of India's conversion to a nation-state guided by an exclusivist and rigid adherence by all her citizens to a particular interpretation of Hindu practice.

⁹ Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, Bangalore : Vikrama Prakashan, 1966, p. 361.

However, while the strategy for mobilization predicated on social service provision was born in the late 1970s and early 1980s with the founding of wings like Seva Bharati, the real organizational development of these wings from fairly modest beginnings to truly mass organization levels has been a very recent phenomenon. Christophe Jaffrelot notes:

Social welfare work on behalf of Hindus has always been one of the mainstays of the RSS. Traditionally, it consisted in helping victims of natural catastrophes or of ‘Muslim aggression.’ This propensity to help coreligionists in order to foster Hindu solidarity acquired a new dimension when it became a technique for integrating and maintaining poor Hindus in the community.¹⁰

Indeed, the previous chapter argued that Hindu nationalists turned to *mass social service organization-building as a tactic for mobilization only after other strategies to attract Dalit and Adivasis had failed during the 1980s and early 1990s.*

Various Sangh organizations answered the renewed call to provide services during the 1990s. Tanika Sarkar noted that the RSS’s women’s wing, the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, began to focus heavily on mass recruitment and ‘to expand its membership downwards, including outside the Sangh’s [upper caste] confines’.¹¹ Sarkar argues that this is a new mode of operation for the Samiti, and is clearly motivated by its desire to develop a following among non-urban lower castes. She outlines a range of techniques now being deployed for making inroads into villages, which includes sending *sevikas* (female volunteers) into villages under the guise of establishing seemingly apolitical cultural programs for women, *puja* (prayer) and cookery classes, etc. In addition, the Sevika is increasingly beginning to hold tutorial

¹⁰ Christophe Jaffrelot, India’s Silent Revolution: the rise of low castes in North Indian politics. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003, pp. 454-55.

¹¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, "The Sangh Parivar. A pervasive network", in C. Jaffrelot, *op. cit.*, 2005.

classes, in which they organize discourses on selected Sanskrit texts, and provide free medical care to poor women, and also has created income-generating programs in *bastis* (urban slums). Through these myriad activities, the Samiti hopes also to garner the trust of mothers, thereby ‘paving the way for their sons to be organized by the Sangh’.

The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), the trade union wing affiliated with the Sangh Parivar, has also begun focusing on welfare work. While the BMS has always been active in disaster relief operations, it began to especially expand its role in providing such services in recent times, during what Jaffrelot terms its ‘new welfarist strategy.’¹² These activities ranged from requesting public authorities to supply electric hookups, dig wells, open schools, etc. to setting up free dispensaries. The growing welfarist activities of the BMS grew to include the opening schools in the mines of Parasia (Madhya Pradesh), the distribution of eye glasses in Poona, blood donation drives in Hyderabad, the supplying of sewing machines to trade union widows, and of course the famous instance of the ‘Buldhana combat’.¹³ This latter agitation in particular, became a prototype for BMS chapters to follow across the country.

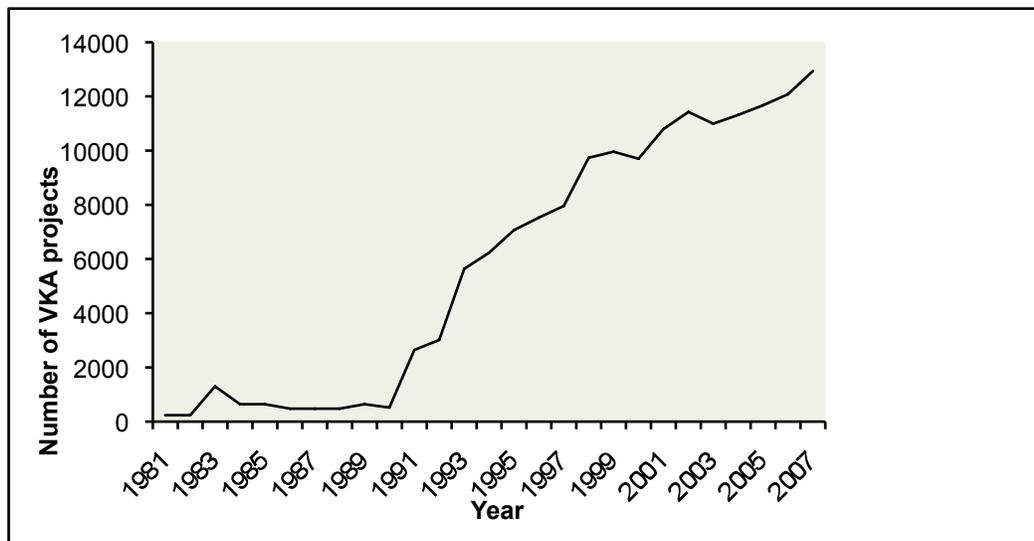
Like the BMS, the central organization of the Sangh Parivar, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has had a strong tradition of social work, especially when that work could be easily linked to efforts to preserve Hindu society.¹⁴ However the scope of these activities has significantly increased in recent times, as the Sangh began

¹² Jaffrelot, *op. cit.* 2005, p. 364

¹³ In this incident, BMS activists mobilized rallies and petitions on behalf some over twenty thousand ‘tribals’ living in a particularly remote district in Vidharbha who alleged they had been deprived of their right to farm land. The BMS claims their actions helped 150 families obtain redress (Jaffrelot, *op. cit.*, p. 365).

¹⁴ Malkani, *op. cit.*, 1980, p. 153.

realising their potential political utility.¹⁵ The growth patterns of the Sangh's wings completely devoted to 'service' provide the clearest evidence of the its emphasis on the *seva* [service] strategy during the 1990s. Sewa Bharati and Vanvasi¹⁶ Kalyan Ashram, the two biggest service organizations within the Sangh Parivar, each experienced massive growth during the 1990s.¹⁷ Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below outline the growth of the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, showing clearly that the real development of the wing as a mass organization is a relatively recent phenomenon.



Source: Data collected by author from VKA annual records, Jashpur, Chhattisgarh

FIGURE 3.1: Growth in Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram Projects 1981-2007

Similarly the ABVP, the Sangh's student wing, shifted from simply organizing students within the university towards social outreach programs with tribals, for example by bringing scores of tribal students from the North-east to Bombay and other cities, and putting them up with local families under its program. The organization's leaders pushed this social service image of the RSS by suggesting the group's initials should stand for 'Ready for Selfless Service'.¹⁵ See 'RSS means Ready for Selfless Service', *Organizer*, June 22nd, 1980, p. 10.

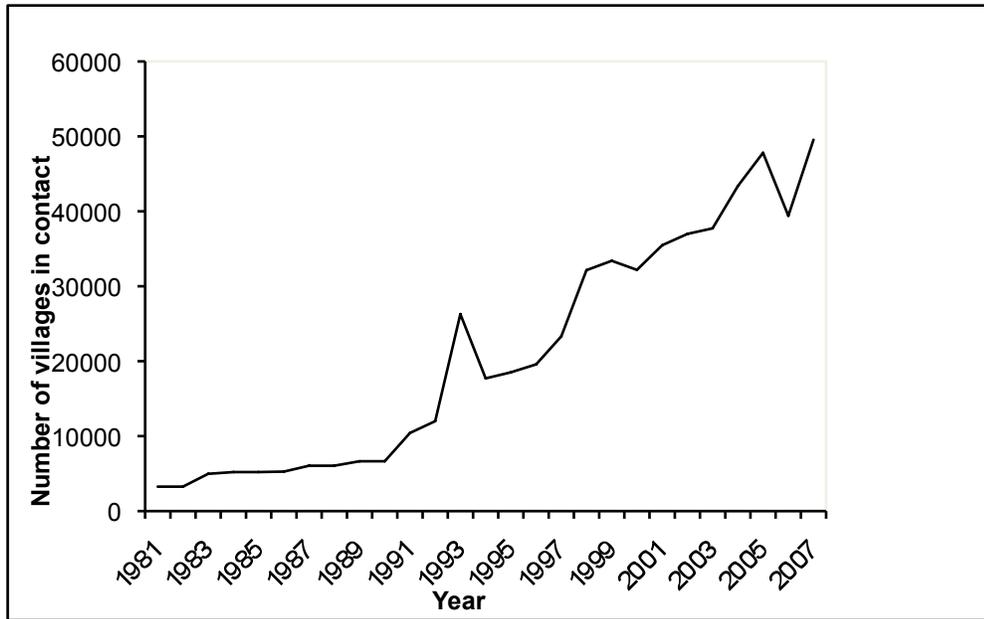
¹⁶ The use of the term 'Vanvasi' instead of Adivasi is a strategic move by Hindu nationalists. 'Adivasi' translates as 'original/native inhabitant', which Hindu nationalists find problematic. This stems from their belief the original inhabitants of India are of Aryan descent, not 'tribal' lineage. Instead the term 'Vanvasi' translates as 'forest dweller', and in addition to denying 'nativity', also has a patronizing connotation used by Hindu nationalist missionaries to justify their work to 'uplift' these communities. See Nandini Sundar, 'Adivasi vs. Vanvasi', in S. Sabharwal and M. Hasan (eds.), *Assertive Religious Identities: India and Europe*, Delhi: Manohar, 2006, pp. 357-390.

¹⁷ Source: Vidhya Bharati Handbook (1985-2004).

Further, Seva Bharati as an organization in 1990 had only 6000 active units, and by 2006 it had 70,000 chapters.¹⁸ Between 1988 and 2003, the number of schools run by Vidya Bharati, a subsidiary of Sewa Bharati focusing specifically on education, increased from 5,000 to almost 20,000. Ethnographic studies corroborate the proliferation of Sangh service organizations within the past decade.¹⁹ Clearly, the Sangh has been putting increasing energy into expanding those branches which specifically operate within poorer communities. The Sangh hopes this effort will translate into expanded membership and influence among lower caste communities through extending their organizational dominance in Indian associational life into the country's least socio-politically integrated communities.

¹⁸ Malkani, (*op. cit.* 1980) in his work on the RSS, notes that the first major relief operation the Sangh undertook was in 1947, when, even before independence, refugees started pouring in from what was to become Pakistan. The RSS set up a Hindu Sahayata Samiti (Hindu Aid Society), and even issued a questionnaire to refugees, inquiring about their background and training, in its efforts to help rehabilitate them.¹⁸ The Sangh also organized similar relief efforts, although on a smaller scale, with refugees from East Pakistan in the 1950s. Other notable disasters during which Malkani describes significant RSS relief work included the 1955 Punjab floods, the rehabilitation of 2000 families during the 1955 Tamil Nadu cyclone, the 1956 earthquake in Kutch, Gujarat and later the 1977 cyclone in Andhra Pradesh (in this last case Malkani says 'the name "RSS" became so popular that at one stage the local CPI names its camp as 'RSS' to attract villagers seeking relief.' On the growth of the social service activities of the Sangh, see 'Service projects to touch one lakh during centenary' *Organizer*, March 26, 2006.

¹⁹ Shubh Mathur, Everyday Hindu Nationalism, New Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2008, p. 30.



Source: Data collected by author from VKA annual records, Jashpur, Chhattisgarh

FIGURE 3.2: Growth in Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram Villages Contacted 1981-2007

Part of the reason a social service strategy was a popular option, was that it avoided many of the more uncomfortable aspects of prior strategies. Many leaders within the Sangh Parivar were displeased with the fact that both ‘social engineering’ and electoral alliances with lower caste parties explicitly acknowledged caste as a socio-political reality. Such acknowledgment, they felt, undermined the larger project of constructing a unified Hindu nation, and descended into the petty realm of casteist partisan politics. More pragmatically, these prior strategies involved ceding power to lower caste political candidates or parties, and this involved convincing upper caste candidates and constituencies to relinquish some political control over the party, which had proved very difficult.

By contrast, a ‘social service’ strategy could use the language of ‘uniting Hindus’ through ‘upliftment of its weaker sections’ to actively recruit lower castes without giving them any of the formal political representation that alienated upper

castes. More than simply acquiescence, the patronizing language of ‘upliftment’, particularly when framed as necessary to prevent the predations of ‘foreign’ religions, could be deployed to help mobilize resources and volunteers from upper caste communities to service this organizational expansion. Such language is evident in the rhetoric of Sangh activists, as Shubh Mathur observes in an ethnographic study of the Sangh in Rajasthan:

Today throughout the nation, some Dalit, Muslim, Christian and communist organizations are collecting crores [tens of millions] of rupees abroad and using this wealth to mislead some of our brothers among the Harijans, the poor, the vanavasis, and other backward groups to fulfill their scheme to separate them from Hindu society.... We have to save the nation at all costs and to free our brothers of the backward sections of society from the clutches of these treacherous forces. It is only when the different sections of Hindu society get involved with such social work that we will be able to join the Hindu brothers... We cannot depend on government sources to keep our brothers of the backward groups within the Hindu fold... The lead will have to be taken by social workers, and by the elderly and retired.²⁰

The call to help the ‘backward’ sections of the ‘brotherhood’ offered a far more palatable solution to the problem of forging unity while acknowledging upper caste superiority that the Sangh had found so difficult to achieve though previously attempted strategies.

Two related questions emerge from this brief description of a turn to social services. First, has the Sangh been successful in establishing dominance in the organizational sphere with respect to Dalit and Adivasi communities? Also, does this

²⁰ Internal VHP circular as quoted in Mathur, *op. cit.* 2008, p. 125.

strategy explain the pattern of the BJP's variable success with marginalized electorates across India? In the following chapter, I formulate falsifiable hypotheses that question whether the social organizational strategy helps understand the patterns of support for the BJP with Dalit and Adivasi communities. I then test these hypotheses at both the state and individual voter level using the largest available survey sample of Dalit and Adivasi voters in India. I conclude with some thoughts about how the results of the national analysis might inform a more locally contextualized inquiry of the processes under study, which I then take up in subsequent chapters.

3.3 Specifying the Hypotheses and Data Sources

Sewa Bharati and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, the two organizations I focus on, seek to project themselves as distinct socio-religious organizations, and not as participants in the morally polluted sphere of party politics.²¹ Yet while these organizations are not formally attached to the BJP, it is highly plausible to suggest that the party benefits greatly from its linkages with them. Indeed the next two chapters highlight how this constructed aloofness from partisan politics serves to make these organizations more effective politically. As outlined in Chapter 2, the long-term goal of these groups is to mobilize support for a project beyond elections, indeed one that stops nothing short of the conversion of India from a constitutionally secular state to one adhering to a particularly exclusivist (and even militaristic) interpretation of Hindu identity and socio-cultural practice. In working towards such transformation however, the services these groups provide could also serve to benefit the narrower electoral goal of the BJP with Dalit and Adivasi communities.

²¹ Interestingly, as Jaffrelot has noted, they also tend to emulate the opponents that the RSS had identified as its primary targets in that political sphere, in order to counter them more effectively. Thus the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh modeled its activities very closely on the unions run by the CPM, while Vanavasi Kalyan Parishad (which will be discussed in greater detail later) mirrored the organizational structure and workings of Christian missionaries working in tribal areas (Jaffrelot, *op. cit.* 2005, p. 10).

Specifically, these affiliates could mobilize support for the BJP by establishing a dominant presence of the Sangh with lower caste voters in the non-party organizational sphere of Indian civil society. This dominance could then be translated into building support for the BJP electorally either through:

- 1) The organizations' direct mobilization of members.
- 2) The affiliates' work in building a good opinion of the larger Sangh Parivar and consequently the BJP among the wider community of nonmembers in the Dalit and Adivasi electorates.

These two mechanisms are distinct phenomena, and it is certainly possible that both are at work simultaneously, and that the Sangh helps the BJP both through building a base of formal members *and* through the positive image it portrays through its 'social service' activities. From this we can derive four testable hypotheses operating at the state and the individual level respectively, outlined in the introduction and re-summarized in Table 3.1:

TABLE 3.1: Summary of Hypotheses

<p>H1 (testing if the aggregate presence of Sangh social service organizations matters for overall BJP performance): <i>A greater proportion of Dalit and Adivasi voters will support the BJP in those states/districts where the Sangh social service organizational network is stronger.</i></p> <p>H2 (Testing if the Sangh is establishing comparative organizational advantages with subaltern voters in the civil society sector): <i>Dalit and Adivasi individuals who profess membership in non-party associations should be more likely to vote for the BJP than those who are not members of any associations.</i></p> <p>H3: (Testing whether the Sangh service approach creates participation linkages that help the BJP): <i>Dalit and Adivasi voters who are members, or take part in the activities of Sangh social organizations specifically should be more likely to vote for the BJP than those who are not participants.</i></p> <p>H4: (Testing whether the Sangh service approach creates opinion linkages that help the BJP) <i>Among Dalit and Adivasi individuals who are not participants in Sangh organizational activities, those who have a good opinion of these activities are more likely to support the BJP.</i></p>
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In the remainder of this chapter, I will present an analysis of the first two hypotheses **H1 and H2**, using a dataset based on the largest national survey of SC and ST voters conducted in India. In the next two chapters, I will supplement this analysis with original survey data to test **H1** at the *district* level, and then **H3 and H4** at individual level within the states of Chhattisgarh and Kerala. The dataset I have compiled for this chapter utilizes several sources, including the 2001 Indian National Census, the Varshney-Wilkinson dataset on ethnic riots, Election Commission of India reports, and the private and public records of Hindu nationalist organizations.

The bulk of the dataset is drawn from a National Election Study (NES) conducted by the Center for the Study of Developing Society (CSDS) in New Delhi. CSDS has regularly conducted surveys of voter opinion since 1996, and has done so for both the Lok Sabha (National Parliament) elections, and Vidhan Sabha (State Assembly) elections, both of which are typically held every five years. The CSDS surveys are invaluable because they were the first surveys conducted in India which provided information on the caste profile of voters. Caste-based voting information is unavailable through the Election Commission, since caste practice is officially illegal in India and hence not a component of official government records.

A note about the methodology of the National Election Study is in order here. The NES is not an exit poll, but a post-poll survey, whose primary purpose is not ‘predicting the number of seats that a...coalition is likely to get. Rather, it is a survey that takes the results as given, and then tries to understand the reasons why voters chose the parties they did.’²² Given the nature of the question I am asking, this is actually a better form of survey than an exit poll fixated on predicting results. Further, because the survey team was particularly interested in understanding state-level

²² For a more detailed report of the methodology of the survey, see ‘Methodology of the National Election Study, 2004’ available at: <http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com/archive/sept04/methodo.pdf>.

politics even within national elections, they use a stratified random sampling technique that makes sure the samples within each state are reflective of the state's share of the country's total. The interviews were conducted after the votes had been cast in each constituency, but before the results were known, in order to assess political opinions without knowledge of the outcome influencing their answers to the questions.

For this particular study I am employing data collected during the National Election Study of the 2004 Lok Sabha (National Assembly) elections, which for the research period of this project were the most recently held parliamentary elections in India. I was given access to the responses for all Dalit and Adivasi voters in the 17 major states in India: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. The sample covers 3411 Dalit respondents and 2048 Adivasi respondents. Using a national election dataset instead of a compilation of state assembly election data was a major decision with significant ramifications for the research design, and hence requires some explanation. There are obvious advantages to using Vidhan Sabha (State Assembly) data for this study. Under the Indian federal system, state governments possess a great deal of autonomy over a variety of public policies, and for this reason state elections are often more politically charged for local populations than Lok Sabha elections. Further, given that I am specifically looking at poor populations for whom the most important government services fall under the state administration's purview, there is a strong rationale for examining their political behavior when voting at the local level.

Having said this, there were stronger reasons for employing national level data that ultimately led to the decision to use the 2004 Lok Sabha survey. The biggest issue was simply the lack of comparability between the different state assembly surveys.

Unfortunately the questions on each of the Vidhan Sabha surveys varied greatly, making it impossible to compile a composite of several state election surveys for more than a small handful of questions. Critical variables, such as income levels or sympathy with Hindu nationalist agendas were simply not available for several states.

Further, the state assembly elections happen by rotation across the country, meaning the responses were gathered across a range of five years in different states, compounding problems of comparability. Lastly, the methodologies used on the various surveys differed somewhat in their techniques of sampling, and even their methods for replacing missing respondents. Given these concerns, using the national election data offers the best opportunity to rigorously test the central hypotheses articulated above. In the remainder of this chapter I present these analyses, focusing first on the state-level analysis of **H1**, and then moving to an individual-level analysis of **H2**.

3.4 State-Level Analysis:

3.41 Defining the Variables:

A) Outcome Variable (*BJPVoteShare*): BJP Vote Share with Dalits and Adivasis

The outcome of interest for the testing of **H1** is simply defined as the percentage of the combined Dalit and Adivasi vote captured by the BJP in a given state in the 2004 national elections.

B) Key Independent Variable (*Sangh*): Strength of Sangh Service Organizations

A first necessary step to testing **H1** is to operationalize a variable that can act as a suitable enough proxy for the strength of Hindu nationalist social service operations in a given Indian state. I have distinguished between different types of organizations within the larger Sangh Parivar family, and these distinctions become

important in conceptualizing an organizational variable for this analysis. Specifically, I am only concerned with those wings of the Sangh Parivar that are primarily concerned with providing ‘social services’ in the fields of health, education, and basic care. The most important examples of what would *not* be included in this conceptualization are the local chapters of the parent organization within the Sangh Parivar, the RSS. As I mentioned earlier, these local chapters, or *shakhas*, do not primarily provide ‘welfare’ in the narrow sense of providing goods or services. Nor are *shakhas* primarily located in areas dominated by Dalit and Adivasi populations.

In contrast, Sewa Bharati and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, the two main organizations within the Parivar, specifically follow a mandate of ‘service work’ primarily in Dalit and Adivasi communities. Sewa Bharati undertakes a range of different services falling under four categories: Education, Health, Social Organization, and Self-reliance projects. Education and health projects range from schools (including one-teacher schools in remote areas) to blood banks and medical dispensaries. Social organization and ‘self-reliance’ projects include vocational training centers, typing centers for providing services such as writing letters or claims, and centers for manufacturing local handicrafts. The second, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram was founded during the 1950s, with the specific mandate to work among Adivasi populations, and also conducts a range of activities including schooling, hospice care, and small infrastructure development projects.

To construct an index of Sangh social service strength, I first compiled information on the number of service projects undertaken by each branch of Sewa Bharati and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram in different Indian states (Table 3.2).²³

²³ The Index is computed as follows: (Sewa Bharati Projects + VKA Projects)/ (Combined SC and ST population in the state), and this figure is then multiplied by 1000 for easier readability.

TABLE 3.2: Sangh Service Activities Across India

Sewa Bharati Activities						Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram
State	Education	Health	Social Organization	Self Reliance	Total	Service Projects
Andhra Pradesh	453	171	263	15	902	604
Assam	43	834	63	56	1046	510
Bihar	98	9	4	3	114	572
Chhattisgarh	833	33	255	13	1134	1086
Gujarat	49	210	40	7	306	1013
Haryana	131	19	41	93	284	1
Jharkhand	152	119	56	20	238	1847
Karnataka	1634	463	1079	13	3189	479
Kerala	75	104	493	16	688	325
Madhya Pradesh	2044	300	536	135	3015	1703
Maharashtra	437	307	165	19	928	1260
Orissa	154	34	59	3	250	1494
Punjab	260	160	454	70	520	0
Rajasthan	192	85	182	52	911	2400
Tamil Nadu	384	105	3171	33	527	306
Uttar Pradesh	1028	1127	454	181	2790	315
West Bengal	68	119	7	11	205	499

Using this data, I constructed an index of Sangh service strength for each state in India, which takes into consideration the size of the state's Dalit and Adivasi population (Table 3.3.)

TABLE 3.3: Per Capita Index of Sangh Social Service Organizations

State	Total Projects	SC Population	ST Population	Sangh Index
Andhra Pradesh	1506	12,339,496	5,024,104	0.087
Assam	1556	1,825,949	3,308,570	0.303
Bihar	686	13,048,608	758,351	0.050
Chhattisgarh	2220	2,418,722	6,616,596	0.246
Gujarat	1319	3,592,715	7,481,160	0.119
Haryana	285	4,091,110	0	0.070
Jharkhand	2085	3,189,320	7,087,068	0.203
Karnataka	3668	8,563,930	3,463,986	0.305
Kerala	1013	3,123,941	364,189	0.290
Madhya Pradesh	4718	9,155,177	12,233,474	0.221
Maharashtra	2188	9,881,656	8,577,276	0.119
Orissa	1744	6,082,063	8,145,081	0.123
Rajasthan	3311	9,694,462	7,097,706	0.197
Punjab	520	7,028,723	0	0.073
Tamil Nadu	833	11,857,504	651,321	0.067
Uttar Pradesh	3105	35,148,377	107,963	0.088
West Bengal	704	18,452,555	4,406,794	0.030

Source for Tables 3.1 and 3.2 : Seva Bharati figures from Official Report: Seva Disha 2004, obtained from Sew Bharati office, Bhopal. Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram figures from VKA national headquarters, Jashpurnagar, Chhattisgarh (obtained on March 30th, 2008). Population figures from 2001 Indian census, available at www.censusindia.gov.in

The index variable in the above table is an admittedly imperfect measure. The counting of projects spread over the remotest and least accessible parts of a country as vast as India is rife with difficulties. Having said that, imperfections in data should not deter efforts to systematically study social phenomena, and this index is a defensible measure, especially for purposes of comparison. The fact is that these figures give us an accurate idea of the *relative density* of these organizations in different parts of India. While Karnataka might not have exactly 3668 service projects and Bihar might not have exactly 686 at a given moment in time, the relative strength deriving from these figures is more reliable. There is no reason to believe figures for a national organization are particularly inflated in particular regions more than in others, and thus the comparisons this data affords us remain valuable. Further, the Sangh does have mechanisms to check their figures, and indeed I personally traveled with a Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram employee whose job was specifically to travel to each project within the district twice a year to make sure all units are accounted for.

C) The Logic of Control Variables:

In order to test the strength of the impact of Sangh organizational presence on BJP electoral performance, it is imperative to see whether the relationship holds when controlling for variables measuring confounding effects. I take an approach advocated by James Lee Ray, who argues that more careful multivariate analysis should focus on evaluating the impact of a key factor (in this case Sangh service strength, and in the individual level analysis, organizational membership) rather than explaining as much of the variation in the outcome variable as possible.²⁴ This approach argues against

²⁴ James Lee Ray, 'Explaining Interstate Conflict and War: What should be controlled for?' *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 20 (2003): pp. 1-31.
James Lee Ray. 'Constructing Multivariate Analyses (of Dangerous Dyads), *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 22, No. 4, (January 2005): pp. 277-292.

including any and every variable that might have an impact on the outcome, and in doing so helps avoid the practice of including exhaustive lists of control variables. This practice, which has been critiqued as ‘garbage-can’ or ‘kitchen-sink’ regression, poses a host of problems for causal inference.²⁵

Instead of including exhaustive lists of control variables to account for any and all variation in the dependent variable (BJP success at either the state or individual voter level), I include a few control variables that serve a very specific purpose of testing the validity of the key argument presented by **H1** and **H2**. The variables included are those that present potentially confounding effects, which reveal the relationship between aggregate organizational presence, (or individual organizational membership) and voting to be spurious. Essentially I only control for those variables which are associated strongly with *both* the key explanatory factor A and dependent variable B in such a way as to influence the central relationship between A and B.²⁶

Here it should be made clear that I believe the goal of this form of analysis is not to construct the model of several explanatory variables that jointly best explain BJP support. As Ray argues, we have ‘no theoretical approach which will tell us what the best 6,7 or 8 predictor variables to put into a multivariate model’ are definitively: the analyst’s aims should be more modest.²⁷ Instead we are far better off testing whether a single explanatory factor we see as having a theoretically important effect on a given outcome does in fact have a substantive impact. In models governed by this analytic aim, control variables are included to determine whether this key relationship is spurious, not simply to ‘control’ for any and all effects on the outcome. The addition of non-confounding variables would not in any way enhance the goal of analysis thus

²⁵ Christopher Achen, ‘Let’s Put Garbage-Can Regressions and Garbage-Can Probits Where They Belong’, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 22, No. 4, (January 2005): pp. 327-339.

²⁶ Also see Kelly M. Kadera and Sara M. Mitchell, ‘Heeding Ray’s Advice: An Exegesis on Control Variables in Systemic Democratic Peace Research’, Vol. 22, No. 4, (January 2005): pp. 311 — 326.

²⁷ Ray, *op. cit.*, 2003, p. 16

defined. In this project's case, the central goal of analysis therefore becomes testing of the relationship hypothesized between Sangh service organizational presence (at the state level) and membership (at the individual level), and the support patterns of the BJP among Dalit and Adivasi voters.

While adding variables offer no clear benefits to achieving this central goal, it does have potential downsides, including rendering analysis of the individual relationships between all independent variables included in the model near impossible. Without such analysis, the researcher may unknowingly introduce control variables which are correlated with A in ways that might hamper their ability to correctly assess the latter's impact on B.²⁸ Further, regressions with fifteen or twenty control variables are far more likely to be sensitive to particular model specifications, which in turn make them more susceptible to selective presentation by the analyst.

Many scholars will ask whether including only a few explanatory variables makes the analysis susceptible to omitted variable bias. However, bias on A's coefficient due to omitting a theoretically significant variable is exactly what this research design hopes to eliminate by focusing on potential confounders. Moreover, as several scholars have argued, omitted variable bias is a 'phantom menace' of sorts, and indeed unless the complete true specification is known, atheoretically including many control variables may increase instead of decrease bias.²⁹ In this analysis, I therefore eschew a 'garbage-can' approach in favor of building small, carefully designed models which only include variables which, for plausible theoretical reasons explained in detail, might be associated with the level of Sangh social service organizations within a state *and* the overall electoral performance of the BJP with

²⁸ Achen, *op. cit.*, 2002; Detlef F. Sprinz, Yael Wolinsky-Nahmias Models, numbers, and cases, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004, p. 144.

²⁹ See Kevin Clark, 'The Phantom Menace: Omitted Variable Bias in Econometric Research', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 22, 2005, pp. 341-352.

Dalits and Adivasis.³⁰ I will *not* include any and all variables that might affect the BJP's performance, but which are not theoretically expected to also influence the pervasiveness of Sangh service wings.³¹

The first important control deals with the issue of how fertile a particular socio-political terrain is for Hindu nationalist ideology and 'communal' politics to take hold. As mentioned earlier, there is considerable literature discussing the BJP's ability to mobilize electoral support through dividing communities along religious axes, thereby uniting castes to vote 'as Hindus' against a polarized religious minority (primarily Muslims or Christians). Such theories would expect more Dalit and Adivasis to vote for the BJP in states with higher incidences of communal conflict.³² To measure the historical level of communal conflict in a given state I employ a variable *Riots* which represents the number of total Hindu-Muslim riots in the state from 1950-1995, as reported in the Varshney-Wilkinson database on Hindu-Muslim conflict.³³

It is also entirely plausible that the BJP will get lower levels of support in states with more competitors for Dalit and Adivasi support, especially in those states in which regional or lower caste parties are significant players. At the same time, states with higher numbers of political formations and their attached organizations often make for much more competitive associational arenas, making them relatively less hospitable environments for Sangh organizations to recruit members. To measure

³⁰ Achen, *op. cit.*, 2005.

³¹ Moreover I will only include *antecedent* factors, i.e. factors which are plausible *causes* for joining Sangh organizations and voting for the BJP, not an intervening variable that is itself a consequence of the key causal variable.

³² See Paul Brass, 'The Rise of the BJP and the Future of Party Politics in Uttar Pradesh,' in Harold Gould and Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993.

³³ Varshney, Ashutosh; Wilkinson, Steven, 2006-02-17, "Varshney-Wilkinson Dataset on Hindu-Muslim Violence in India, 1950-1995, Version 2", hdl:1902.2/4342 Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [Distributor].

levels of political competition, I employ the variable *ENPV*, which records the effective number of parties in a given state.³⁴

The third control variable is concerned with potential variation in the social reality the BJP faces in its attempts to forge an unlikely alliance between its upper caste core constituencies and Dalits and Adivasis. The work these Sangh service organizations undertake requires receptivity from these marginalized populations to interact with the upper-caste Sangh volunteers seeking to establish chapters in new areas. These workers could find their tasks hampered where local relations between upper and lower caste are socially polarized. At the same time the BJP could find that in polarized local contexts, its traditional upper-caste profile is more of an obstacle electorally, making lower castes will be unlikely to vote in tandem with their upper caste oppressors.

Therefore conditions of caste polarization might lead to lower levels of support for the BJP *and* halt the ability of the Sangh to expand their organizations among lower caste populations. To measure conditions of caste polarization, I employ a variable *Atrocities*, which is defined as the number of atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Tribes reported to the police in each state for 2003 and 2004, adjusted for the size of a states combined SC/ST population.³⁵ Such atrocities (by definition) report instances of abuse by non-SC/ST persons on people from these communities, and thus

³⁴ Effective Number of Parties is widely seen as a more accurate measure of competitiveness than the actual number of parties competing in a given election, as it is weighted to reflect parties that actually have some measure of success in elections. The measure is $= 1/\sum x_i^2$ where x_i refers to the percentage of votes captured by the i^{th} party. See William Clark and Matt Golder 'Rehabilitating Duverger's Theory: Testing the Mechanical and Strategic Modifying Effects of Electoral Laws', *Comparative Political Studies*, 39 (2006): pp. 679-708. For an example of an analysis relying on this measure in an Indian context, see Steven Wilkinson, *Votes and violence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

³⁵ Atrocities as defined by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes include murder, grievous hurt, rape, kidnapping and abduction, dacoity (banditry), robbery, arson, and a miscellaneous 'other' category. The data is available in National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 'Annual Report on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for the Year 2004' available at socialjustice.nic.in/schedule/ar-poa.pdf.

provides an important measure of the degree of hostility and exploitation that might affect Sangh recruitment and BJP vote share.

TABLE 3.4: State-Level Confounding Factors

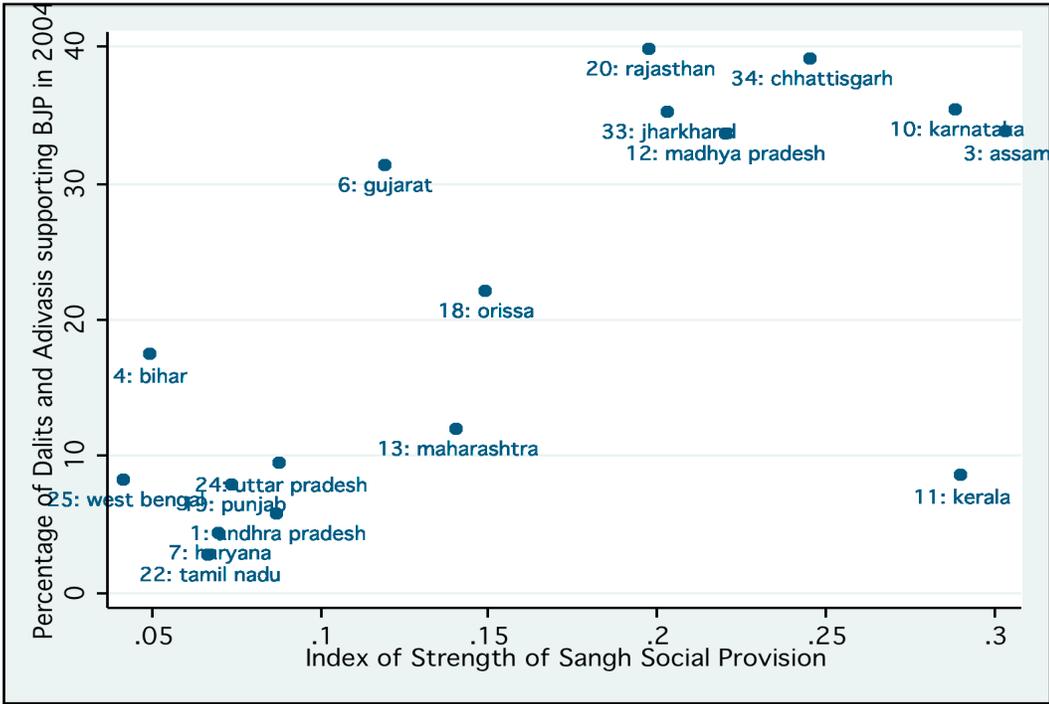
Potential Confounding Variable	Expected Impact on Strength of Sangh	Expected Impact on % Voting for BJP
ENPV	Sangh chooses to build organizations where there are fewer alternative political formations (-)	BJP gets higher vote share where there are fewer parties. (-)
Atrocities against SC/ST	Upper caste Sangh leaders will be less able to recruit leaders to work with lower castes in charged environment of caste hostility (-)	Building high-caste low-caste electoral alliance is harder in conditions of strained caste relations (-)
Riots	Sangh chooses to build organizations where it can exploit high levels of communal conflict. (+) ³⁶	BJP communal platform more attractive to voters where Hindu-Muslim conflict is higher. (+)

3.42 Data Analysis and Findings

Now according to the argument presented here, the BJP benefits electorally with Dalits and Adivasis primarily through the work of its social service affiliates. It stands to reason that the aggregate performance of the BJP with these electorates will be better in those states where these affiliates have a more significant presence. Figure 3.3 shows the relationship between the Sangh Index and the percentage of total Dalit and Adivasi voters in a state supporting the BJP during the 2004 national election. It shows that with the notable exception of Kerala, the other sixteen major Indian states

³⁶ The states of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand were created after 1995, and thus riots occurring in these regions was reported under the states of Madhya Pradesh and Bihar respectively, of which these new states were once a part. I have gone through the dataset and transferred those riots occurring in districts now part of the new states to Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, and out of the Madhya Pradesh and Bihar totals.

conform quite remarkably to the hypothesized pattern. In fact the Pearson's coefficient between the Sangh Index and BJP vote share with Dalits and Adivasis is .67 and if the obvious outlier of Kerala is removed, it jumps to over .7.

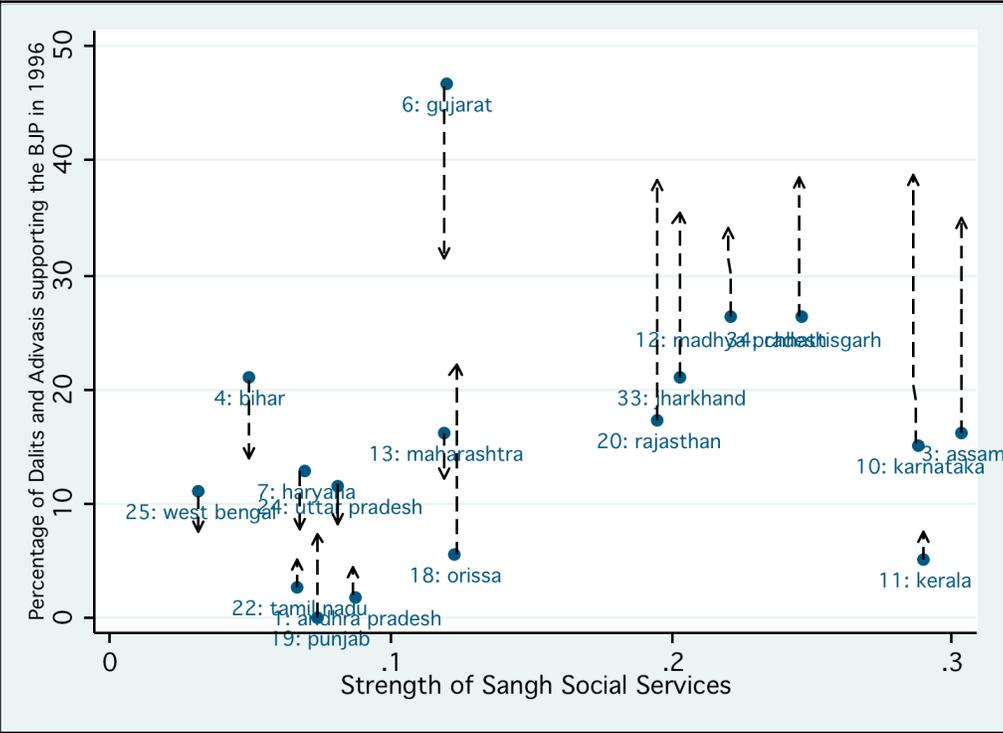


Source: National Election Study 2004

FIGURE 3.3: 2004 BJP Performance

However a cross-sectional view such as this does not get at critical issues of temporality that must be addressed in analyzing **H1**. For example, cross-sectional data cannot help us address the question of whether the Sangh chose only to build their social service organizations where the BJP was *already* successful with Dalit and Adivasi voters. If so, the argument presented here could suffer from severe problems of endogeneity seriously compromising its potential validity. One way to address this is to see if the BJP *was already doing well* in the states in which the Sangh chose to focus its organizational attention. Figure 3.4 below shows the relationship between the

Sangh index and the change in the BJP's performance with Dalits and Adivasis from the 1996 national election (the first year in which caste-wise voting data is available through the NES) and the 2004 election. The arrows for each state originate from the 1996 performance of the BJP, and end at the party's level of success in the 2004 elections.



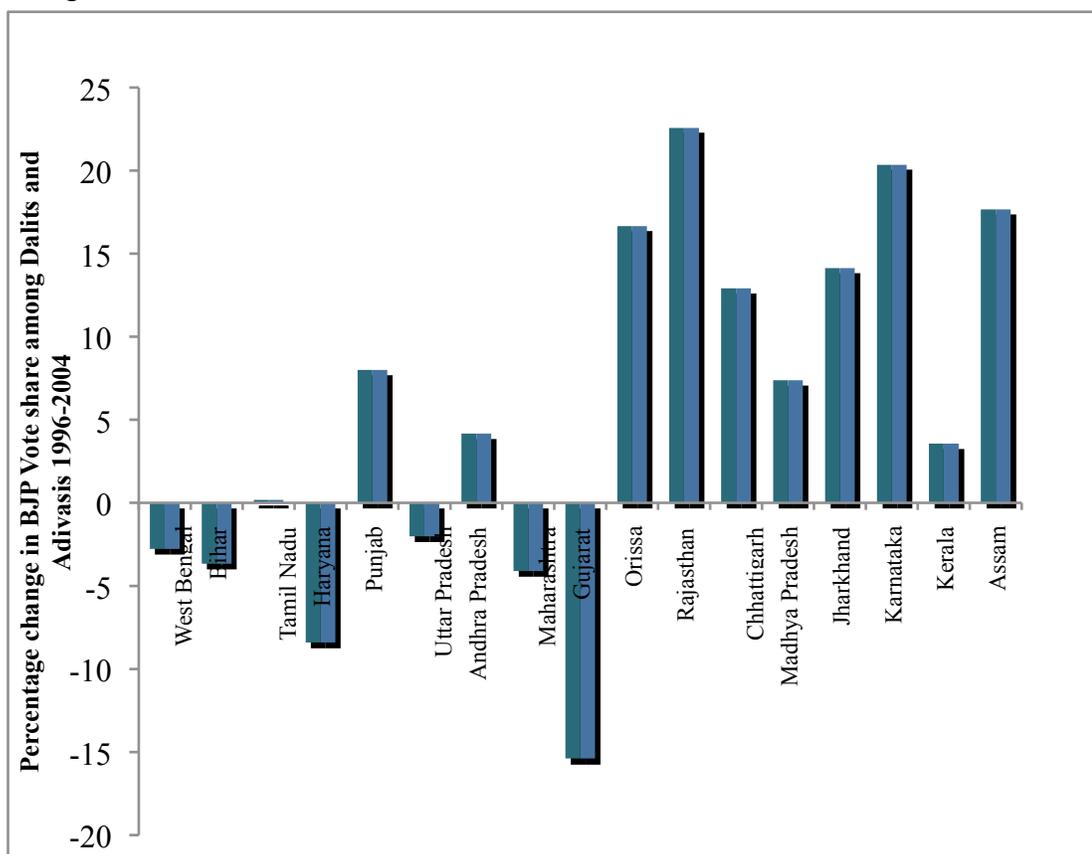
Source: National Election Studies 1996, 2004.

FIGURE 3.4: 1996 BJP Performance

The striking results in Figure 3.4 indicate that the BJP was not already doing well in those states in which the Sangh began to concentrate its organizational attention in the early 1990s. Firstly, the strong correlation between the Sangh index and vote share in 2004 is not replicated with the 1996 data. The correlation between the index and the BJP vote share in 1996 is only .203. The temporal analysis in Figure 3.4 provides further evidence that variations in organizational expansion help understand the trajectory of the BJP's electoral fortunes across India. The arrows in

Figure 3.4 show that in five of the seven cases where the Sangh index is over .2, the BJP sees significant gains of over ten percent in its vote share with Dalits and Adivasis between the 1996 and 2004 election, and a jump of over five percent in a sixth case. However, of the remaining ten cases below the .2 benchmark, only Orissa registers a gain of over five percent.

Figure 3.5 below arranges the cases in increasing order of their Sangh index score from left to right, and shows even more clearly this pattern of gains. We see a clear rise in the BJP's fortunes in the 'High' strength states (with the exception of Kerala) during the 1996-2004 period, whereas there is little improvement in the 'Low' strength cases.



Source: National Election Study 1996, 2004

FIGURE 3.5: BJP's Gains and Losses 1996-2004

3.43 Dealing with Confounding Effects:

Given the strength of the relationship in Figure 3.3, it is not surprising that a simple bivariate regression of *Sangh* on *BJPVoteShare* vote share yields both a statistically and substantively significant coefficient for the former's effects on the latter. However, it is possible that any one of the three variables specified earlier, *Riots*, *ENPV* or *Atrocities* is associated with both *Sangh* and the BJP's support levels at the state level in ways that renders the relationship of interest to be a product of spurious correlation. While the number of cases for this analysis is admittedly small, we can still profit from looking at simple trivariate analyses in which only the key independent variable, the potentially confounding factor, and the dependent variable are included. To do so I estimate each potential trivariate model using ordinary least squares analysis of the form:

$$BJPVoteShare = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \log Sangh + \beta_2 CONTROL + \varepsilon \quad (\text{Equation 3.1})$$

Where *BJPVoteShare* measures the percentage of a state's combined Dalit and Adivasi population, *logSangh* refers to the logged index of Sangh service provision strength in the state, and *CONTROL* refers to one of the three potential confounders. The key index variable was logged because doing so greatly improves the linearity of the variable's relationship to the outcome measure, as Figure 3.6 demonstrates:

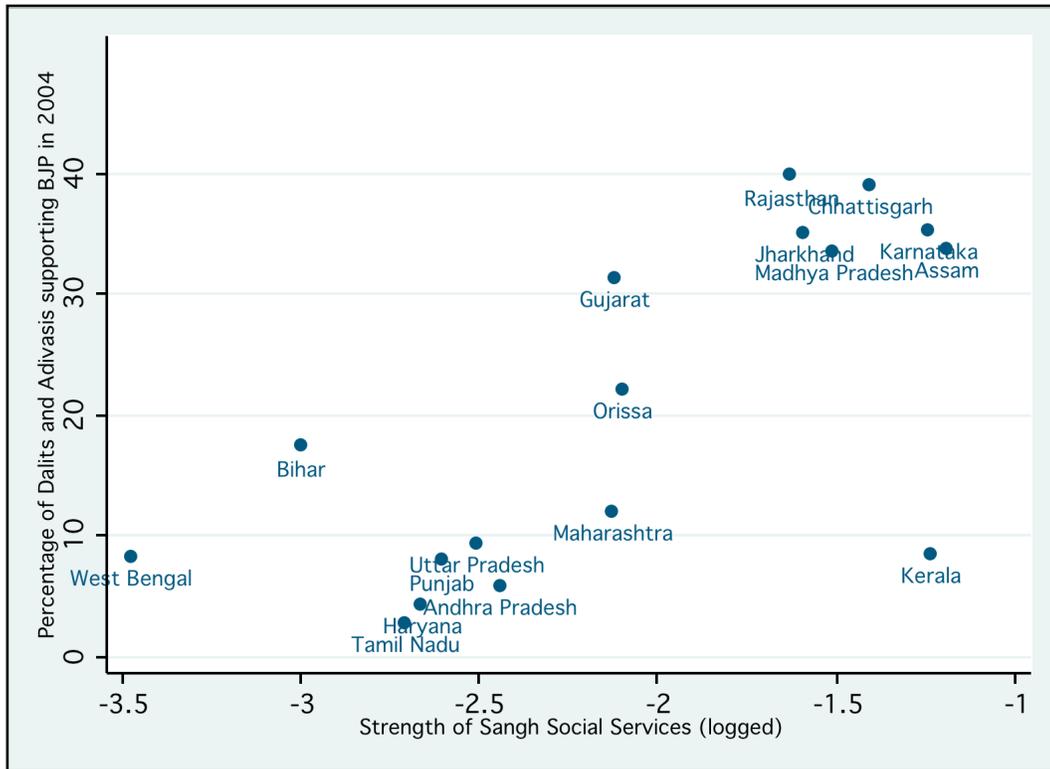


FIGURE 3.6: 2004 BJP Performance with Logged Index

The results of the models testing different specifications of Equation 3.1 are presented in Table 3.5. The results of these regressions indicate support for the validity of *logSangh*'s impact on BJP aggregate vote share. *The relationship remains statistically significant in each of the four models, and substantively important: as logSangh varies from its minimum observed value of -3.5 to its maximum of -1.5, the BJP's predicted vote share increases from approximately 1% to about 35%.* The significance of *logSangh* does not diminish with the inclusion of any of the potential confounding factors, and moreover none of these latter variables register as statistically significant in their own right. Finally, the impact of *logSangh* is remarkably stable across the different model configurations, indicating that it is not the product of a particular specification.

TABLE 3.5: OLS Regression Results

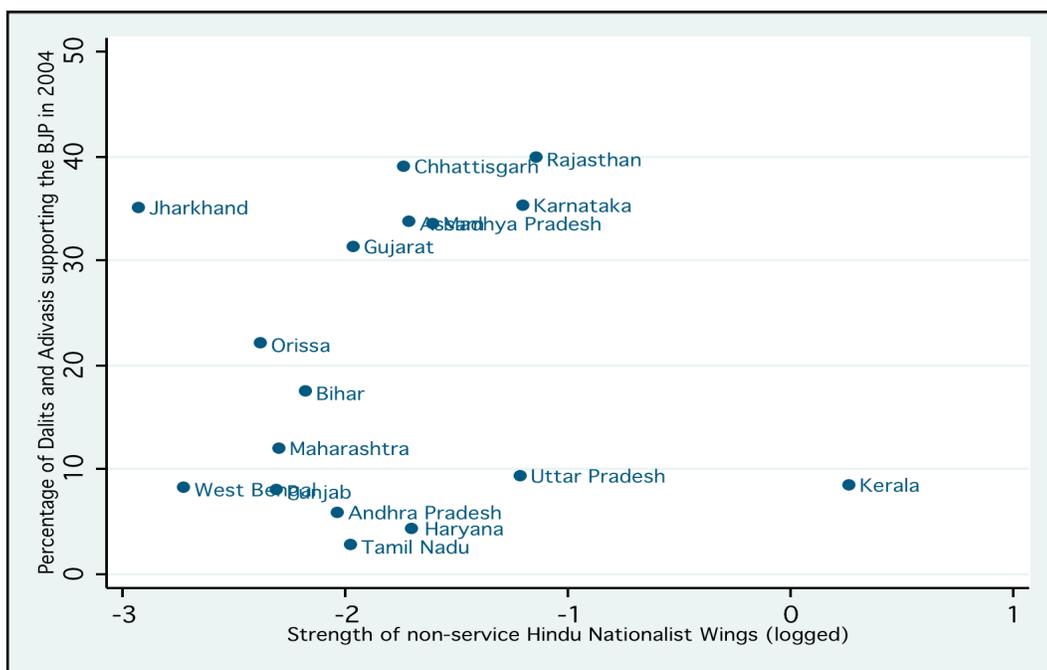
	Model 3.1	Model 3.2	Model 3.3	Model 3.4
<i>logSangh</i>	14.184** (3.700)	13.621** (3.713)	13.304** (3.708)	14.514** (3.853)
<i>ENPV</i>		-3.747 (3.433)		
<i>Atrocities</i>			.001 (.001)	
<i>Riots</i>				0.018 (0.036)
<i>Constant</i>	50.125** (8.127)	-63.641** (3.433)	45.541** (8.818)	49.624** (8.398)
R-sq:	.50	.53	.54	.50
N	17	17	17	17

**p<.01

The substantive impact, statistical significance, and stability of the variable *logSangh* coupled with the descriptive data presented earlier supports the claim that aggregate presence of Sangh social services matter in determining the performance of the BJP with poorer voters. The data also support the claim proposed earlier in the chapter that it is analytically important (for purposes of this project) to focus on those wings providing social services specifically, and *not* on the general presence of the Sangh.

The above analysis was repeated while replacing *logSangh* with an equivalent index of Sangh centers or *shakhas*. These *shakhas* were described in Chapter 2 as not offering broad material services, and not targeting lower caste constituencies specifically (indeed they are often located in upper caste neighborhoods). The index

variable *logShakhas* produced by including these units instead of those of the social service wings has absolutely no statistical or significant impact on the performance of the BJP at the state level, and comparing Figure 3.7 with Figure 3.6 clearly highlights the greater salience of social service wings of the larger Hindu nationalist movement in the matter of subaltern recruitment.



Source: Sangh organizational data from Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, New Delhi, 2007
Election Data: National Election Study 2004.

FIGURE 3.7: Impact of non-service wings on BJP Vote Share (2004)

3.5 Individual-Level Analysis:

In this next section I turn to examining the second hypothesis presented earlier (**H2**), which posited that a being a member of a non-party civil society organization would make a Dalit/Adivasi respondent more likely to support the BJP. This hypothesis is designed to test if the aggregate effects specified in **H1** are operating at the individual level, thus providing an additional test of the causal logic of an argument for the importance of the organizational strategy of the Sangh. In addition,

testing **H2** helps provides insight into whether the Sangh is organizationally dominating its electoral competitors with respect to recruiting Dalit and Adivasi voters.

3.51 Defining the Variables:

A) Outcome Variable (*Bjpvoted*): Individual support for the BJP

The dependent variable for this analysis is a dichotomous variable coded 1 when a respondent voted for the BJP, and 0 when they did not. I have specifically chosen voting for the BJP, and not the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition that the party heads, as the outcome of interest. This choice is due to my specific interest concerning when the party is able to recruit voters directly into its fold, and not merely forge alliances with smaller parties with lower caste bases of support. One of the advantages of defining the dependent variable in this manner is that it removes from consideration the hypothesis that any of the party's success can be explained by the performance of its alliance partners in a given state.

B) Key Independent Variable (*Orgmember*): Civil Society Organizational Membership

For constructing this variable, one question in the 2004 National Election Study, assumes particular importance. It asks a respondent: 'Other than political parties, are you a member of any religious/caste organization or association?' The broad category of religious/caste organizations is one which most Sangh Parivar organizations would fall under. If the Sangh Parivar really has established dominance in the organizational sphere in ways that have helped the BJP electorally, then we would expect voters who responded 'yes' to this question to be more likely to support the BJP than those who answered 'no'. If however members of extra-party organizations are no more likely to support the BJP than other parties that indicates

that this social organizational strategy is not importantly affecting the BJP's pattern of success at the level of individual voters.

C) Individual Level Controls:

Continuing the discussion from the state-level analysis, in this section I specifically outline factors for which there are plausible theoretical associations with *both* an individual's decision to join a caste/religious organization *and* to support the BJP electorally.

a) *Religiosity:*

As I noted in chapter one, one way to understand the BJP's support among marginalized communities derives from those studies of electoral behavior which have noted that the primary determinants of poor communities' voting choices may lie outside of their class/economic interests and revolve around other issue areas such as levels of religiosity or ethnic heterogeneity.³⁷ Higher levels of religiosity among the poor are argued to shift the determinants of voting away from material concerns and towards social issues on which poor voters may share closer positions with elite, conservative parties.³⁸ Yet at the same time higher levels of religiosity might also plausibly lead Dalits and Adivasis to join socio-religious organizations of the Sangh Parivar which are active in promoting Hindu cultural rituals. Given that these groups routinely organize prayer meetings and celebrations of religious festivals, we then have a potential case of religiosity being associated with *both* the independent and

³⁷Kenneth Scheve and David Stasavage, "Religion and Preferences for Social Insurance", *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*. Vol. 1 No. 3 (2006): 255-286.

Alberto E. Alesina, Edward Glaser, and Bruce Sacerdote, "Why Doesn't the US have a European Style Welfare State?", Harvard Institute of Economic Research Discussion Paper No. 1933 (November 2001).

³⁸ Jeff Manza and Clem Brooks "The Religious Factor in U.S. Presidential elections, 1960-1992." *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 103, No. 1 (1997): 38-81.

Pippa Norris, Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

dependent variable in the analysis. To control for this, I employ a variable ‘Religiosity’ which is a composite index of questions on the 2004 survey asking how often a voter prays, how many times they go to temple, how frequently they keep religious fasts, and how frequently they attend religious services.

b) Communalism:

Since devotion and religious intolerance are hardly equivalent, religiosity has to be differentiated from religious nationalist sentiment. Many scholars have outlined the myriad ways in which the BJP has worked hard to activate communal conflict for electoral gain, which connects to broader theories of how parties can create conditions of social polarization amenable to their electoral needs.³⁹ Much ink has been spilled on the success of the BJP in stoking religious nationalist fires among Hindus, uniting different castes through the othering of a Muslim (and sometimes Christian) minority. In his seminal work on the rise of Hindu nationalism, Christophe Jaffrelot notes that the various arms of the movement, including the BJP, often relied on an ‘instrumentalist strategy of ethno-religious mobilization’.⁴⁰

Communal sentiment thus constitutes another important potential confounding factor. The fear generated by allegations of minority aggression that are a central component of ethno-religious mobilization was commonly thought to have been translated by the BJP into electoral support from Hindu voters through the ingenious use of symbolic political tactics discussed in the previous chapter, ranging from chariot marches to mosque demolitions designed to provoke religious polarization.⁴¹ Now it is entirely possible that those Dalits and Adivasis professing greater support

³⁹ Hansen, *op. cit.*, 1999;

Arvind Rajagopal, Politics After Television, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.* Jaffrelot (1993), p. 7.

⁴¹ Victoria Farmer, “Mass Media: Images, Mobilization, and Communalism”, in David Ludden (ed.) Making India Hindu, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.

for the Hindu nationalist agenda were also prompted to join Sangh organizations associated with those demands.⁴² Thus communal support could be an underlying condition associated with both the key independent variable and the outcome of interest.

To control for this I include a variable based on two pointed questions on the national survey designed to gauge support for communal ideology. The first, *ConversionBan*, measures how much respondents agreed, from a low of 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) with the need to ban religious conversions. The banning of conversions, which has been discussed in the previous chapter and will be analyzed in greater details in the next chapter, is a key part of the Hindu nationalist agenda. Indeed Hindu nationalists are particularly concerned with proselytizing religions such as Islam and Christianity and their efforts to convert lower castes and tribals, who Hindu nationalists believe are, and should remain, part of the natural Hindu community. The second variable (*Ayodhya*) asked whether respondents agreed with the controversial project outlined in Chapter 2, to construct a temple dedicated to the Hindu god Ram at the site of a mosque demolished by Hindu nationalist mobs in the town of Ayodhya in 1992 (also measured from 1 to 4). The measure used in the analysis *Communalism* is a composite index of the voter's responses to each of these questions (ranging from 2 to 8).

c) Income:

In addition to communal beliefs, previous chapters have outlined in some detail how the BJP has been traditionally understood as a party of the Hindu elite. One theory that has been proposed to understand the BJP's growing success with Dalits

⁴² Paul Brass, 'The Rise of the BJP and the Future of Party Politics in Uttar Pradesh,' in Harold Gould and Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993.

and Adivasis has been the idea that the party is recruiting the economic elite *within* these lower caste categories. In part due to sustained policies of affirmative action-type reservations and quotas for Scheduled Castes (Dalit) and Tribes (Adivasi) in public institutions, there has been significant financial differentiation within SC and ST populations.⁴³ As individuals from within these communities ascend the class hierarchy they might be inclined to support an elite party more than their less financially fortunate caste brethren:

Some members of low castes, who have improved their material conditions as they have availed themselves of new opportunities in agricultural, trade, and white-collar sectors, strive for higher status and a new identity.⁴⁴

The difference in class locations and consequent social-cultural attitudes has led to a state where despite coming from similar social origin, one does find a perceptible difference between the experiences, grievances and aspirations of the Dalit masses and that of the Dalit middle classes. 'These middle class Dalits have a desire to assimilate with the upper caste middle class... [to] imitate them in their thinking and behaviour.'⁴⁵

The new identity these primary beneficiaries of sustained reservations (popularly termed the 'creamy layer') seek to acquire might make them more susceptible to the BJP's overtures.⁴⁶ As part of this assimilative mimicry, upwardly mobile Dalits and

⁴³ Pradipta Chaudhury, 'The 'Creamy Layer': Political Economy of Reservations', *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 15th, 2004.

⁴⁴ Ghanshyam Shah, 'The BJP and Backward Castes in Gujarat', *South Asian Bulletin*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1994), pp. 57-65, p. 60

⁴⁵ Subhash Gatade, 'The Ideological and institutional Incorporation of Dalits Into Hindutva maelstrom', *South Asia Citizens Wire*, 27th January 2009, quotes from Sandeep Pendse, 'Dalits and Hindutva: Gainers and Losers' in Anand Teltumbde (ed.) *Hindutva and Dalits: Perspectives for Understanding Communal Praxis*, Kolkata: Samya, 2005, pp. 75-91.

⁴⁶ S. Subramanian 'Examining the 'Creamy Layer' Principle, *EPW*, Nov 11-17, 2006, pp. 4643-5. However it also bears noting that despite the growth of this 'creamy layer' the correlation between caste and class remains very strong in India, for a variety of reasons ranging from lack of access to public

Adivasis might also seek to join those organizations staffed primarily by upper castes (as described earlier) and historically associated with Brahminical traditions of cultural practice. Thus income levels might be correlated with *both* the decision to join Sangh organizations and the decision to vote for the BJP, thereby confounding the relationship between the latter two phenomena.

To anticipate this possibility, I use a categorical variable *Income*, which measures the household monthly income of the respondent with the lowest category being below Rs. 1000 per month (roughly \$25) and the highest being over Rs. 20,000 a month (roughly \$500). While income is by no means an exhaustive measure of class, it is the best single measure available, and preferable to the alternative of including a plethora of control questions on the survey designed to measure material possessions individually (from land to televisions), leading to the ‘garbage-can’ models that my analysis is aiming to avoid.

d) Caste Leader Influence:

I outlined earlier how the BJP in particular might benefit from a shift to a non-material issue axis like religion in terms of improving the party’s fortunes with SC and ST voters. However this logic seems less applicable to the issue of caste. As an upper-caste party, the BJP would not appeal to SC/STs if caste-based ethnic identity became the central political cleavage in a given state, as lower caste party tactics inevitably attempt to ensure. Kanchan Chandra’s work shows the success of lower caste parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is predicated on a logic of ethnic clientalism, where Dalit voters support the BSP because the party has created clientalist networks *within* the Dalit community by incorporating lower caste leaders into their party’s

resources to discrimination on the part of employers (see EPW special issue on caste and economic discrimination, October 13-19, 2007).

fold.⁴⁷ However the BJP is constrained by its upper caste core constituencies from following a tactic of appealing to lower castes through filling its administrative posts with Dalits and Adivasis, and the party apparatus remains overwhelmingly dominated by upper caste personnel.

Given this reality, it is plausible to argue that the BJP would do less well with Dalit and Adivasi voters who significantly identify with their caste status during elections, or who place a high value on the opinion of local caste leaders who are not likely to be incorporated into the machinery of the Sangh. One measure of whether this form of linkage is salient relies on what voters identify as the most important influence in their decision to vote. I therefore include a variable, *CasteCom*, which is coded 1 for those voters who cited their caste community leaders as the most important political influence on their electoral decisions. The expectation would be that those who are influenced more heavily by caste leaders would be less likely to support the BJP electorally. At the same time we would expect Dalit and Adivasi voters who follow their caste community leadership to be less likely to join Hindu nationalist organizations headed by upper caste rivals of these lower caste community leaders, especially at the senior level.

e) Liberalization:

One point on which the BJP and its Sangh affiliates remain in disagreement is over support for measures of economic liberalization. As outlined in the previous chapter, the Sangh largely remains wedded to an economic nationalism opposed to the deregulating reforms undertaken during the 1990s. The BJP however, broke dramatically with the Sangh on this issue once it became clear that many upper-caste voters benefitted from, and therefore supported the liberalizing reforms. Consequently,

⁴⁷ Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

it is possible that a respondent favoring liberalization measures would be *less* likely to join a Sangh organization, but *more* likely to support the BJP electorally. To account for this, I include a variable, *Liberalization*, which is a composite index of support for four statements advocating economic reform, and specifically with a reduced role for government in the national economy.⁴⁸ Table 3.6 summarizes the direction and reasons for the potential associations for each of these variables. The variable names are given in italics in parentheses.

TABLE 3.6: Summary of Individual-Level Potential Confounding Factors

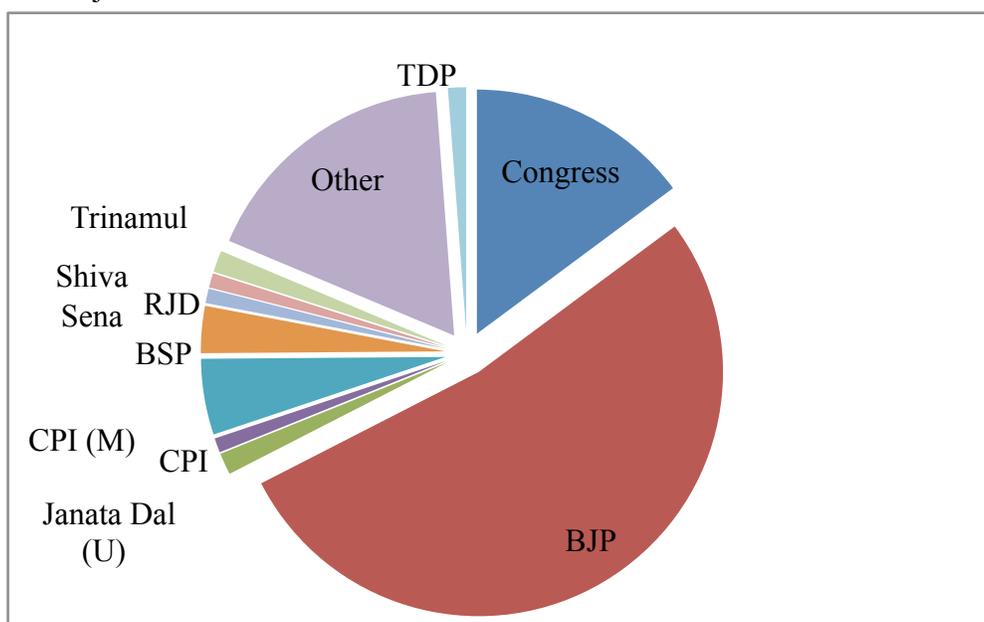
Potential Confounding Variable	Expected Impact on Organizational IV	Expected Impact on Voting DV
Religiosity (<i>Religiosity</i>)	Increasing religiosity makes it more likely that a voter will join Sangh groups. (+)	Increasing religiosity makes it more likely that a voter will support the BJP. (+)
Communalism (<i>Communalism</i>)	Expressing more communal values makes it more likely that a voter will join organizations affiliated with those causes. (+)	Expressing more communal values makes it more likely that a voter will support the party most supportive of a communal agenda. (+)
Class (<i>Income</i>)	Wealthier, upwardly mobile lower castes are more likely to join upper-caste staffed organizations. (+)	Wealthier lower castes are more likely to support party with elite-friendly policies and leadership. (+)
Caste Identification (<i>CasteCom</i>)	Those identifying with lower caste community leadership are less likely to join upper-caste dominated organizations. (-)	Those identifying with lower caste community leadership are less likely to support party with largely upper-caste leadership. (-)
Support for Economic Liberalization (<i>Liberalization</i>)	Those more supportive of liberalization are less likely to join Sangh organizations which preach economic nationalism. (-)	Those more supportive of liberalization are more likely to support the liberalization-favoring BJP. (+)

⁴⁸ The statements are (Q30b, c, d, and e on the NES 2004 questionnaire):

- 1) The number of government employees should be reduced as paying their salaries is costly for the country.
- 2) The government factories and businesses should be sold/handed over to private companies.
- 3) Foreign companies should not be allowed free trade in India.
- 4) People themselves are responsible for their poverty, not the government.

3.52 Individual-Level Data Analysis:

As a first step, it is useful to look at some descriptive disaggregation of the data concerning organizational membership. Figure 3.8 below shows that the BJP does indeed enjoy a dominant position among those Dalits and Adivasis who profess membership in religious/caste based non-party organizations. The BJP's share of the vote of members is 53%, well ahead of the next biggest party, the Congress, whose share is just under 15%.

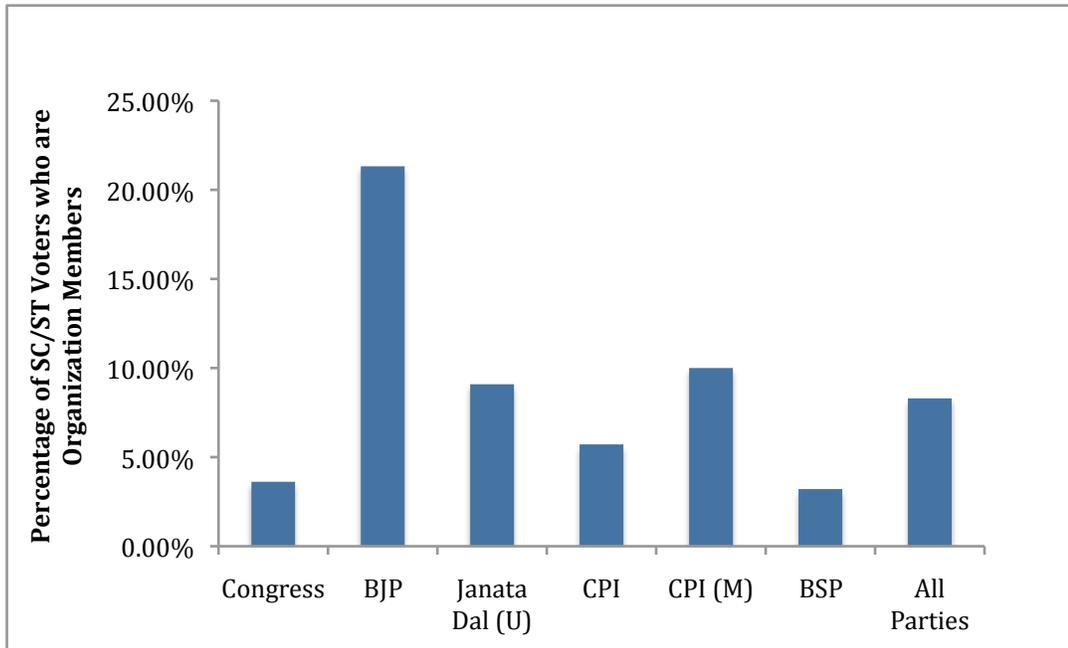


Source: National Election Study 2004

FIGURE 3.8 Distribution of Organizational Members by Party

A different way to look at this data is to see what percentage of a party's Dalit/Adivasi support comes from respondents who are members of civil society organizations.

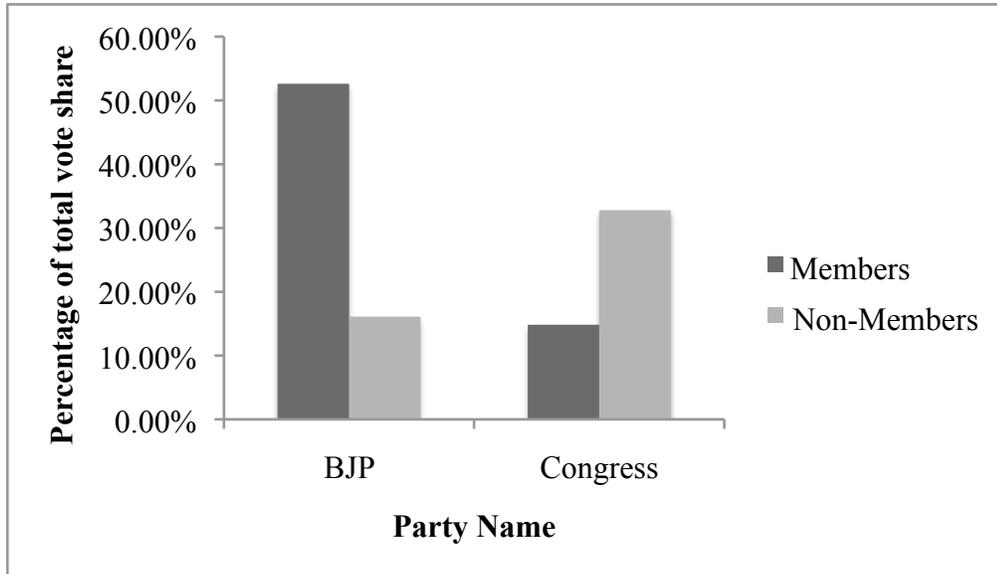
Figure 3.9 shows this breakdown:



Source: National Election Study 2004

FIGURE 3.9: Party Dependence on Organization Members

The above graph shows that the BJP clearly extracts a much higher proportion of its support from organizational members *among Dalit and Adivasi electorates* than any other major party in Indian politics, including the famously well-organized leftist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M). Indeed, as Figure 3.10 shows, the BJP's dependence on this organized base is made clear by the fact that while it significantly leads its main rival the Congress among organized members, the positions are reversed among non-members.



Source: National Election Study

FIGURE 3.10 Patterns of Support by Membership Status: BJP vs. Congress

To some extent this supports the idea that the ‘default’ support among Dalits and Adivasis is tilted away from the BJP and towards the Congress, unless they are actively ‘organized’ by the Sangh Parivar. This result fits well with our historical understanding of the Congress’ dominant position with these voting groups, and the need for active strategies on the part of the BJP to induce de-alignment.

The next step is to statistically test the importance of membership on the likelihood of a voter supporting the BJP. To do so, I conduct an analysis based on a logistic regression of the form:

$$\text{logit}(\pi) = \alpha + \beta 1 \text{Orgmember} + \xi x + \varepsilon \quad (\text{Equation 2})$$

Where $\text{logit}(\pi)$ is the logit function of probability that a voter supports the BJP.

Orgmember is a binary variable coded 1 if a respondent professed to being part of a caste or religious and 0 otherwise, and x refers to potentially confounding variables described previously. An initial simple bivariate model with just *Orgmember* included as an explanatory factor shows a highly significant impact of membership on voting:

TABLE 3.7: Bivariate Logistic Regression Results on *bjpvoted*

	Model 3.5
<i>Orgmember</i>	1.774*** (.112)
<i>Constant</i>	-1.436*** (.039)
N	4605

***p<.001

Both the graphical data and the bivariate regression show quite clearly that Dalits and Adivasis who are members of extra-party organizations are far more likely to support the BJP rather than any other party. Unfortunately we cannot ascertain which organizations they are members of, but I remedy this in my own personal survey, the results of which are presented in the following two chapters. However these individual-level results are still telling, and when taken in combination with the state-level analysis presented earlier, suggest strongly that the BJP holds a significant advantage with voters who take part in associational life, suggesting strongly that Sangh affiliates dominate the organizational space with these marginalized voters and are able to mobilize their members to support the BJP.

However, as with the state-level analysis, it is necessary to test if this relationship is rendered spurious by the inclusion of control variables that are associated with both the key explanatory factor and the dependent variable. Table 3.8 presents the results of individual trivariate regressions for the potential individual-level confounding factors listed in Table 3.6.

TABLE 3.8: Multivariate Logistic Regression Results on *bjpvoted*

Model	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.9	3.10	3.11
<i>Orgmember</i>	1.753*** (.105)	1.743*** (.112)	1.738*** (.106)	1.758*** (.112)	1.738*** (.112)	1.756*** (0.124)
<i>Liberalization</i>	.075*** (.015)					0.054** (.017)
<i>CasteCom</i>		-.570*** (.137)				-0.505** (.17)
<i>Income</i>			.095** (.022)			0.073** (.026)
<i>Communalism</i>				.088*** (.023)		0.082*** (.023)
<i>Religiosity</i>					0.083*** (.011)	0.058** (.014)
<i>Constant</i>	-2.373*** (.155)	-1.598*** (.0397)	-1.864*** (.064)	-2.06*** (.144)	-2.72*** (.145)	-3.44*** (.286)
N	5459	5459	5408	3488	5459	3458
Log Likelihood	-2502.578	-2504.792	-2479.205	-1686.318	-2482.64	-1649.60
	***p>.001	**p>.01	*p>.05			

Religiosity, *Communalism*, *Income*, *CasteCom*, and *Liberalization* are each paired with *Orgmember* and the dichotomous outcome variable. These trivariate tests are understood to be crucial steps in a careful analysis of potential spurious correlation: if one of these variables represents a confounding factor, its inclusion should eliminate *Orgmember*'s statistically significant effect from the bivariate analysis. Model 3.11 is the one multivariate model in which, once they have all been checked independently, all the control variables are added simultaneously.

The results indicate that all of the potentially confounding variables are statistically significant and have coefficients in the direction expected in Table 3.6. However, their inclusion in both the trivariate and the multivariate analyses does not remove or even reduce the statistically significant effect of *Orgmember* on the decision to vote for the BJP. Further, the relative stability of the coefficient on *Orgmember* across the six models helps strengthen the claim that this relationship is not the product of a particular model specification, or of spurious correlation with another influential variable.

At the same time, statistical significance is only half of the story. Equally important is the substantive impact these variables have on the likelihood of a respondent supporting the BJP at the polls. Interpreting coefficients of logistic regression is difficult, given the non-linearity of the underlying relationship. A clearer understanding of the impact of each variable can be attained through examining their impact on the predicted probability of a voter supporting the BJP. Table 3.9 shows the changes in predicted probabilities for each of the variables across the different model specifications. This information describes the change in likelihood of supporting the BJP as the independent variable increases from its minimum to its maximum observed value. For example, agreement with communal values as measured by the variable *Communalism* varies from a minimum of 2 (strongly disagree) to 8 (strongly agree). The change in predicted probability reported below charts the change in the probability of supporting the BJP as a respondent goes from strongly disagreeing to strongly agreeing with a Hindu nationalist agenda, holding other values in the analysis at their mean values. This analysis employed the simulation-based estimation of predicted probability (or predicted values) utilized in the *Clarify* program for STATA

to ascertain the predicted values for each estimation point (using the default 1000 simulations for each predicted value estimate).⁴⁹

TABLE 3.9: Changes in Predicted Probabilities of Key Independent Variables (values in percentage points)

Variables	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
<i>Orgmember</i>	35.51%	38.86%	36.34%	36.00%	36.11%	37.35%
<i>Liberalization</i>	13.65%					10.39%
<i>CasteCom</i>		-7.22%				-6.94%
<i>Class</i>			11.21%			8.99%
<i>Communalism</i>				8.06%		7.33%
<i>Religiosity</i>					18.19%	13.38%

Clearly *Orgmember* remains the factor with the largest substantive impact, and by some margin. Moreover, its substantive impact on the probability of a voter supporting the BJP remains remarkably stable across the different specifications, never dipping below 35 percentage points. Even at its lowest, membership’s effects are at least double that of the next most salient factor (*Religiosity*). Thus *Orgmember*’s significance in both statistical and substantive terms is substantial and not an artifact of a particular specification or a product of spurious correlation. What will be perhaps most surprising to analysts of Indian politics is the relatively small substantive effect of *Communalism*. Figure 3.11 shows how for organizational members, even those who are opposed to Hindu nationalist ideology are very likely to nevertheless support the BJP. The figure also reports the uncertainty for each estimate point obtained through the simulations. Even accounting for this uncertainty members who are express

⁴⁹ Michael Tomz, Jason Wittenberg, and Gary King (2001). CLARIFY: Software for Interpreting and Presenting Statistical Results. Version 2.0 Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, June 1 <http://gking.harvard.edu>. Gary King, Michael Tomz, and Jason Wittenberg (2000). “Making the Most of Statistical Analyses: Improving Interpretation and Presentation.” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, no. 2 (April 2000): pp. 347-61.

strongly *disagree* with building a Ram temple at Ayodhya and the banning of religious conversions (both pet agendas of the Sangh) are nearly 50% likely to support the BJP (Point A). On the other hand, the likelihood of even those non-members who are strongly supportive of both agendas (point B) is only about 17%. Even taking into account the levels of uncertainty presented, the lowest estimates for Point A are twice as high as the highest estimates for point B.

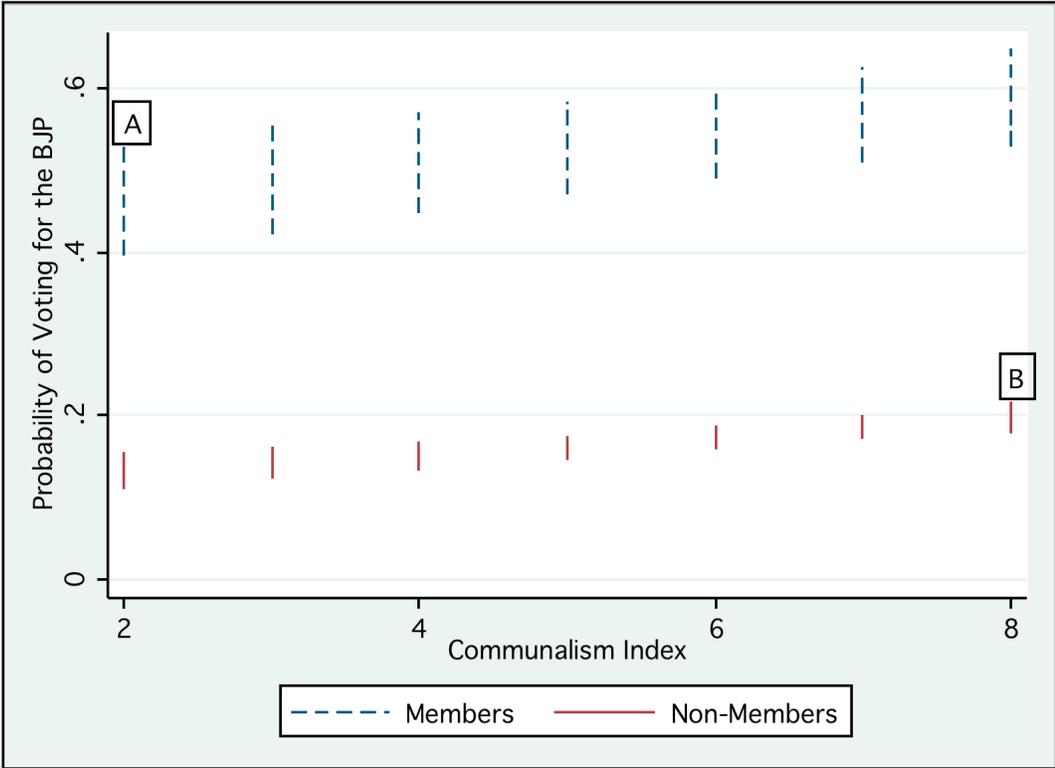


FIGURE 3.11: Comparative Effects of *Orgmember* and *Communalism*

3.6 Pruning the Sample: A Matched Analysis of Membership Effects

The above analysis has attempted to carefully include only those select variables that might confound the primary relationship of interest between associational membership and electoral support for the BJP. The analysis then tested

the impact of these variables separately and together in order to examine whether their inclusion dissipated the effects of membership on the probability of a voter supporting the BJP. However, the analysis remains dependent on observational data, where the ‘treatment’ of joining a non-party organization was not randomly assigned. Moreover, as is usually the case with social phenomena, we cannot observe the counterfactual of interest (i.e. we cannot simultaneously observe the effect of membership and non-membership on the same individual).⁵⁰

The problem with non-random assignments of treatment is that it is impossible to assume that said treatment is independent of observed and non-observed baseline variables.⁵¹ Instead the strongest assumption we can make about the data is that the nonrandom selection of treatment units is conditional on certain observed covariates. If we then ensure there is sufficient overlap of the treatment and control units along these observed covariates, then we have fulfilled requirements of ‘strong ignorability of assignment’, if not actual independence of assignment achieved through random selection in experimental settings.⁵²

An increasingly popular way to produce such overlap is through ‘matching’ analysis. If there are some covariate values only observed for control observations, those observations become irrelevant for estimating treatment effects in observational data, and are effectively dropped from the sample.⁵³ The original parametric analysis is then repeated on this truncated sample to produce more reliable estimates of casual

⁵⁰ This formulation is borrowed from Matthew Kocher, Thomas Pepinsky and Stathis Kalyvas, “Into the Arms of the Rebels? Aerial Bombardment, Indiscriminate Violence and Territorial Control in the Vietnam War”, paper presented at the 49th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, CA, March 26-29, 2008.

⁵¹ J. Sekhon, “The Neyman-Rubin Model of Causal Inference Estimation via Matching Methods”, in J. Box-Stefensmeier, H. Brady and D. Collier (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, (draft version dated 11/16/2007, pp 1-46), p. 3

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 7

⁵³ D. Ho, K. Imai, G. King and E. Stuart, “Matching as Nonparametric Preprocessing for Reducing Model Dependence in Parametric Causal Inference”, *Political Analysis*, Vol. 15 (January 2007), pp. 199-236, pp. 210-11

effects. In other words, matching analysis prunes the data sample by creating a control group of observations which is as similar as possible to the treatment group, with the exception of their differences in the treatment itself. Subsequent parametric analysis on this dataset that has been ‘matched’ along important covariates can potentially give us a more robust estimate of the treatment’s autonomous effects on the outcome of interest.

There are several techniques possible to pursue in determining the contours of the ‘match’, with the overall goal to minimize the ‘distance’ between the treatment and control groups, often measured by propensity scores or Mahalanobis distance.⁵⁴ A popular technique is developed by Diamond and Sekhon called ‘genetic matching’, uses a matching algorithm to determine optimal balance given the specific covariates and data inputted.⁵⁵ Perhaps an even more stringent matching procedure is exact matching, where only those control units that match a given treatment unit *exactly* along *all covariate values* are included. Naturally, this procedure’s strict criteria ensure the distance with respect is minimized. However the problem is ensuring that the technique’s stringency does not result in too few units being matched thereby rendering subsequent parametric analysis difficult to pursue. If exact matching can generate sufficient number of outcomes however, the findings of the subsequent analysis are concomitantly more robust.⁵⁶

For the purposes of this project, I used the *MatchIt* software library to create a pool of ‘non-members’ NM_x for every member M_x that match M_x *exactly* with respect

⁵⁴ Propensity scores generally refer to the predicted probability of ‘receiving the treatment’ based on certain observed predictors or covariates, which are generally obtained from logistic regression analysis.

⁵⁵ Alexis Diamond and Jasjeet Sekhon, “Genetic Matching for Estimating Causal Effects: A General Multivariate Matching Method for Achieving Balance in Observational Studies,” Working Paper, 2005, see <http://sekhon.berkeley.edu/papers/GenMatch.pdf>.

⁵⁶ D. Ho, K. Imai, G. King, E. Stuart, “Matchit: Nonparametric Preprocessing for Parametric Causal Inference”, Software documentation, Feb 2, 2009, p. 10.

to the six covariates earlier employed: *Communalism, Liberalization, Religiosity, Income, Communalism and CasteCom*.⁵⁷ The ways in which these variables might influence an individual's membership were specified in Table 3.6 earlier in the chapter. However, since *MatchIt* requires complete data sets, prior to performing the matches, I used multiple imputation techniques, using the *Amelia* software package in R to impute the missing values in the national survey data.⁵⁸ As a result, I was working with 5 imputed datasets, which in turn produced five matched datasets.⁵⁹ I then repeated the logistic regression analysis performed earlier in the chapter on each of the five datasets, and calculated the average logistic regression coefficient (q) and variances ($SE[q]^2$) of across these imputed datasets using the formulae suggested by Honaker et. al.⁶⁰

The results of these computations are presented in Table 3.10. The results in general show little change from the logistic model estimated prior to matching. *Orgmember* once again appears to have a statistically significant impact on the likelihood of a Dalit or Adivasi voter supporting the BJP, and this effect does not diminish across different specifications.

⁵⁷ Ho, et. al, *op. cit.*, 2009.

⁵⁸ See James Honaker, Gary King and Matthew Blackwell, "Amelia II: A Program for Missing Data", Feb 19, 2009. Also see Gary King, James Honaker, Anne Joseph, and Kenneth Scheve, "Analyzing Incomplete Political Science Data: An Alternative Algorithm for Multiple Imputation," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 1, (March 2001), pp. 49-69.

⁵⁹ For an example of multiple imputation followed by matching, see Beth Simmons and Daniel Hopkins, "The Constraining Power of International Treaties: Theory and Methods", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, No. 4, (November 2005), pp. 623-31.

⁶⁰ Honaker, et. al, *op. cit.* (2001), p. 4.

The formula given is:

$$SE(q)^2 = \frac{1}{m} \sum_{j=1}^m SE(q_j)^2 + S_q^2(1 + 1/m).$$

Where:

$$S_q^2 = \sum_{j=1}^m (q_j - \bar{q})^2 / (m - 1)$$

i.e. the sample variance of estimates *between* the data sets.

TABLE 3.10: Logistic Regression Analysis on Matched Models

	Model 3.12	Model 3.13	Model 3.14	Model 3.15	Model 3.16
<i>Orgmember</i>	1.852*** (.150)	1.876*** (.153)	1.774*** (.152)	1.867*** (.154)	1.867*** (0.159)
<i>Liberal~ion</i>	.134 (.372)				0.1528 (0.383)
<i>CasteCom</i>		-.925 (.523)			-0.8108 (0.517)
<i>Income</i>			.255 (.131)		0.2528 (0.131)
<i>Communalism</i>					0.0904 (0.079)
<i>Religiosity</i>				.106 (.118)	0.0916 (0.074)
Constant	-1.381 (1.089)	-1.659 (.331)	-2.0844 (.352)	-3.083 (.490)	-4.2238 (0.72)
N*	1335	1335	1335	1335	1335

*** p <.001 **p <.01 *p<.05

The average predicted probabilities across the five matched models of the full specification in the earlier analysis (Model 3.11) were also practically identical to those presented for the original logistic regression analysis, with *Orgmember's* effect at 36 percentage points, far higher than any other included factor including *Communalism*, which had an average effect of about 8 percentage points.

* This is the averaged value across the five matched datasets. The individual sample sizes for the datasets were 1307, 1354, 1348, and 1333.

Using a different matching technique, such as Sekhon and Diamond’s genetic matching algorithm does not change any of these results either in terms of statistical significance or substantive impact. One of the reasons for this consistency is that the treated and control groups in the dataset do *not* appear to differ systematically on key dimensions. If organizational members were systematically be richer, more communal, or more pious than their non-member counterparts, the data would violate Sekhon’s ‘strong ignorability’ criterion. However, the ‘balance’ statistics of the survey data used in this analysis actually indicate that there is actually *not* much difference between organizational members and non-organizational members along potentially confounding underlying factors.

TABLE 3.11: Balance statistics from genetic matching on first imputed dataset

Variables	ALL DATA			MATCHED DATA	
	Treated Means	Control Means	Means Difference	Control Means	Means Difference
Estimated Distance Measure	0.082	0.076	0.006	.082	.000
Monthly Income	2.334	2.135	0.199	2.334	.000
Religiosity	13.219	12.522	0.696	13.216	.003
Communalism	5.709	5.719	-0.010	5.699	.010
Candidate	0.341	0.306	0.035	0.341	.000
Party	0.534	0.503	0.031	.534	.000
Caste/community	0.072	0.127	-0.054	.072	.000
Something else	0.053	0.065	-0.012	.053	.000
Liberalization	2.570	2.525	0.044	2.570	.000

Consequently, as Tables 3.11 and 3.12 indicate, using the genetic matching algorithm does improve balance on some of these dimensions, but on the crucial dimension of communalism, matching does not in fact help us: the means difference

between the treated and control means is no better for the matched dataset than it was for our original dataset.

TABLE 3.12: Percent Balance Improvement from Genetic Matching

Variables	Mean Difference	EQ (Median)	EQ (Mean)	EQ (Max)
Estimated Distance	99.738	33.4	21.44	-43.63
Monthly Income	100.000	-Inf	-217.65	-200.00
Religiosity	99.655	100.0	26.64	0.00
Communalism	-0.514	0.0	-506.25	-100.00
Candidate	100.000	0.0	-140.00	0.00
Party	100.000	0.0	-338.46	0.00
Caste/community	100.000	0.0	56.52	0.00
Something else	100.000	0.0	-140.00	0.00
Liberalization	100.000	0.0	-138.89	0.00

The statistical analysis on the genetically matched datasets, as with the case of exact matching, yields the same findings as those of the original analysis. Such consistency of results indicate that the key findings of the analysis were not due to either particular model specifications, nor the product of underlying systematic differences in the distributions between members and non-members along certain key dimensions such as ideological beliefs or class status.

3.7 Comparisons With Other Parties

In addition to highlighting the strong impact of membership, these results also highlight that the substantive impact of communal attitudes is quite small in influencing poor voter decisions. These results also seem to indicate that membership may not be simply ideologically driven, as assumed by most of the scholarship on the Sangh Parivar. If, as Figure 3.11 highlights, an organizational member who is not

supportive of Hindu nationalist ideology is still much more likely to support the BJP than a non-member who is very supportive of communal agendas, then it seems plausible to argue that membership has some autonomous effects on voter choices. The importance of these effects in distinguishing a typical BJP voter is made clear in a comparison with factors influencing voter decisions to support its electoral competitors. Table 3.13 presents the identical multivariate analysis specified in Model 3.11, but changes the dependent variable to measure those who voted for the BJP's two main rivals for Dalit and Adivasi votes: the Congress, and the lower caste-led BSP.

With respect to communal attitudes, we see that the Congress *also* is more likely to get votes from respondents who favor banning conversions. While this might surprise observers of Indian politics who think of the Congress as the secular party of Gandhi and Nehru, followers of electoral politics in India might be less surprised. Since the explicit moves of the party under Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, to court the Hindu vote (discussed more fully in the previous chapter), the Congress has increasingly adopted a soft Hindu nationalist line, especially in local politics. Thus, while the BJP's chances certainly improve (even if only marginally) the more communal-minded a voter is, so does its main national rival's.

Contrast this to the effect of *Orgmember*, where the difference could not be starker. The Congress' chances with members of non-party organizations are far lower than with non-members, not surprising given its weak organizational networks, befitting the clientalist party it has become. Further the results conform to expectations concerning the Congress pattern of mobilization outlined in Chapter 1. Precisely because the Congress clientalist strategy uses local elites such as landlords or local business men rather than explicitly courting Dalit and Adivasi community leaders, it is unsurprising that *CasteCom* returns a significantly negative coefficient: those voters

valuing the opinion of local lower caste leaders likely to be left out of Congress machinery will support a different party.

TABLE 3.13: Changes in Predicted Probabilities of Key Independent Variables

	Congress	BSP
Orgmember	-1.172*** (.172)	-0.948** (.36)
Liberalization	0.025 (.015)	-0.086** (.028)
CasteCom	-0.351** (.133)	1.429*** (.159)
Income	0.008 (.023)	- 0.137*** (.05)
Communalism	0.036 (.019)	-0.011 (.035)
Religiosity	0.007 (.012)	- 0.089*** (.021)
Constant	-1.293*** (.235)	-0.495 (.411)
N	3458	3458
Log Likelihood	-2076.4577	-804.728

*** p <.001 **p<.01 *p<.05

The results seem to indicate this different party might very well be the BSP. As Chandra's work maintains, the BSP has generated support among lower caste communities through incorporating lower caste leaders into its party structure, leaders who voters feel will ensure that state patronage will now flow through their

communities and not simply those of higher castes. The results confirm this mechanism of ethnic clientalism, the coefficient on *CasteCom* for the BSP is significant and *positive*, unlike the negative impact of the variable for both the Congress and the BJP. Further, the BSP's support wanes with the increasing communal beliefs of a Dalit or Adivasi voter, another important point of difference between the Congress and BJP. What seems to emerge then is that while the Congress and BJP attract ideologically similar voters, the BJP's success rests on its ability to gain support through its organizational network. In contrast the BSP attracts more ideologically secular voters, who are mobilized by the party through the work of locally incorporated lower caste leaders.

3.7 Conclusion:

The evidence presented in this chapter serves to highlight the importance of organizational membership in differentiating the BJP from its main competitors, and reinforcing the idea that organization seems to matter more than pure ideology in the case of the party's efforts with Dalit and Adivasi voters. Aggregate Sangh organizational presence and individual organizational membership seem to influence the BJP's electoral chances to a considerable extent. However, the evidence presented above is incomplete, and needs to be supplemented in two different ways:

- 1) Does this argument hold not simply for organizational members, but for members of Sangh social organizations specifically? Moreover, beyond membership is there evidence to suggest opinion of Sangh social work is a significant factor in predicting individual voter decision and aggregate BJP success?
- 2) What are the conditions under which organizational membership is more likely? Further, what are the causal mechanisms linking membership to voting

choice—i.e. how does Sangh membership and the work of the Sangh social service organizations themselves translate into electoral support for the BJP?

The next two chapters tackle these questions by looking at the variation *within* and between the states of Chhattisgarh and Kerala. It employs original survey data along with extensive interviews to address the questions above by showing how the variation of aggregate Sangh presence influences BJP vote share not simply at the state level, but also at the district level, operating between the state and the individual. The following chapter on Chhattisgarh also makes up for inadequacies in the national survey data by highlighting specifically how membership in Hindu nationalist social organizations influences decisions to support the BJP, and how opinion of Sangh social work influences non-member voting decisions. The subsequent chapter on Kerala analyses what features of a local political arena render the social organizational strategy less efficacious, thereby arresting Hindutva's spread to subaltern populations.

CHAPTER 4

SAFFRON FORESTS: THE RISE OF HINDUTVA IN CHHATTISGARH

4.1 Introduction:

The previous chapter provided a broad analysis of the trajectory of the BJP's success with poor voters across India. The results painted a compelling picture of the centrality of the BJP's social service organizational affiliates in generating support for the party among previously hostile Dalit and Adivasi electorates. However, the national survey data which Chapter 3's study was based on is limited in its ability to provide a nuanced understanding of the myriad ways in which these organizations mobilize voters. An argument based on grassroots organization compels an analysis that is also more locally specific. This chapter attempts to provide such an analysis through a case study of the Sangh's efforts in the state of Chhattisgarh in central India.

Party politics in Chhattisgarh has been heavily understudied, but in fact the state seems a particularly promising case in which to study the BJP's attempts at social expansion among lower caste communities more closely. Adivasis comprise 31.8% of the state's population, one of the highest concentrations of 'tribals' in the country, which along with the state's 11.6% Dalit population gives subaltern voters a substantial electoral presence. As a result, there have been obvious demographic imperatives for the BJP to court both populations, as well as to seriously cull these electorates for suitable leaders to contest the 44 (out of 90) state assembly constituencies reserved for candidates from Dalit and Adivasi backgrounds.¹

The BJP performed spectacularly in recent state and national elections in

¹ Of the 44 seats, 34 are reserved for Scheduled Tribes and 10 for Scheduled Castes. Population figures are from the 2001 Indian National Census, and electoral data are from the Election Commission of India.

Chhattisgarh, particularly with Adivasi voters. The party managed to win an impressive 36% of the Adivasi vote in the 2003 state election, matching the vote share of the Indian National Congress (Congress), the BJP's main rival in the state. By matching the Congress, which had traditionally dominated the Adivasi vote, coupled with its own traditional superiority with upper castes, the BJP managed to win 24 of 34 constituencies reserved for Adivasi or (in the language of the Indian state) Scheduled Tribes (ST) candidates. The party followed this performance by winning 37% of the Adivasi vote in the 2004 national election, helping it to win 9 of the 11 seats in the state, including all 4 reserved for Adivasis. In the recent Assembly elections in the state held in December 2008, the BJP once again replicated its success with Adivasis, winning 23 of the 29 ST reserved constituencies on its way to retaining its incumbency.²

An analysis of the 2003 elections by Yogendra Yadav and Sanjay Kumar notes that 'the greatest surprise was the [equal] division of the Adivasi vote.'³ Kumar and Yadav argue that it was the significant reversal of fortunes in the Adivasi-dominated region of Bastar, traditionally a Congress stronghold, which proved to be the party's 'Waterloo'. The BJP's maintenance of control of the state legislature following the 2008 elections cemented the party's growing popularity with Chhattisgarhi Adivasis as indisputable and worthy of inquiry. The 'saffron wave' of Hindu nationalism had come to the forests of Chhattisgarh.⁴ This chapter attempts to see whether the results of a large-n analysis from the previous chapter, which demonstrate the centrality of the

² Data from the Election Commission of India, available at www.eci.gov.in. The number of reserved constituencies for Scheduled Tribes decreased following a new delimitation of constituencies in 2008, based on the most recent Census data of the state's ST population.

³ Yogendra Yadav and Sanjay Kumar, 'Understanding the Chhattisgarh Vote', *The Hindu*, 11th December, 2003.

⁴ The term 'saffron wave' is borrowed from how many observers of Indian politics have referred to the rise of Hindu nationalism during the 1980s and 1990s (see Hansen, *op. cit.* 1999). The significance of the term, and the association of the color saffron with Hindutva, is explained more fully in Chapter 2.

grassroots work of Hindu nationalist activists in mobilizing support for the BJP, withstand further empirical scrutiny at a more micro-level.

The research for this chapter was conducted in two stints in Chhattisgarh in November-December of 2007, and in March-April of 2008. A principal source of information was a voter survey I designed and carried out among Dalit and Adivasi voters across the state. The survey was given to 360 Dalit and Adivasi voters in 24 randomly selected villages, and was supplemented by some targeted focus group discussions in 5 of these villages.⁵ In addition to the survey, I conducted several interviews of BJP and Congress leaders within the state and district units of the party, as well as with several Sangh Parivar activists working in Adivasi-dominated districts. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a sense of the development of political strategy and party politics in the region, as well as learn about the tactics of the BJP's organizational affiliates working with marginalized communities. Finally, I conducted archival research at the State Assembly Library, and a local press archive to gather secondary materials about contemporary political development in the region.

After a brief overview of the political context of contemporary Chhattisgarh, I provide descriptive and statistical evidence from the survey, which tests the central hypotheses of the dissertation at the district and individual level. The results show that in addition to the inter-state variation analyzed in Chapter 3, variations in the strength of the Sangh social network also help understand the BJP's pattern of success within states, at the district level. I show that the BJP does much better in those districts in which the Sangh Parivar has stronger local chapters and is able to dominate the region's organizational arena. These findings are strengthened by the fact that within-state variation helps control for a greater range of contextual factors, including the

⁵ For more details on the methodology of the survey as well as a copy of the survey questionnaire itself, please see Appendix 1.

nature of opposition facing the party, and the personal popularity of the state-level BJP leaders.

At the individual level, this local analysis also helps provide a more nuanced understanding of the social service strategy's multiple effects on individual voters. Firstly, the survey data enables an examination of the impact of different levels of involvement with the Sangh on voter preferences. The analysis tests the effect of membership and participation in, and opinion of Sangh activities. The results indicate that not just formal membership, but even participation in Sangh service organizational activities has a very strong positive influence on the probability of a subaltern voter supporting the BJP. Moreover, positive opinions of Sangh social work have a significant impact on voter choice, even among those who do not participate in Sangh associational activities.

In the chapter's next section, I present evidence from interviews conducted with activists of the Sangh, as well as with state political leaders of both the BJP and the opposition Congress. These interviews outline the mechanisms through which these service projects were used to turn voters towards supporting the BJP. Coupled with data gathered from the local surveys, these interviews also make clear that organizational presence and the recruitment of Dalit and Adivasi populations into the Sangh *preceded* the change in support patterns and was not a *result* of growing affection towards the BJP. I make clear that both the Congress and BJP units within the state are faction-ridden and corrupt, and that the BJP would have been incapable of expanding its base in the state on its own.

In fact, I argue the Sangh's efficacy as an engine powering the surge in the BJP's popularity is predicated on their activists' strategic use of a 'depoliticized' discourse of social welfare to insert themselves as 'neutral' observers who are interested in what is best for the 'community', loosely defined. This constructed

apolitical neutrality enhances their ability to work as an effective political cadre for the BJP at election time. I conclude by presenting evidence that as effective as the Sangh service strategy appears to have been in parts of Chhattisgarh, the expanding the service network may not automatically yield electoral dividends for the BJP. I argue that the Sangh's strategy may be particularly hampered in districts where local caste organizations hostile to the project of Hindu unification are more active in providing the Sangh with competition for organizing subaltern voters.

4.2 Setting the Context: State Formation and Party Politics in Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh is a recent entry into India's list of states. Previously, the state's territory was considered part of Madhya Pradesh, India's largest state in terms of area, and second only to Uttar Pradesh in terms of population. However, on November 1st 2000, sixteen administrative districts of Madhya Pradesh were formally declared to now comprise the state of Chhattisgarh. It was to be the first of three new Indian states formed in the space of two weeks.⁶ Chhattisgarh literally translates as '36 forts', and some say this moniker refers to 36 princely forts that operated within the new state's boundaries, although the historical veracity of this claim is disputed. While Chhattisgarh has a relatively small population of 21 million by Indian standards, it is extremely topographically varied, with the fertile plains in the geographical center being flanked by forested hilly regions in both the northern and southern sections of the state.⁷

According to the Chhattisgarh government's official history, the demand for a separate state initially arose in the early 1920s, and was regularly repeated throughout the twentieth century, most notably at the 1924 Raipur Congress unit meeting and in

⁶ The region of Uttarakhand, which was previously part of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, was formally declared a state on November 9th. Finally, the area known as Jharkhand in the western part of Bihar was also announced as a separate state on the 15th of November.

⁷ Data from Indian National Census, available at: www.censusindia.net

the 1955 meeting of the Madhya Bharat (now Madhya Pradesh) Assembly. However the demand was initially rejected by the All-India State Reorganisation Commission, which was set up in 1954. The Committee justified its decision on the grounds that the projected prosperity of the Chhattisgarhi region (due to its rich natural resource reserves, particularly its deposits of iron ore) would prove crucial in developing the impoverished region of Madhya Bharat.⁸ The demands for a separate state was once again advanced however in the 1960s, with the formation of the *Chhattisgarh Bhratra Sangathan* [Chhattisgarh Brotherhood Organization], as regional elites began to feel that their interests were not being represented by elites of other parts of Madhya Pradesh who dominated the region's politics.

A *Chhattisgarhi Mukti Morcha* [Free Chhattisgarh Movement] was formed in the late 1970s to organize agitations around a regional identity. However, it is widely acknowledged that this organization never achieved the levels of success in grassroots mobilization that its counterpart the *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* [Free Jharkhand Movement] achieved to the north.⁹ In fact, there was never any sustained mobilization around the demand for an independent state, despite the token presence of a *Chhattisgarh Rajya Nirman Manch* [Independent Chhattisgarh Association].¹⁰ However, there were incentives for local elites seeking greater control over the rich resources in the area, and largely due to their pressures, both the BJP and the Congress (the two major parties in the region) took up the issue, as several prominent leaders from both parties started voicing support for a Chhattisgarhi state.¹¹ By the late

⁸ For the official state account of the region's history, see Chhattisgarh State Government website: chhattisgarh.nic.in/profile/corigin.htm.

⁹ Samuel Berthet notes this lack of an organized movement in the region in his study of the political development of Chhattisgarh, as does the state government's own account of the movement for a separate state. See Samuel Berthet, 'Chhattisgarh: Tribals, OBCs, Reformist Movements and Mainstream Politics', forthcoming in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.) *Rise of Plebians: The Changing Face of the Indian Legislative Assemblies*. Routledge: New Delhi, 2008.

¹⁰ Chhattisgarh State Government website, 'Chhattisgarh- A History'.

¹¹ For example Atal Behari Vajpayee and Vidya Charan Shukla joined the Chhattisgarh Raja Sangharsh Morcha in 1999 (see Berthet, *op. cit.*, 2008).

1990s, the election manifestos of both parties for national and state elections included the demand for creation of a separate Chhattisgarh.

4.3 Wooing the Poor: Social Service Provision in Chhattisgarh

This new state of Chhattisgarh is in many respects an ideal case for testing the importance of social service provision in influencing the decision of Dalit and Adivasi communities to support the BJP. Firstly, the BJP faced an uphill task in wooing both electorates as the Congress had established effective dominance with both populations in the region. Initially, this was due to the local chapter of the Congress managing to establish clientelistic arrangements with local leaders: the typical Congress pattern of mobilization.¹² This strategy was rendered particularly effective due to the fact that tribal areas were largely under the rule of various local princes, who the Congress co-opted and who in return rewarded the party with spectacular majorities.¹³ The Congress' overall success in Madhya Pradesh also allowed several party politicians from the Chhattisgarhi region to attain senior positions in the state government and acquire a regional and even national profile.¹⁴

¹² For the classic description of this system, see Rajni Kothari, 'The Congress 'System' in India.' *Asian Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 12, Dec. 1964, pp. 1161-1173.

¹³ These relationships were not always harmonious however. Samuel Berthet (2008: 15) notes the 'tumultuous relationships between Pravir Singh Deo, descendant of the princely family of Bastar, and the Congress are indicative of these difficulties to integrate sustainably the tribal areas into the party's fold.' See Berthet, *op. cit.*, 2009, [p. 15 of working draft manuscript]. For more on such clientalist patterns of mobilization, see Christophe Jaffrelot and Jasmine Zerini-Brotel, 'Post-'Mandal' Politics in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh', in Rob Jenkins (ed.), Regional Reflections: Comparing Politics Across Indian States, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.

¹⁴ The Brahmin Shukla family, for example, became a local dynasty. Ravi Shankar Shukla, a longtime Congress activist who helped build the party unit out of Raipur, assumed the Chief Ministership from 1947 till 1956. His son Shyam Charan Shukla has also been elected Chief Minister for Madhya Pradesh on three separate occasions, and his second son Vidya Charan Shukla also built a considerable following under the aegis of the state Congress before defecting to the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in 2003. He then moved from the NCP to the BJP in 2004, and this move caused a lot of internal controversy within the BJP. Many prominent factional leaders within the party, particularly the OBC leader Ramesh Bais, were upset at the prospect of including a member of the Shukla dynasty against whom they had fought several bitter contests. See 'Editorial: Shukla woos Raman, Sai feels no warmth', *Indian Express*, 16th February, 2004. Also see 'Editorial: Chhattisgarh BJP leaders sulking with Shukla's inclusion', *the Statesmen*, 16th March, 2004.

The Congress thus had the ideal mixture of prominent leadership and clientelistic networks it relies on to garner support among Dalit and Adivasi constituents. However, these networks developed by the party were loosely constructed vertical ties through intermediaries and not truly encapsulating direct linkages with voters. The fact that the BJP managed to take advantage of these weak ties to draw substantial numbers of Congress voters out of this clientelist system, compared with the Sangh's difficulties against a more cadre-based leftist opposition in Kerala, might help us understand the local conditions which facilitate or impede the welfarist strategy (which will be more fully discussed later in the chapter).

The argument emerging from the national analysis presented in the previous chapter was in two parts. The first holds that at the *level of the individual voter*, the most important mechanism for the BJP to get support of a Dalit or Adivasi voter was to have them incorporated into the Sangh organizational network. The second part of the argument held that in order to garner enough of these members to consolidate a solid electoral base in the state for the BJP, the Sangh needed to have a significant aggregate organizational presence *at the state level*.

Chhattisgarh seems an ideal venue for this argument to play out, as the growth of the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram [Organization for the Welfare of Vanvasis, henceforth VKA], the main social service arm of the Sangh in the state, has been truly phenomenal. The VKA was founded in 1952, in the northern Chhattisgarhi district of Jashpur, and its roots in the state are inextricably linked to the long history of Christian missionary activity in the region. As sociologist Nandini Sundar notes, the region is marked by 'competitive proselytization' between the Sangh and Christian missionaries seeking to extend their influence over Adivasi communities.¹⁵ Sundar

¹⁵ See Nandini Sundar, 'Adivasi vs. Vanvasi', in Satish Saberwal and Mushirul Hasan (eds.) Assertive Religious Identities: India and Europe, Delhi: Manohar, 2006, pp 357-390, p. 357.

notes that after the establishment of a Jesuit mission in Jashpur in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, missionaries used an array of tactics to recruit converts, including monetary incentives for conversion, running cooperative banks, and even organizing boycotts for non-Christians.¹⁶ She argues that the missionary activities came to the attention of the RSS when Hindu nationalists began suspecting Christian organizations in the area were coordinating the movement for a new state of Jharkhand, ‘similar to the Muslim demand for Pakistan.’¹⁷

In response, the RSS pressured the Madhya Pradesh state government to have its *pracharak* [full-time activist] Balasaheb Deshpande appointed Regional Director of the Tribal Welfare Department, ironically at the behest of the then Congress Chief Minister Ravi Shankar Shukla¹⁸. Deshpande, who was cousins with Murali Deoras, the third *sarsanghchhalak* [supreme leader of the RSS] came to Jashpur and discovered the extent to which missionaries had established a social presence, particularly in the field of education. He eventually quit his government position in order to counter this influence by setting up an organization whose explicit mandate would be to run its own schools in competition with the missions, and emphasize the teaching of *Hindutva* [Hindu nationalist ideology] in its curriculum.¹⁹ Deshpande established the VKA, and within five years the Sangh recognized this institution’s potential by sending one of its *pracharaks*, Moreshwar Ketkad, to Jashpur for the first time.²⁰ The organization’s recent growth, as evidenced by Graphs 3.1 and 3.2 in the previous

¹⁶ Nandini Sundar, *op. cit* (2006), p. 362.

¹⁷ Sundar, *op. cit.* 2006, p. 364. Jharkhand was of course founded as a separate state around the same time as Chhattisgarh in the year 2000. Jharkhand shares its southern border with the northern border of Chhattisgarh.

¹⁸ Ravi Shankar Shukla was the father of VC Shukla, a prominent politician in the state, who is discussed at greater length in footnote 7.

¹⁹ For a longer discussion of Hindutva and its core tenets see Chapter 2.

²⁰ Later K. Bhaskar Rao who was working as a *pracharak* [RSS worker] in Kerala, became the first organizing secretary of the organization.

chapter, has been nothing short of phenomenal and forms the backbone of Sangh social services in the state.

In addition to this organizational growth, Chhattisgarh's unenviable record in terms of human development has been argued to facilitate demand for services of the type provided by the VKA and its affiliates.²¹ Sundar, in an analysis of educational services in northern Chhattisgarh argues:

The 'success' of the RSS agenda on education must be seen in the wider context of state schooling. Despite climbing government statistics on the number of schools opened, teachers hired or children enrolled, the micro level reality remains grim in central India...widespread teacher absenteeism, leaking roofs, non-existent toilets, no drinking water, no blackboards and no educational materials... one consequence of this widespread demand and the lack of matching state initiative has been the considerable increase in private schooling, both of the religious non-profit and the supposedly secular profit-making variety.²²

The combination of low development and strong organizational presence make Chhattisgarh seem a favorable arena for the Sangh to mobilize Adivasi support for the BJP. Further, there was a distinct lack of political mobilization among Dalit and Adivasi communities in the state:

After more than half a century of Independent political history the tribal political consciousness has not yet assumed the form of a distinctive movement either through a specific party or within the existing parties of Chhattisgarh.

²¹ See Shashank Sharma, 'Adivasiyon par Kisne Kiya Jadu? [Who performed magic on the Adivasis?], *Deshbandhu*, January 20, 2004.

²² Nandini Sundar, 'RSS: Teaching to Hate', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 17th, 2004.

Integrated and channelized, the...movement took a regional dimension which made either unnecessary or difficult the connection with the national scene.²³ Even though the demand for a separate state was often made in terms of a state 'for tribals', state tribal leaders acknowledge that such rhetoric came 'largely from upper caste leaders who wanted to create their own area of influence.'²⁴

Several scholars and informed observers have noted the potential importance of the Sangh's organizational advantage in delivering success to the BJP with new electorates further down the caste hierarchy.²⁵ However there has been no systematic study of Adivasi voters across Chhattisgarh (or indeed anywhere in India) to determine whether or not those who support the BJP are indeed being mobilized through the RSS and its organizational affiliates. The fact that such a fundamental question remains unanswered is largely due to a general lacuna in Indian political analyses, with notable exceptions, of research grounded on the perspectives of voters themselves.²⁶ Further, the arguments about the BJP's rise with Adivasis in Chhattisgarh tend to be totalizing, and offer little explanation of those who remain outside of the BJP's fold. If the Sangh organizations are indeed so pervasive in the state, then why do they seem to be successful in converting some Adivasi voters to the BJP's cause but not others? I take up these questions in turn in the rest of this chapter.

²³ Berthet, *op. cit.* 2009, page 23.

²⁴ Interview with Nand Kumar Sai, BJP MP from Sarguja and former state president of the Madhya Pradesh unit of the BJP, New Delhi, April 28th, 2008.

²⁵ In addition to Sundar *op. cit.* (2006) and Sharma *op. cit.* (2003), see Mahesh Daga, 'Is the Party Over?', *Seminar*, 534, 2004.

²⁶ Yogendra Yadav's work remains an important exception with regard to electoral studies. See Y. Yadav (with Anthony Heath) "The United Colours of Congress: Social Profile of Congress Voters, 1996 and 1998", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume XXXIV (No. 34 and 35), August 21-28, 1999, pp. 2518- 2528.

4.4 Survey Results: Looking at organizational presence

The survey was administered among 360 Dalit and Adivasi voters in 24 villages in the districts of Bastar, Jashpurnagar (Jashpur), Mahasamundh and Raigarh (for details on the survey see Appendix 1). These districts are spread across the state, as Map 1 indicates. The reason these four districts were selected was due to their marked variance on the key independent variable of interest: the organizational strength of the Sangh. Administering the survey in these districts could therefore uncover if these differences resulted in telling variations in the voting patterns of Dalit and Adivasis respondents.



Source: Chhattisgarh State Industrial Development Corporation

FIGURE 4.1: District Map of Chhattisgarh

While it is true that the Sangh has a formidable apparatus across Chhattisgarh, such strength is not uniformly distributed. To overcome the fact that the Sangh does

not provide district-level data for its projects across India, during the course of fieldwork in Chhattisgarh I was able to obtain figures on the number of service projects being run for tribals in each of the four districts by the state unit of Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram and Seva Bharati, the two main ‘service’ organizations in the state.

In Chapter 3, we saw that Chhattisgarh’s overall index of Sangh social service strength, adjusted for size of SC/ST population, is one of the highest in the country at .245. However, as Table 4.1 shows, there is tremendous within-state variation in this organizational presence.²⁷

TABLE 4.1: District-wise Distribution of Sangh Social Services

Source: VKA Headquarters, Jashpur Chhattisgarh, Seva Bharati office, Raipur, Chhattisgarh

District	Number of Sangh Service Projects	Index of Sangh Strength Per Capita
Jashpur	545	1.07
Bastar	512	.619
Raigarh	20	.096
Mahasamundh	26	.059

Unlike the national sample, a comparison of voting preferences across districts affords us a much greater degree of control over factors that might influence the hypothesized relationship between organizational presence and support of the BJP. For example, conditions of low social development were theorized to enhance demand for the Sangh’s social work, rendering the welfarist strategy more effective. However all four districts have low levels of human development even by already low Indian

²⁷ The VKA’s share in the four districts are 398 projects in Jashpur, 317 projects in Bastar, 13 projects in Raigarh, and 8 projects in Mahasamundh. The remaining projects in each district are run by Sewa Bharati.

standards. Other factors which could conceivably affect the BJP's performance are also (relatively) controlled for: all four districts have a comparable level of party competition, land area, size of population, and all are predominantly rural, with less than 10% of total population living in urban areas. Further, none of the four districts experienced significant communal rioting.²⁸

The greater degree of control afforded by the relative similarity of districts within a small state like Chhattisgarh, allow us to see with greater clarity the effects of a factor which does vary greatly across them, such as the strength of Sangh service organizations. The argument presented here expects the greater organizational presence in Jashpur and Bastar to specifically lead to higher rates of individual participation in Sangh organizational activity. Further, the theory expects these participants to be more likely to support the BJP than non-participants and consequently expects the BJP to fare much better electorally with respondents in Jashpur and Bastar than in Mahasamundh and Raigarh.

4.31 Survey Results:

The results of the survey showed the BJP outperforming the Congress as a whole across the four districts with respect to Dalit and Adivasi voters, with the party garnering 46.76% of the total vote to the Congress' 39.15% among those sampled.²⁹

²⁸ Indeed the only district which experience *any* rioting was Raigarh, which was one of the districts the BJP was *not* successful in. Thus the idea that the party could use rioting to garner votes appears not to have empirical support in the specific case of Dalit and Adivasi voters. Riot data from: Varshney-Wilkinson Dataset on Hindu-Muslim Violence in India, 1950-1995, Version 2, Ashutosh Varshney and Steven Wilkinson, October 8, 2004.

²⁹ Congress politicians such as state leader Ajit Jogi have cried foul over the party's reversal in Bastar in the 2003 election, arguing the result was due to improper electoral procedure. Jogi maintains that the BJP, which was in power in New Delhi at the time, forcibly deployed the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to the region under the guise of 'keeping elections fair', when in reality they stuffed ballot boxes for the BJP in these areas. However Kumar (*op. cit.*, 2004) notes that such allegations flew on both sides of the aisle, as some of his sources from Bastar informed him that the 1998 elections had not been fair, as 'it was alleged that many booths were non-functional and district officials had gifted those seats to the then Congress Chief Minister Digvijay Singh on a platter.' As a result it is difficult to

However, more than this aggregate victory, what is of interest to this study is examining what differentiates the party's performance *across* these districts. The disaggregated results of the survey are presented below. With respect to the aggregate measure of Sangh organizational strength, of the 360 respondents, half fell in districts with 'high organizational strength' (Bastar and Jashpur) and half fell in districts with 'low organizational strength' (Mahasamundh and Raigarh). The differences in probabilities of Dalit and Adivasi voters supporting the BJP between the 'high' and 'low' districts from the perspective of Sangh presence are quite startling:

TABLE 4.2: Voting Patterns Across the Districts

Source: Author-conducted Fieldwork (2008).

District	Index of Sangh Strength Per Capita	Percentage Voting for the BJP
Jashpur	1.07	59.55%
Bastar	.619	67.78%
Raigarh	.096	25.89%
Mahasamundh	.059	19.77%

Looking at the second organizational variable, which was individual membership, we find similarly strong support for the argument presented above. Now in the local survey, I was able to specifically ask if respondents took part in Sangh service organizations, as well as their opinions of these services, and therefore able to test **H3** and **H4**, which were specified in the last chapter as:

conclusively state that election irregularities hurt one party's performance systematically more than others.

TABLE 4.3 Individual-Level Hypotheses

H3: (Testing whether the Sangh service approach creates participation linkages that help the BJP): *Dalit and Adivasi voters who are members, or take part in the activities of Sangh social organizations specifically should be more likely to vote for the BJP than those who are not participants.*

H4: (Testing whether the Sangh service approach creates opinion linkages that help the BJP) *Among Dalit and Adivasi individuals who are **not participants** in Sangh organizational activities, those who have a good opinion of these activities are more likely to support the BJP.*

Before testing these hypotheses, it is necessary to make a couple of clarifications about the statements themselves. Firstly, the analysis in the previous was limited by the wording of the 2004 National Election Study, which asked whether a respondent was a member of *any* caste or religious association [emphasis added]. **H2** was helpful in the national analysis, because testing this hypothesis provided evidence that members of any civil society association were substantially more likely to vote for the BJP than any other party. Such evidence lends credence to the idea that the Sangh is establishing organizational dominance with respect to Dalit and Adivasi populations in ways that are helping the BJP electorally. However implicit in this logic is the assumption that the organizations responsible for the association between membership and BJP support in the previous chapter are indeed those run by the Sangh. While certainly plausible, and even likely, the analysis remains fundamentally incomplete as long as the wording is limited to the general language of ‘any caste or religious association’. The more specific wording of **H3** allows us to avoid such assumptions by focusing on respondents who have explicitly associated with social service organizations of the Sangh specifically.

Another advantage of the wording of **H3** is that it broadens the scope of potential linkages between voters and Sangh organizations from the rather restrictive

condition of formal membership that the national analysis was limited to. In many respects, membership is an extreme form of participation, but is hardly the only form affiliation could take. To provide some insight into how different forms of linkages might influence voter behavior, the local survey whether respondents had participated in activities run by these organizations. Someone receiving treatment from one of Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram’s mobile dispensary’s during a VKA-organized ‘medical camp’ in a given village (discussed later in the chapter), would thus be a participant, but not necessarily a formal member.

The survey thereby allows us to disaggregate respondents into three categories: members, participants, and those who are neither (henceforth non-participants). We can then examine how *effective* and *extensive* each type of linkage is in delivering electoral success for the BJP. Turning to the survey results to analyze these hypotheses in turn, we see that the conditional probability of voting for the BJP varied significantly between participants (members and non-member participants) and non-participants. The percentages in each column provide a crude initial measure of the efficacy of each linkage type, whereas the number of respondents in each category, reported in parentheses, indicates the extensiveness of each form of linkage.

TABLE 4.4: BJP Support Across Districts By Linkage Type

Source: Author-conducted survey (2008).

District	Members	Non-Member Participants	Non-participants
High-Strength Districts	100% (N=27/27)	89.13% (N=41/46)	42.99% (N=46/107)
Low-Strength Districts	100% (N=4/4)	100% (N=12/12)	21.95% (N=36/164)

Table 4.4 indicates that membership in a Sangh social service organization guarantees support for the BJP at the polls. This result is perhaps to be expected, but the results for non-member participants are quite striking. The second column of Table 4.4 indicates an extremely high success rate for the BJP with those who have simply *participated* in activities organized by Sangh affiliates. While more rigorous testing is obviously required, the results seem to provide preliminary evidence for the efficacy of the Sangh strategy in converting not simply those who they formally enlist, but even those who their activities encompass. In fact there is such little difference between members and participants in their support of the BJP that the remainder of this analysis will collapse the two categories and focus on the difference between those who have participated (members and non-member participants) and those who have not.³⁰

A second point that emerges from Table 4.4 is that while the *efficacy* of participation as a linkage mechanism remained robust across the different types of districts, the *extent* of this participation differed substantially. While the proportion of participants in Sangh organizations supporting the BJP remained relatively constant and very high across all four districts, the absolute number of participants varied greatly. In Jashpur and Bastar, the districts in which the Sangh network was strong, Sangh organizations have encompassed more than four times as many respondents as in the low-strength districts of Mahasmundh and Raigarh. While effective in delivering a small core of support in these latter regions, organizational presence appears to simply not have been pervasive enough to yield a significant electoral base of voters.

³⁰ All subsequent analyses were also performed keeping the distinction between members and non-participants alive, and found no substantive difference between the behavior of members and non-member participants.

While members and participants are highly likely to support the BJP regardless of the local strength of the Sangh social service network, the same does not appear to be true for non-participants. In Jashpur and Bastar, the high-strength districts for the Sangh, non-participants are nearly twice as likely to support the BJP as those in Mahasamudh and Raigarh. This variation suggests the possibility that in areas where its organizations are dominant, the Sangh's activities produce a significant spillover effect on the decisions of those who do not take part in them. The reasons for such a spillover are unclear however, and will be explored further later in the chapter.

In summary, it appears from the descriptive data presented thus far that where the Sangh has a solid organizational presence, the BJP manages to attract the majority of support from marginalized electorates through the Sangh's building of a substantial base of participants *and* through influencing a higher number of non-participants.

In the next section, I continue the logic developed in Chapter 3, and statistically gauge the strength of **H3** at the individual level. I do so by testing the impact of a few carefully selected control variables, which might potentially confound the apparent relationship between participation and voting decisions. In order to test the strength of the impact of Sangh organizational presence on BJP electoral performance, it is imperative to see whether the relationship holds when controlling for variables measuring confounding effects. As explained in Chapter 3, I focus on evaluating the impact of a key factor (in this case participation) rather than explaining as much of the variation in the outcome variable as possible.³¹ This approach argues against including any and every variable that might have an impact on the outcome,

³¹ James Lee Ray, 'Explaining Interstate Conflict and War: What should be controlled for?' *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 20 (2003): pp.1-31.
James Lee Ray. 'Constructing Multivariate Analyses (of Dangerous Dyads), *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Volume 22, Issue 4 January 2005, pp. 277-292.

and in doing so helps avoid the practice of including exhaustive lists of control variables.³²

Instead, I include a few control variables that serve the very specific purpose of testing the validity of the key argument presented by **H3**. The variables included are those that present potentially confounding effects, which might reveal the relationship between participation in Sangh activities and voting for the BJP to be spurious.³³ To keep the analyses broadly comparable I include the same potential confounders included in the national analysis, which for plausible theoretical reasons, might be associated with an individual's decision to take part in Sangh organizational activities *and* with their decision to support the BJP. I will *not* include any and all variables that might purportedly affect the BJP's performance with these groups.

4.5 Potential Variables Impacting the Organization-Voting Link

1. Income:

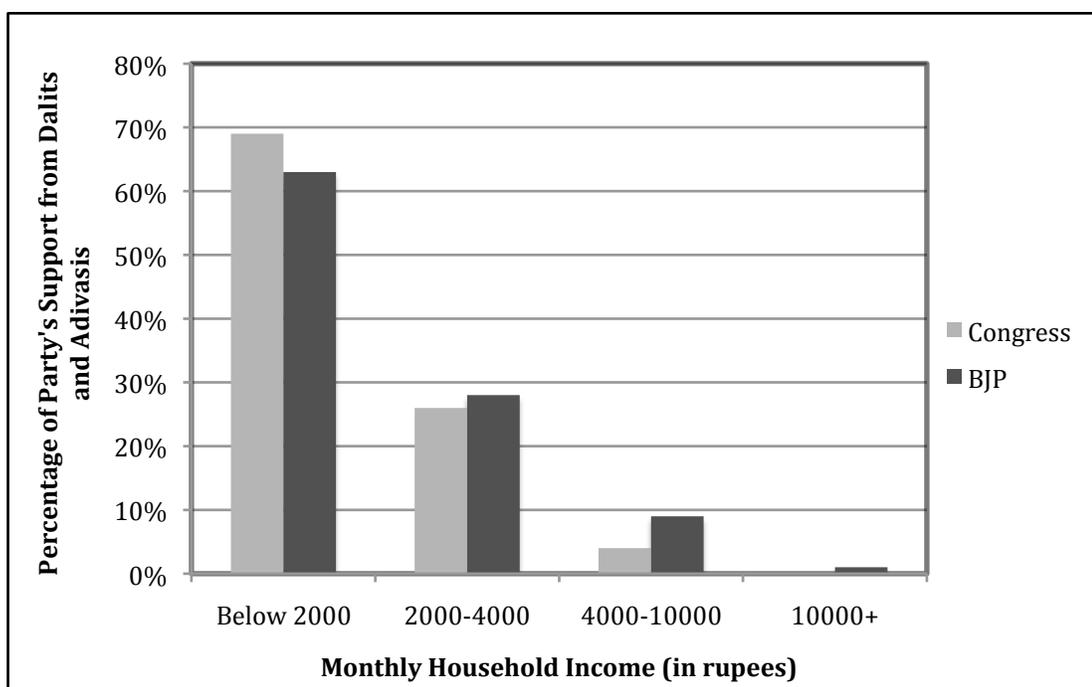
One set of potential explanations discussed in the previous chapter center on the importance of class-based divisions within the Dalit and Adivasi electorates, specifically that the BJP has succeeded only with wealthier members of either community (the so-called 'creamy layer'). At the same time, it is conceivable that only upwardly mobile Dalits and Adivasis participate in Sangh Parivar organizational activities as part of a process of aspirational mimicry. Thus income might conceivably be associated positively with both the key causal variable and the outcome, confounding the relationship between the latter two. To control for this, the survey

³² Christopher Achen, 'Let's Put Garbage-Can Regressions and Garbage-Can Probits Where They Belong', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 22(2005): 327-339.

³³ Also see Kelly M. Kadera and Sara M. Mitchell, 'Heeding Ray's Advice: An Exegesis on Control Variables in Systemic Democratic Peace Research.' *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 22(2005): pp. 311-26.

measures class in the same way as on the national survey, in terms of the monthly household income of the respondent.

A simple tabulation of the data seems to indicate a relative lack of differentiation between Congress and BJP SC/ST voters along either measure. As Figure 4.2 shows, there is little variation between the pattern of BJP and Congress support in the lowest income bracket, and indeed both parties find a majority of their support among these voters, with 69% of Congress voters, and 63% of BJP supporters coming from these two sub-groups. These results are consistent with the data on land ownership patterns, with over 65% of both parties' voters come from farmers with less than 4 acres of land, falling in the bottom two categories of the survey population. Thus the argument that the BJP relies heavily on richer, larger landowners within SC/ST communities is simply untenable in Chhattisgarh.

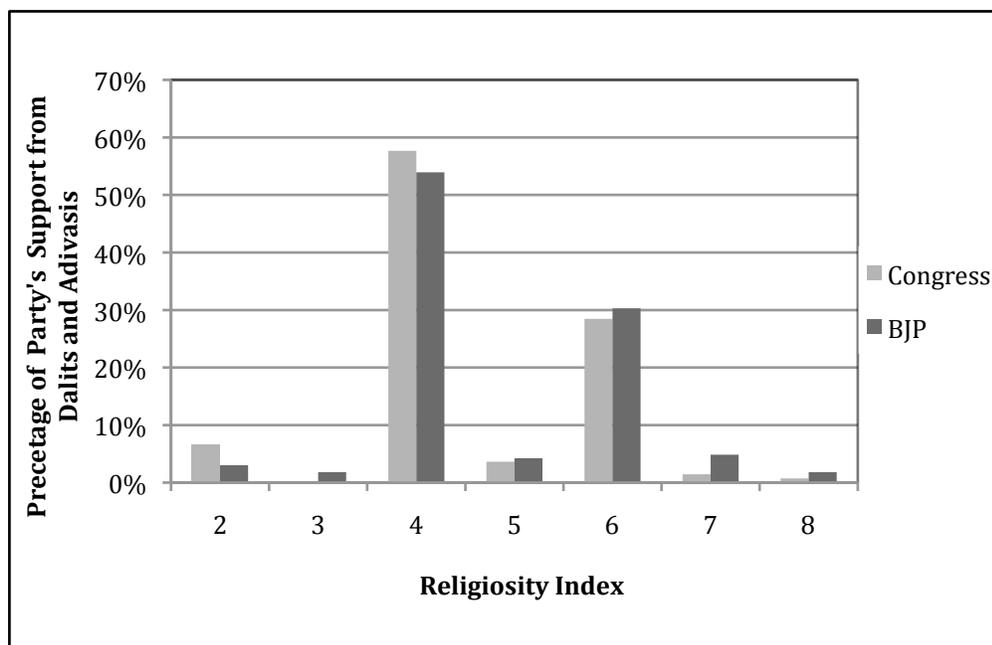


Source: Author-conducted survey (2008)

FIGURE 4.2: Distribution of supporters by income

2. Religiosity:

Another theory examined in Chapter 3 held that a greater religiosity, distinguishes those SC/ST voters who support the BJP *and* those more likely to take part in Sangh socio-cultural organizations. If this were the case, religiosity might confound the relationship between participation in Sangh activities and supporting the BJP. There were two questions on the survey used to measure religiosity of the respondents: the frequency with which they prayed, and the frequency with which they attended temple, mosque or church. The responses to these two questions were combined to create a religiosity index (higher values indicating more fervent religious practice), which was then used to discern if those lower caste or tribal voters supporting the BJP were indeed more devotional, and thus more susceptible to the party's pro-Hindu ideology. As the figure below shows, religiosity levels are remarkably similar between the two groups of voters.



Source: Author-conducted survey (2008)

FIGURE 4.3: Distribution of supporters by religiosity index

3. Communalism:

However levels of religiosity might not correspond with adherence to Hindu nationalist ideological perspectives. It is perhaps even more plausible that those Dalits and Adivasis supportive of communal* agendas, rather than those professing devout faith, would have a greater proclivity to join the Sangh, and also to vote for the BJP. Given that this was a local survey, I also asked respondents their view on the single most important item on the local Sangh ideological agenda in the state: the halting of religious conversions. Due to the long presence of Christian missionaries, the Sangh is extremely concerned with the conversion of lower castes and tribals to other religions, and supports legislation banning religious conversion.³⁴ As a result, an argument that the BJP is appealing to Hindu Dalit and Adivasi voters on ideological grounds might expect those expressing stronger support for banning religious conversions to support the BJP in greater numbers.

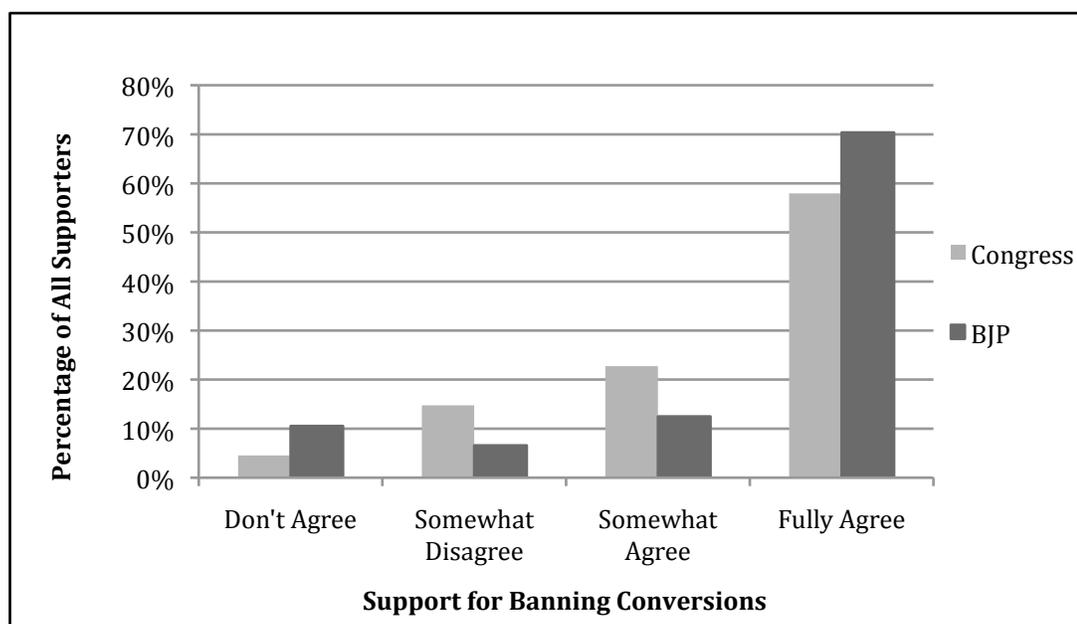
Looking at Hindu Dalit and Adivasi voters that the BJP is competing for, and who are over 90% of the sample surveyed, we see little difference in support patterns between the two major parties. While the BJP has a slightly higher proportion of voters in the fully agree category, both parties have a majority of supporters from this

* Once again I use communalism as it is employed in South Asia, which roughly translates as sectarianism, and in this specific instance refers to sectarian divides based on religious identities.

³⁴ The legislative debate over conversions has a long history in India. As early as 1967, it became evident that the concern was not just with forced conversion, but with conversion to any religion other than Hinduism, and especially to Christianity and Islam. In states like Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, where explicit anti-conversion laws were passed, the biases were clear in the prosecution of Christian conversions, but not of forcible conversions of Christians to Hinduism. See Angana Chatterjee, 'Hindutva's Violent History', *Tehelka*, Vol 5, Issue 35, September 13, 2008. For the text of the Orissa Freedom of Religion Bill, see

<http://74.125.95.132/search?q=cache:Axr8Hs17GCoJ:persecution.in/persecution/Orissa%2520anti%2520conversion%2520bill.pdf+religious+freedom+bill+in+orissa&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us&client=safari>

response group, and both have over 80% of their supporters in at least partial agreement with banning conversions. Opinions on other, less locally specific issues that the Sangh promotes nationally also fail to significantly differentiate BJP and Congress supporters, mirroring the results of the all-India analysis.³⁵



Source: Author-conducted survey (2008)

FIGURE 4.4: Distribution of supporters by communalism

4. Caste Community Leader Influence:

As mentioned in Chapter 3, local caste community leaders have not been incorporated as successfully by the BJP as some of its competition. Indeed, these leaders are often hostile to Sangh activists who wish to envelope individual caste associations into a larger Hindu family of organizations. Consequently, it is conceivable that those voters who value the opinion of their local caste community

³⁵For example in the local survey, I also repeated the question from the larger national survey that asked respondents the degree to which they supported building a temple at the site of the mosque demolished by Hindu nationalist activists in the town of Ayodhya (more fully discussed in Chapter 2). However this measure like the variable *ConversionBan*, was found not to be significant in the statistical analysis.

leaders are both less likely to join the Sangh, and less likely to support the BJP at the polls. To address this, however imperfectly, I included a question asking respondents whose opinion mattered most to voters at election time. The variable (*CasteCom*) has been coded 1 for those who said the opinion of their caste community leaders mattered most, and 0 otherwise. As conventional wisdom expects, the data did show some difference here between the BJP and the Congress, with only 42.21% of BJP voters said their caste leader’s opinion was pre-eminent as compared to 54.03% of Congress supporters.

TABLE 4.5: Potential Confounding Variables and their Expected Effects

Potential Confounding Variable	Expected Impact on Joining Sangh Activities	Expected Impact on Voting for the BJP
Religiosity (<i>Religiosity</i>)	Increasing Religiosity makes it more likely to join Sangh organizations. (+)	Increasing religiosity makes it more likely to support the BJP. (+)
Communalism (<i>ConversionBan</i>)	Holding more communal values makes it more likely to join organizations affiliated with those causes. (+)	Holding more communal values makes it more like to vote for the party most supportive of a communal agenda. (+)
Class (<i>Income</i>)	Wealthier, upwardly mobile lower castes more likely to join upper-caste staffed organizations. (+)	Wealthier lower castes more likely to support BJP’s elite-friendly policies and leadership. (+)
Caste Community Leader Influence (<i>CasteCom</i>)	Those identifying with lower caste community leadership less likely to join upper-caste dominated organizations. (-)	Those identifying with lower caste community leadership less likely to support BJP’s largely upper-caste leadership. (-)

4.6 Regression Results:

This previous section provided some descriptive data on the profiles of BJP and Congress voters among the Dalit and Adivasi households surveyed with respect to potential confounding variables. However, as in the previous chapter, it is necessary to address the statistical impact of controlling for these confounders on the relationship between organizational variables and the BJP's electoral performance. To address this, I present the results of logistic regression models, where the dependant variable, *Bjpvoted*, is defined as an individual voter's choice to vote for the BJP (coded 1) or not (coded 0). In each model I include two variables which are associated with the organizational hypothesis. *Sanghpart* measures if a respondent has taken part in Sangh organizational activities (for testing **H3**). The variable is coded 1 if a respondent was a participant in Sangh organizational activities, and 0 otherwise. *SanghOpinion* measures the opinion a respondent has of Sangh social service work on an increasing scale from 0 to 3 (for testing **H4**). In addition to the control variables described above, *ConversionBan*, *Religiosity*, *Income*, and *CasteCom*, I include the variable *Age*, which measures a respondent's age in years. Since these activities (particularly in the sphere of education) are largely targeting the young, an observable implication of the organizational hypothesis proposed here would be that the BJP should perform better with younger respondents.

A few conclusions can be drawn from results of testing the various models, the results of which are reported in Table 4.6. Firstly, the statistical analysis reveals that all three variables related to the hypotheses **H3** and **H4** have highly significant impacts across the different specifications. Moreover, the coefficients on *Sanghpart* and *SanghOpinion* were both extremely stable in all six models. Additionally, *Age* is found to be highly significant in all the models, with a substantial negative coefficient. This

finding suggests that where they are successful, the BJP has made significant progress in recruiting new voters within SC/ST electorates, with a stunning 65% of voters from the 18-29 year category supporting the party.

TABLE 4.6: Logistic Regression on Probability of Supporting BJP

	Model 4.1	Model 4.2	Model 4.3	Model 4.4	Model 4.5	Model 4.6
<i>Sanghpart</i>	3.079** (.512)	3.075** (.513)	3.117** (.530)	3.039** (.516)	2.910** (.518)	2.977** (.542)
<i>SanghOpinion</i>	.586** (.163)	.579** (.162)	.528** (.165)	.564** (.167)	.640** (.171)	.578** (.178)
<i>Age</i>	-.050** (.012)	-.047** (.012)	-.059** (.013)	-.053** (.012)	-.063** (.012)	-.072** (.016)
<i>Religiosity</i>		.055 (.119)				-.035 (.151)
<i>ConversionBan</i>			.208 (.128)			.298 (.150)
<i>Income</i>				.034 (.102)		.083 (.115)
<i>CasteCom</i>					.163 (.303)	.133 (.321)
<i>Constant</i>	.684 (.448)	.357 (.822)	.335 (.623)	.788 (.506)	.957 (.501)	.385 (1.188)
N:	359	356	333	348	326	298
Log Likelihood:	-165.756	-164.279	-149.877	-161.174	-145.422	-129.281

(standard errors in parentheses)

* Significant at the .01 level

** Significant at the .001 level

Moving towards attitudinal variables, we find the striking result that neither religiosity nor support for communalism, are consistently statistically significant

across the different specifications. This finding suggest that the presumption that Sangh organizations are appealing to these electorates along ideological lines may be quite premature, particularly since earlier descriptive evidence such as Figure 4.4 showed that the average Congress voter is also quite communal in their beliefs.

With respect to the substantive effects, the results mirror the national analysis in finding a large impact of variables associated with the service strategy on a respondent’s predicted probability of supporting the BJP. Once again using statistical simulation through the Clarify software package, the analysis found that the probability of voting for the BJP if you were a participant in Sangh organizational activities is at least 55.18 percentage points higher than if you are not, holding all other variables constant. Not surprisingly, this was higher than the impact of being the member of *any* organization found in Chapter 3 (which resulted in an increase of 38 percentage points on average).

TABLE 4.7: Impacts on Predicted Probabilities of Voting for the BJP

Variables	Model 4.1	Model 4.2	Model 4.3	Model 4.4	Model 4.5	Model 4.6
<i>Participation</i>	57.28%	55.67%	57.36%	56.33%	55.15%	55.18%
<i>SanghOpinion</i>	38.45%	37.62%	34.19%	36.40%	41.28%	36.21%
<i>Age</i>	-58.89%	-56.49%	-64.66%	-61.74%	-66.57%	-71.88%
<i>Religiosity</i>		7.92%				4.48%
<i>ConversionBan</i>			15.95%			21.74%
<i>Class</i>				4.28%		11.57%
<i>CasteCom</i>					-4.2%	-2.93%

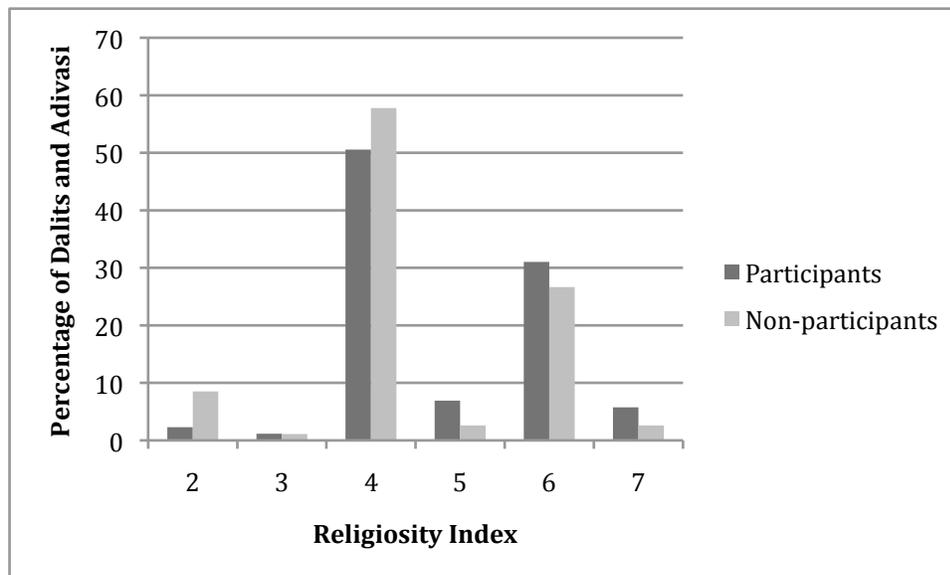
Contrast this change with that induced by the variable *ConversionBan*, which in addition to being less statistically significant was less than half as impactful, effecting an increase in likelihood of supporting the BJP of 21.74 percentage points as a voter went from the least to most supportive position. Equally importantly, factors like ideology or class do not appear to affect the likelihood of supporting the BJP *indirectly*, in particular through influencing the decision to join Sangh organizations. The matching analysis in Chapter 3 showed that Dalit and Adivasi organizational members do not systematically vary from non-members across class or ideological variables. Table 4.8 further shows that the difference between participants and non-participants in Chhattisgarh, in terms of either their income level or their support for banning conversions, is not statistically significant at the 95% confidence threshold.

TABLE 4.8: Comparing Participants and Non-Participants

	<i>ConversionBan</i>	<i>Income</i>	<i>Religiosity</i>
Non-participants	3.08	2.5	4.485
Participants	3.33	2.25	4.897
Means Difference	.25	.25	.412
Scale of Index	1-4	1-7	2-8
P-value	.08	0.15	0.01

The only factor where there is a significant difference in means across the two sample groups is religiosity. However even here the difference in means is not substantial (about .4 on an 7-point scale), and furthermore Figure 4.5 makes clear that the overall distribution of participants and non-participants in terms of the religiosity index is largely similar. Thus the evidence suggests that higher levels of religiosity are

an unlikely basis for explaining a respondent's decision to participate in Sangh service activities. Instead, participation appears largely autonomous of ideological or class-based factors, and thus exerts an independent effect on the decision to support Hindu nationalists at the polls.



Source: Author-conducted survey (2008).

FIGURE 4.5: Religiosity of Sangh Participants vs. Non-Participants

The variable *SanghOpinion* measuring opinion of Sangh social work is another important addition to the analysis presented in the previous chapter, which was unable to measure wider public attitudes towards these activities. This measure is particularly useful in determining how influential approval of Sangh service work is in informing voting patterns among non-participant voters. To some extent, this measure would give us a sense of the ‘multiplier’ effect of Sangh activities: in addition to influencing those voters who it directly envelops into its organizational fold, we need to know how much the Sangh’s work influences non-participants. Figure 4.6 below disaggregates

the impact of opinion of Sangh work on the likelihood of supporting the BJP for participants and non-participants separately.

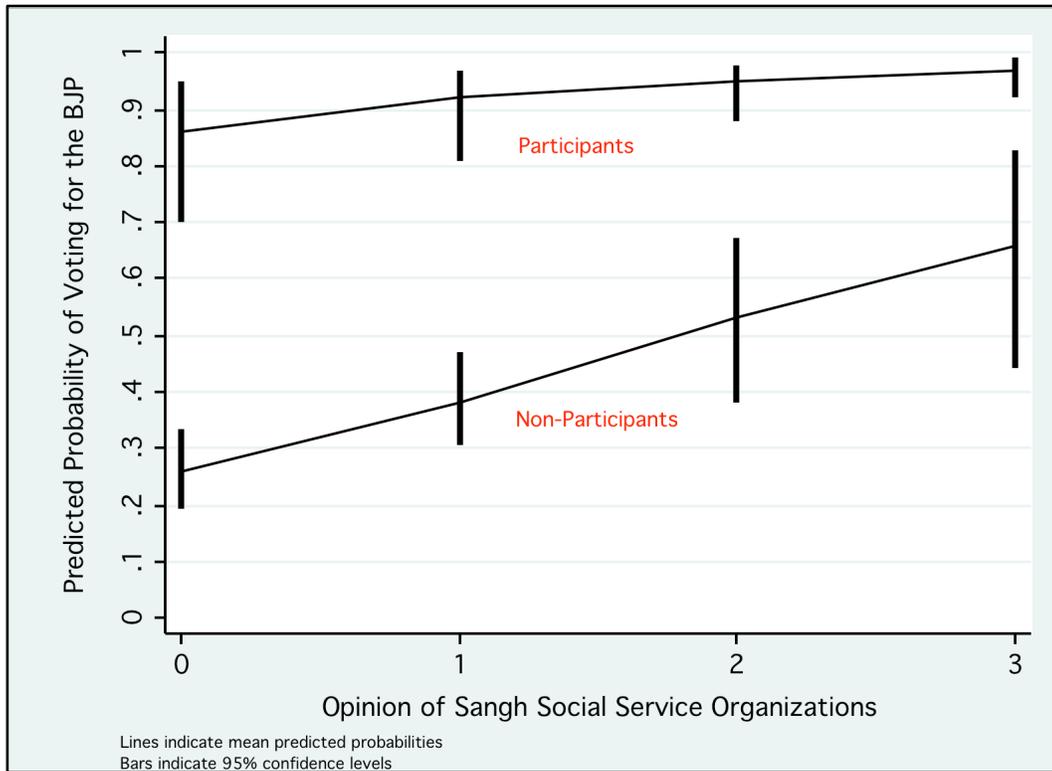


FIGURE 4.6: Effect of Opinion of Sangh Social Service Work

The two lines in Figure 4.6 indicate the change in the mean predicted probability of a voter supporting the BJP as their opinion of Sangh social work improves, while the bars at each point indicate the 95% confidence intervals for each of these estimates, once again estimated using statistical simulations through the Clarify package. Figure 4.6 demonstrates that opinion of Sangh activities has a substantively significant effect on the likelihood of voting for the BJP *even among non-participants*. A non-participant who holds a very favorable opinion of the Sangh’s social work is about 30 percentage points more likely to support the BJP than a non-participant.

While *SanghOpinion* is statistically and substantively significant for all types of voters, these results help nuance the confirmation of **H4** from the models tested earlier. For instance, the bars in Figure 4.6 indicate that improving opinion of Sangh social work make participants more certain (bars shorten) and non-participants less certain (bars lengthen) about their voting choice. For participants, improving opinion complements a default preference to support the BJP, a preference which the earlier results show is significantly associated with this participation in the first place. Thus the two effects work together to make a voter more certain in supporting the BJP. For non-participants on the other hand, the ‘opinion effect’ is working against their inclination to not support the BJP. As their opinion of the Sangh organizational activities improves, these voters become less sure of their choice, even as they become more likely to support the BJP.

The implication here is that the BJP’s links with some subaltern voters is more tenuous than with others. Figure 4.6 shows that participation is a much firmer basis for building a link with a voter: participants of all types were at least 80% likely to support the BJP, irrespective of their opinion of the work, and significantly higher than those non-participants who strongly approved of Sangh social work. While participants seem to have strong preferences to the party, non-participant supporters for the BJP, even those who view Sangh activities favorably, remain unsure of their choices and thus potentially far more volatile in their future electoral behavior.

More generally, these results have to be taken in tandem with the descriptive statistics on organizational presence presented earlier in the chapter. The statistical tests support the argument that Sangh activities are important in determining voter choices. Participation in and opinion of Sangh social service organizations prove much more influential in determining voter choices than a respondent’s income, piety, or cultural values. However, the second part of this mechanism is for Sangh activities to

be widespread enough to influence a large number of voters, thereby building a significant enough base within the Dalit and Adivasi electorate to cross a winning threshold.

The combination of national and local election analysis help to provide multi-level testing of the hypothesized relationship between Sangh organizational activities and the BJP's patterns of support. However, they are less efficacious in explaining the causal mechanisms underlying this association. How exactly do the activities of the Sangh grassroots network translate into increased success for the BJP? In order to adequately answer this question, it is necessary to move beyond national and local survey analysis. In the next section, I outline the causal linkages behind my argument, relying on both interviews with a range of BJP and Congress party leaders and workers, and with activists in the Sangh Parivar. I also make use of some focus group discussions in select villages, which provided an opportunity to go beyond the closed-ended nature of survey questionnaires.

4.7 Organizational Strength and Electoral Support: The Chicken and the Egg

4.71 The Congress and the BJP in Chhattisgarh

In order to buttress the argument made here for the importance of Sangh organizational strength in mobilizing support for the BJP, it is necessary to address a potential problem of reverse causation. The current argument states that the BJP's growing popularity in Chhattisgarhi elections stems from the expanding efforts of the Sangh Parivar. However, it is conceivable that instead the BJP's popularity is the cause of the Sangh's growing success, rather than an effect of it. In this section, I maintain that making such an argument with respect to the Chhattisgarhi case is not very tenable. The BJP was simply not a player with Dalit and Adivasis communities

until the 1990s, when its support began increasing steadily with these groups. I demonstrate that for the BJP's success to be the cause rather than the effect of Sangh growth, the party would have to have developed a popular reputation in the state, on the basis of which its supporters would join the Sangh.

However, far from developing such a reputation, the BJP unit in Chhattisgarh displayed many of the faction-ridden tendencies of its rival, the Congress, making the party heavily reliant on its Sangh Parivar affiliates to generate support for it in the countryside.³⁶ For example, the BJP has come under heavy criticism for not following up on a number of fairly populist policies aimed at helping families below the poverty line (BPL), of whom SC and ST populations still constitute a disproportionate amount.³⁷ For example, the party implemented a promise made during the campaign to give a cow to every Adivasi household below the poverty line. Other programs included providing Adivasi girls with cycles on the condition that they use them to attend school, and to provide free footwear to Adivasi school-going children.³⁸ Additionally the Raman Singh government recently announced a scheme by which families below the poverty line would receive a quota of rice at the highly subsidized

³⁶ The most visible face of the party, Dilip Singh Judeo, is the *maharaja* [ancestral king] of Jashpur district, and nationally known for his vociferous campaigns to 'reconvert' Christian Adivasis to Hinduism, organized under the auspices of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Judeo's national profile earned him a ministerial position in New Delhi, but this title was stripped from him following the controversy which ensued when he was caught in a cash-on-camera sting operation, which the BJP alleged, was masterminded by Amit Jogi. Following this fall from grace, the position for BJP leader in the state became a three-way race between veteran upper-caste leader Lakhiram Agarwal, Judeo, and eventual Chief Minister Raman Singh. Even since the BJP formed the government since 2003, Singh has had to constantly shuffle his cabinet members in order to contain the power of factions opposed to him. See Debrata Mohanty, 'Judeo reconverts tribals', *Nation*, 5th March, 2004; Editorial: Hindu *banane ka kaam mandir banane se badha* [the tasking of converting Hindus is more important than the task of building temples], *Haribhumi*, 9th May 2004; Pradip Kumar Maitra, 'Lobbying with RSS helped Judeo nomination', *Hindustan Times*, 13th June 2004; Editorial: Judeo is BJP's best bet in Chhattisgarh', *Times of India*, 10th September, 2003; and Shivananda Shukla, 'Raman emerges stronger after reshuffle', *The Pioneer*, 20th June 2005.

³⁷ Sanjeev Majupuria, 'Chhattisgarh Govt. launches pro-poor schemes', *The Pioneer*, 18th December 2003.

³⁸ Staff Reporter, 'Das Lakh Adivasiyon ko joote bantegi sarkar' [Shoes will be distributed to 10 lakh Adivasis], *Deshbandhu*, 3rd March 2005.

price of Rs. 3 per kilo (roughly 3 cents a pound), and to provide a subsidized meal a day for the price of 5 rupees.³⁹

However, many of these schemes were seen as having been empty campaign promises, with numerous Adivasi villagers telling us that they never received the cow they were promised, and many who did saying the cows were sickly and not productive animals.⁴⁰ This poor performance with respect to pro-poor policies is perhaps not surprising, given the strength of the BJP's upper-caste lobby nationally and locally. However, in Chhattisgarh, this upper caste bias has not hurt the party irreparably, mainly due to the host of problems afflicting its principal rival in the state.

Since the state's formation in 2000, the most prominent Congress politician in the state has been Ajit Jogi, who is seen by many as an efficient leader in matters of building infrastructure in the state. Jogi built his reputation not as a politician, but as an administrator in the Indian Administrative Service, winning plaudits for his efficient performance as a District Magistrate and Collector for thirteen years in various parts of Madhya Pradesh. Jogi came into the Lok Sabha after winning the 1998 Madhya Pradesh election from the Raipur constituency, and then later became the state's first Chief Minister in 2000. Many political observers and members within his party agree that this administrative experience was seen as an asset in improving the efficiency of government under his tenure.⁴¹

However these same commentators mentioned that Jogi's 'autocratic style of functioning, and harsh personal style' coupled with the cronyism rife within his inner

³⁹ Ashwini Sharma, 'Raman finds way to voter's stomach with Rs. 5 meals', *Indian Express*, 17th January, 2004.

⁴⁰ Focus group discussions, Nyosa village, 22nd, 23rd November 2007, and Sariapala 24th November.

⁴¹ Interview with Dr. Shakrajeet Nayak, Congress MLA from Raigarh told me that Jogi's Indian Administrative Service (IAS) background ensured he knew how to control bureaucratic officials to ensure they functioned as per Jogi's government's agenda. Also see Manini Chatterjee, 'Jogi: The CM vs. the Man', *Indian Express*, 27th November 2003

circle rendered him extremely unpopular among his political peers.⁴² Senior Congress leaders Shyam Charan and Vidya Charan Shukla were particularly annoyed at being bypassed in favor of Jogi by the Congress leadership (particularly Sonia Gandhi) in New Delhi, and this contributed to Vidya Charan's defection from the party in 2003.⁴³ This volatile situation was made worse when Jogi became embroiled in several controversies, including allegations of his buying over 13 BJP state government legislators right before the 2003 state assembly elections.⁴⁴

He was also accused of placing pliable bureaucrats in the battleground districts of Jashpur and Bastar, which prompted the Election Commission of India to accuse his government of violating the model code of conduct.⁴⁵ His autocracy took on a more malevolent form, when his son, Amit Jogi was accused of masterminding the assassination of a rival politician who was publicizing a flurry of reports documenting corrupt deals struck between the Jogi faction and powerful business leaders and industrialists.⁴⁶

Once voted out of office in 2003, Jogi was then caught in a trap set by the BJP high command, which taped him making a financial offer to a BJP MLA to induce a faction from the party to defect from the government and join hands with a Jogi-led Congress party.⁴⁷ Reports of such tactics abound: a BJP MLA I interviewed alleged that Jogi had approached him to get him to defect unsuccessfully, but had managed to get the local BJP *mandal*⁴⁸ president to defect in return for receiving a legislative

⁴² Interview with Chandra Das Mahant, Congress State President, Raipur, March 28th, 2003.

⁴³ Askari Zaidi, 'Battlefield of Chhattisgarh', *Hindustan Times*, 23 November, 2003. Interviews with Askari. Zaidi, correspondent *Hindustan Times*, Raipur, 22nd March, and Sunil Kumar, editor *Chhattisgarh* newspaper, Raipur 29th March, 2008.

⁴⁴ See 'One more BJP feather in Jogi cap: MP Khunte', *Indian Express*, 12th November 2003.

⁴⁵ See 'Jogi to EC: Hear both parties before taking action', *The Pioneer*, 1st November 2003.

⁴⁶ Sunil Kumar, 'Fruits of megalomania,' Seminar, No. 534, 2004.

⁴⁷ 'Editorial: On the record,' *The Times of India*, 6th December 2003.

⁴⁸ The *mandal* refers to a level of organization within the BJP party structure that falls between the village-level and district-level party units.

ticket.⁴⁹ Lastly, and perhaps most importantly Jogi was accused of falsely certifying himself as a member of a Scheduled Tribe, allowing him to contest seats reserved for ST candidates, as well as gain popularity among the state's important Adivasi electorates. The BJP and Sangh Parivar worked hard prior to the 2003 elections to spread the idea that this claim was fictitious. In fact, the National Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste Commission, headed by BJP leader Dilip Singh Bhuria, declared that Jogi did not belong to the Kanwar tribe.⁵⁰

Thus, with respect to policies, both Congress and BJP governments appeared to have fallen prey to populist rhetoric, and laggard performances. The majority of villagers interviewed in focus groups tended to have negative views of either government, and poor evaluations of their policies. For all of Jogi's celebrated efficiency in office, even the Dalit villagers from places like Ulba in Jogi's current constituency of Mahasamundh, complained that his government 'only operated the scheme in rich villages where the party had powerful friends,' and complained further that 'no one comes to check if schemes are actually working in our village.'⁵¹ Policies which were implemented were often distinguished by their naked pursuit of votes and personal publicity.⁵²

4.72 Sangh Activists as Mobilizers:

Facing an organizationally weak opposition party with corrupt leadership provided an essential opening for the BJP to make inroads into subaltern electorates. This point is reinforced when contrasting the Chhattisgarh case with the Kerala study

⁴⁹ Interview with Bharat Sai, Jashpur BJP MLA, Raipur, 29th March 2008.

⁵⁰ Zaidi, *op. cit.*, 23rd November, 2003.

⁵¹ Focus group discussion, Ulba village, November 20, 2007.

⁵² Staff Reporter, 'Jogi to EC: Hear both parties before taking action', *The Pioneer*, November 1st, 2003. Most infamous was Ajit Jogi's distribution of schoolbags on which his image was prominently plastered to children on the eve of state elections, a stunt which incurred the wrath of the national Election Commission of India

presented in the next chapter, where the BJP faced much more organized, and systematically pro-poor opposition parties (including the Kerala Congress unit). However, to borrow language from social movements theory, a weak opposition provided a favorable political opportunity structure, but mobilizers are still required to convert potential into reality.⁵³ What the last section helped make evident was that the BJP was not the primary mobilizing force among subaltern voters in terms of its policy implementation while in government. This section will add to the analysis by showing concretely how it was Sangh service organizations that helped the BJP electorally in specific ways, thereby buttressing the hypothesized direction of the link from Sangh organizational activities to BJP electoral performance.

This section will argue that it is the good reputation of Sangh activists, especially teachers, who are seen as untainted by partisan politics, which is the primary mechanism through which these workers can mobilize effective support for the BJP. The Congress, without such a base of popular workers, has thus steadily lost ground in those villages where these organizations are active. Unfortunately we do not have caste-wise data for most Indian elections, but even looking at the results in reserved constituencies is instructive. In 1985, the BJP was a non-factor with Dalits and Adivasis, winning only 8 of the 44 SC and ST-reserved constituencies within the part of Madhya Pradesh that today constitute Chhattisgarh. By 1993 they had managed to increase this to 17, and then in the 2003 elections managed to secure an impressive 29 of these reserved seats.

⁵³ For a classic application of the ‘political process model’, and discussion of political opportunity structures, see Douglas McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. Also see Sidney Tarrow, Power in Movement: Collective Action, Social Movements and Politics, Cambridge University Press, 1994. For a critique of this approach see Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, “Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory”, *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1999.

Now the Sangh's organizational buildup certainly did not come *after* the electoral surge of the 1990s, which would have provided indication that it was an effect rather than a cause of the BJP's social expansion. Instead, the Sangh's expansion came slightly before the period of increasing BJP success in the 1990s, during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Graphs 3.1 and 3.2 charted the explosion in the nationwide activities of the main social service wing in Chhattisgarh, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram over the past three decades. From the early 1990s, the growth of the Ashram has taken off, consistent with the argument in Chapter 2 about how the Sangh began investing in this strategy heavily only in the last decade and a half.

To outline precisely how the Sangh has worked to help the BJP crack into new vote banks, this section will analyze the activities of the primary social service wing in Chhattisgarh, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram. I specifically outline three ways the organization helps the BJP electorally:

- 1) Through generating a cadre of Adivasi political leaders for the party from its early recruits.
- 2) Through generating a wider cadre of younger party workers from its later recruits who provide valuable services for the party at election time.
- 3) By generating a core of respected 'apolitical' activists in villages, whose removal from the sphere of party politics help them be more effective politically, be it in mobilizing support for the BJP, or spreading rumors against local Congress candidates.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ The most famous of such rumors was those alleging that Ajit Jogi was falsely certifying himself as a member of a Scheduled Tribe, allowing him to contest seats reserved for ST candidates, as well as gain popularity among the state's important Adivasi electorates. The BJP and Sangh Parivar worked hard prior to the 2003 elections to spread the idea that this claim was fictitious. In fact, the National Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste Commission, headed by BJP leader Dilip Singh Bhuria, declared that Jogi did not belong to the Kanwar tribe. See Askari Zaidi, 'Battlefield of Chhattisgarh', *Hindustan Times*, 23rd November, 2003.

Both political analyses and detailed interviews I conducted with VKA activists, as well as BJP and Congress politicians make clear that Sangh organizations have been mobilizing political support for the BJP, especially since the mid-1990s, not the other way around.⁵⁵ Following the 2004 national election results in Chhattisgarh, Yogendra Yadav argues:

Chhattisgarh was one of the regions swept by the Congress in the 1991 elections...The party won all the 11 seats in this region of Madhya Pradesh with more than a 10 percentage-point lead over the BJP. Since then, however, the BJP has started reaping the political dividends of the years of work put in by the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams and various other Sangh Parivar organisations; and it has improved its position in each Lok Sabha election. The long dominance by the Congress in the State was based on its hold over the adivasis...the BJP's real success has been in dividing the adivasis...⁵⁶

Peggy Froerer's ethnographic account of the Sangh's work among Adivasis in a Chhattisgarhi village notes how it was only in the late 1990s that the VKA's activities really started paying political dividends for the BJP, with the village, a longtime Congress stronghold, returning a favorable result for the BJP candidate in the 1999 election.⁵⁷ She notes:

'it is principally through mimicking the kind of educational and medical initiatives long associated with Christian missionary activities that groups like the RSS and the VHP have seen their greatest success among India's more

⁵⁵ Saumya Pandey, 'Communalism: Narratives in Chhattisgarh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 12th, 2008.

⁵⁶ Yogendra Yadav, 'BJP's Consolidation Will Be Hard To Break In Chhattisgarh', *The Hindu*, 21st March, 2004.

⁵⁷ Peggy Froerer, 'Emphasizing Others: the Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in a Central Indian Tribal Community', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 12: 39-59, 2006.

dispersed adivasi communities... [which] have recently contributed to the electoral success of the BJP.⁵⁸

Samuel Berthet also notes that the strong network of the VKA and the ‘rapid growth of this network in the recent years’ played a major role in helping the BJP to win all the four seats reserved for Adivasis (Bastar, Kanker, Sarguja and Raigarh parliamentary constituencies) during the 1999 and 2004 Lok Sabha elections.⁵⁹

The BJP leadership in the state echoes these accounts in their understanding of the party’s recent success in the state as a direct consequence of the extent of Sangh activities. These activities have generated two palpable benefits for the party, both of which have accrued only recently. Firstly, they have yielded a small, but important cadre of Adivasi politicians, who were early recruits into the VKA and its affiliates. These longtime members have come up through the Sangh system, and are now old enough to assume positions of prominence in the state BJP political machine:

Look, they [the VKA and RSS] are our party’s main backbone, the soul of the party. They are the tree, we are the fruit. They may work directly, indirectly, but ultimately we are a seed that had been sown by them...our current ST leadership have come from the grassroots, come up through the VKA system and are trained by them. Our ST [Adivasi] leadership includes Vishnu Dev Sai (Member of Parliament, Raigarh), Nand Kumar Sai (MP Sarguja), Ganesh Ram Bhagat (MP Jashpur) all affiliated with the VKA.⁶⁰

Local BJP and Congress politicians in Jashpur agree that the success of the BJP in the district is pretty much entirely dependent on the work of the Sangh, specifically the

⁵⁸ Froerer, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 55.

⁵⁹ Berthet, *op. cit.*, 2008, p. 6

⁶⁰ Interview with Satyanand Rathiya, BJP State Cabinet Minister (independent charge), Raipur, March 31st, 2008.

VKA. Nand Kumar Sai, the first Adivasi state level president for the BJP (Madhya Pradesh) and current MP from Sarguja constituency in Chhattisgarh observed:

See the Sangh does do a lot of work-- you are right -- then there is the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram which has worked in health and education, where no one else has gone, to work with retired soldiers, unorganized laborers, etc. So all of this work in different spheres has really helped the BJP establish a presence with these sections. The party has managed to consolidate through its extensive organization.⁶¹

Local journalist, Sunil Kumar concurs:

Senior BJP leaders have, in their interviews, accepted that they had the services of RSS workers in all border areas from the neighboring states. These dedicated workers rode bicycles through the interior villages... The Congress was no match for this motivated work force.⁶²

The survey data presented earlier highlighted how the BJP has garnered a significant advantage with younger voters, who are the primary targets of Sangh activities. Additionally, as the Sangh's chapters proliferated in Chhattisgarh in the 1990s, more recent participants in these activities also provide a young cadre of party workers for the BJP. In the 24 villages surveyed, the average age of the primary party *karyakarta* (worker) for each party was asked. The average age of the BJP's *karyakartas* was 26.5, nearly 12 years younger than the Congress average of 38 years.⁶³ Moreover 18 of the BJP's 25 party workers (1 village had two workers) came to the party from the

⁶¹ Interview with Nand Kumar Sai, New Delhi, April 28th, 2008.

⁶² Kumar, *op. cit.*, 2004.

⁶³ Some villagers in Nyosa village in Bilaspur related to me the process by which party workers were selected by either the Congress or the BJP (Focus group discussion, November 27th, 2007): Party volunteers belonging to either party, from outside the village come to the area and hold a meeting. They note whoever comes to sit in the front while holding their meeting because these people are understood to be the supporters of the party in a given village. Once they are tipped off about who are likely recruits, they hold separate discussions with those few people, out of which they usually get at least one or two volunteers.'

Sangh, and it was widely understood by both Congress and BJP leaders that the latter is similarly dependent on the Sangh across the state for finding its workforce:

All the work for the BJP is done by the Sangh organizations only! The VKA takes on the name of development of tribals but really they are all working for the BJP fulltime as well. The day the RSS stops working in this region, the BJP will be finished.⁶⁴

Indeed, a realization of this dependence on the Sangh has led BJP politicians to take unusual steps to stay in the former's good graces. Dilip Singh Judeo, the *maharaja* of Jashpur, and a BJP party leader in the state, makes sure every male member of his family attend the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram school for at least a short period, even though his family is not Adivasi.⁶⁵ There is thus some agreement between scholars and activists alike that the recent success of the BJP with Adivasis has been greatly aided by the Sangh's direct canvassing on the party's behalf, and well as its affiliates' creation of a generation of Adivasi leaders for the party.

However, the process by which organizations like the VKA have even managed to gain entry into lower caste and tribal communities, much less garner their support, still needs further explication. The first step in this process is obviously establishing a presence in a village. I followed local VKA worker Shivacharan Ram who resides in Chatauri village outside Jashpur, on a visit to several nearby villages where the organization had not yet established a chapter. Ram and a couple of VKA workers rounded up people in each village and held an informal meeting. In the course of this meeting, Ram spoke mainly about how the VKA sought to establish a one-teacher school in the village, and asked for volunteers. He only cursorily mentioned the fact that such education would include a teaching of Indian *samskars*

⁶⁴ Interview with Sarwan Bhagat, former Congress MLA candidate, Jashpur, March 28th, 2008.

⁶⁵ Interview with Ranvijay Singh Judeo, BJP party member, Raipur, 31st March, 2008.

[traditions/customs], and did not mention the term *dharma jagran* [spiritual awakening], which the organization notes as its central goal. Ram later told me that lukewarm reception he seemed to get at the village (no one volunteered) was normal during early work in a given locale.⁶⁶

Kripa Prasad Singh, the organizing secretary of the VKA, told me that the strategy was to go from village to village and hold one day ‘camps’ where either medical checkups are offered, or short teaching sessions conducted for those children allowed to participate. Traveling with Singh to one such ‘camp’, I noticed that initial attendance was once again quite low, but that at the end of the camp Singh was careful to announce that a VKA doctor would be visiting the village at the end of the month. He announced that the doctor would see anyone for free, and was careful to make sure the visit would be timed for the village’s *bazaar* [market] day, a classic VKA tactic. After the visit, Singh was unperturbed by the low turnout, mentioning to me that ‘out of 100 people, only one or two will respond initially, but that is all right, it is all we need to start with.’⁶⁷

During these early visits, what thus emerged as crucial was not to emphasize the VKA’s cultural mission at the outset, but rather to emphasize its social service activities during initial interactions. Brigendra Singh, the head doctor in the Jashpur unit of the VKA explained this strategy in some detail:

They [Christian missionaries in the area] worked out a great medium to gain new followers: through service. See education and healthcare are the first thing a person needs for their life to be lived. If anyone is sick, and if someone treats them and makes them better, then they will forever have their ear. If someone is illiterate, and someone teaches them to read, then again they will always

⁶⁶ Interview with K.P. Singh, Jashpur, 27th March, 2008.

⁶⁷ Interview with K.P. Singh, Jashpur, 27th March, 2008.

listen to their teacher and have their sympathy. That is why we work in health and education. See I told you about the dispensary [in Jashpur] and the medical vans [which go around villages to dispense basic medical care]. Then we have hostels and schools in the village. Through these mediums you can go to anyone at anytime. After we established ourselves, then we can begin work with *Dharma Jagran* [spiritual awakening], and get people to come sit with us, to learn bhajans to come to mandir, etc. Slowly, slowly, this *bhav* [feeling] is brought into tribals.⁶⁸

This frank admission of motivation was not uncommon among the VKA. Dr. Pankaj Bhatia, who worked for many years in 82 villages dominated by the Pahari Korva tribe with whom the VKA has been particularly effective noted:

In the beginning, when we go to hold medical camps, people are suspicious as to what the motive is, because those who came to ‘help’ before would come because they were really interested in their labor. Also they have heard that we don’t approve of practices like the drinking of liquor or the worshipping of trees. There is distrust at first, and will continue until you actually go to them and work amongst them. And at first we don’t tell them anything about how to pray. We just talk to them about health and education. Then gradually over time we begin talking to them about Hindu culture.⁶⁹

The de-politicized discourse of social services thus provide a key entry point for the Sangh to access distrustful communities. Amita Baviskar, in a study of the growth of Hindu nationalism in Madhya Pradesh notes the efficacy of such a strategy in underdeveloped tribal belts in India:

⁶⁸ Interview with Brigendra Singh, VKA doctor, Jashpur, 1st April, 2008.

⁶⁹ Interview with Pankaj Bhatia, Jashpur, 2nd April, 2008. The VKA medical unit traveling in a van with basic medical supplies holds these medical ‘camps’. These camps are held for one day in each village in rotations of anywhere from 10-50 villages for one team, and free check-ups and basic medical care is administered. Source: Interview with Brigendra Singh, Jashpur, 1st April, 2008.

‘In areas where state health and education facilities are non-existent or sub-standard, Sangh-affiliated organizations like Sewa Bharati, Vanvasi Kalyan Manch, and Friends of Tribal Society fill the gap. Philanthropic activities provide an easier entry into adivasi villages...’⁷⁰

This sentiment was echoed by a senior VKA worker, Birbal, who helps run the organization’s Raipur hostel for women from the northeast of India:

Our teachers are not respected at first, because people are not sure about what they are trying to do in the village. But over time they gain high social status in the village. VKA teachers are working with children, and even today teachers in tribal society command much respect, which is helpful for the Sangh. In addition to doing social work, the VKA has managed to do other work for the BJP such as telling people the truth about how [Congress Party leader and former Chief Minister] Ajit Jogi is trying to pass off as a real Adivasi while he was not one, as well as reassuring them that BJP candidates are friends of the VKA and will not engage in corruption.⁷¹

Once they have been able to insert themselves into the fabric of village communities, Sangh activists then form a key pre-existing cadre for the BJP to tap into during elections. Particularly critical for the political efficacy of this strategy is the status of teachers within the village, as they are seen as relatively untainted by partisan politics. The effectiveness of teachers as activists has commensurably increased as the number of villages in the VKA’s ambit has grown, spreading the word about the organization and establishing a reputation for its activists.

In addition to its own core of self-appointed teachers in the VKA, the Sangh also recruits other professionals within villages to help recruit support for them,

⁷⁰ Amita Baviskar, ‘Adivasi Encounters with Hindu Nationalism in MP’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 26th, 2005, pp. 5105-5111, p. 5108.

⁷¹ Interview with Birbal, VKA worker, VKA hostel, Raipur, 22nd March, 2008.

Shashank Sharma, a political analyst and journalist based in Raipur, described the specific strategy he found the Sangh using in remote villages across Chhattisgarh:

The Sangh strategy in each village is as follows: in each *basti*⁷² they find out background information on the basti, and then go about finding a local non-political notable with influence and try to convert them to the cause, often someone educated-- doctor, lawyer, professor. This worker will then spread the word about the good work BJP does, but from the point of view of someone non-affiliated, and this enhances their credence.⁷³

Sharma noted the efficacy of recruiting workers to act as teachers in Sangh schools, saying that teachers commanded great respect within a village and this only helped the BJP's cause.

Playing up the strength of the BJP candidate, while simultaneously disparaging competitors from the Congress are two important political functions VKA activists perform. Their perceived distance from the dirty sphere of party politics strengthens their utility. The Congress leaders in the state are themselves aware of the efficacy of this strategy. Vikas Upadhyaya, the leader of the Congress national student organization's (NSUI) Chhattisgarh chapter admitted his party was losing ground among young people:

See the BJP-*wallahs* [BJP members] have the help of the Sangh, and the Sangh employs and recruits teachers, and the teacher is more effective than a party worker because they are much better respected, and they [the Sangh] use teachers as a medium in every village.⁷⁴

⁷² North Indian villages are typically divided into separate sections by caste, and each one of these sections is called a *basti*.

⁷³ Interview with Shashank Sharma, Raipur, November 26th, 2007.

⁷⁴ Interview with Vikas Upadhyaya, Raipur, November 24th, 2008.

Many VKA activists were at first reticent about admitting to their role at election time. However, over time they admitted to the fact that they would do some canvassing work for local BJP candidates, and equally importantly would share with them the information they had collected about the caste and household composition of the villages they worked in, both activities that political commentators had noted following the 2003 elections:

Organizational strength is critical in other ways too. From careful checking of electoral rolls, to mobilization of supporters on polling day, it can often prove the difference between victory and defeat. Indeed, the phrase ‘micro management’ – much bandied about in the wake of BJP’s recent win – would have made no sense had the Congress mobilised the organizational resources required to deal with this electoral minutiae.⁷⁵

VKA activist Dhananjai Kumar, who worked just north of Jashpur, revealed to me an excellent example of such minutiae. He showed me a detailed log of the caste composition of households in the villages in the local administrative block. Part of his activities for the month was to go around to each village in the block not only to keep the records accurate, but also to check participation rates in the VKA’s own chapters operating in the village.

In summary, the evidence overwhelmingly points to the fact that it is the BJP benefitting from the Sangh’s organizational work rather than the other way around. This chapter has systematically outlined how the density of Sangh organizational efforts impacts BJP electoral success, even in the more controlled environment afforded by within-state comparisons. In districts where the density of the Sangh’s ‘service organizations’ is high, the BJP benefits both from the votes and work of members recruited into these organizations, but also from the good opinion the work

⁷⁵ Daga, *op. cit.* 2004.

generates among non-members. The depoliticized discourse surrounding such service work also helps these organizations gain entry into Adivasi community, and allows Sangh activists to appear nonpartisan, strengthening their leverage at election time.

4.8 Extending the Social Service Strategy

An important question remains unanswered by the analysis thus far: would an expansion of Sangh networks in districts like Mahasamundh and Raigarh necessarily yield the same electoral success for the BJP? Addressing such a question would require understanding how contextual differences might inform varying levels of efficacy for the Sangh's service strategy across the four districts. The presence of the Sangh in Jashpur has contextual reasons beyond the cold calculus of electoral math, as explained in the outline of the VKA's history earlier in the chapter. However, the mass expansion of the VKA's activities is really a modern phenomenon. Further, even by the organization's internal reckoning within Chhattisgarh, the build-up in Bastar is a recent phenomenon, yet it has already paid huge dividends for the Sangh in the region.⁷⁶

Would similar rapid success follow the extension of the service network to Mahasamundh and Raigarh? As I mentioned earlier, all four share features of underdevelopment, party competition, relative lack of communal violence and a range of other factors. However, a closer look at the data does an important difference across the districts that could potentially disrupt the Sangh's attempts to expand the BJP's electorate. The districts exhibit marked variation in terms of the vibrancy of alternative

⁷⁶ The organizing secretary of the VKA, Kripa Prasad Singh explained his organization's goals to me in the following manner: 'The total tribal population is 8.5 crore in the country which is our target point. Out of this, there are 51,000 revenue villages in 308 districts (out of 609 total districts). Scheduled Tribes are in 308. In these communities we wish to work. Out of these, we have calculated that out of 8.5 crore [85 million] there are 2 crore [20 million] children. The government has schools for 1.2 crore [12 million] therefore 80 lakhs [8 million] are left. These 80 lakhs are left for NGOs. These are our targets.' Interview, Jashpur, 27th March, 2008.

forms of organizations available to Dalits and Adivasis, specifically that of caste-based organizations. In the low intensity districts of Raigarh and Mahasamundh, we see the Sangh faces stiff organizational competition. In these two districts, the Sangh captured only 31% of all organizational membership. The remaining 69% belongs to a network of lower caste associations, and these voters tended to support the rival Congress party ahead of the BJP, with the former capturing 50% of caste association members, and even the otherwise marginal lower-caste Bahujan Samaj Party (26%) outperforming the BJP (22%).

Intuitively this makes sense: as outlined in the introductory chapter, both the Congress and BSP use versions of clientelism in order to consolidate support, and thus use pre-existing caste networks to mobilize support for them.⁷⁷ However, these caste associations (which include the Gond Samaj, Kanwar Samaj, Bhumia Samaj and Oraon Samaj) are wary of allying with Sangh organizations, given the latter's explicit desire to unite caste groups with the hope of eventually incorporating them under one Hindu banner. Such plans do not sit well with existing leadership of these associations, who are afraid their organizations would be rendered obsolete if such unification materialized. Further evidence from the case study on the state of Kerala in the next chapter further buttresses the idea that vibrant lower caste associations severely limit the efficacy of the Sangh's strategy, suggesting that organizational expansion in other parts of Chhattisgarh may not yield the same electoral dividends the BJP has reaped in Bastar and Jashpur.

⁷⁷ Indeed the results from Table 3.11 in the previous chapter highlighted how those voters who identified their local caste leaders as having the greatest influence on their voting decision were more statistically more likely to support the BSP.

4.9 Conclusion: Internal Democracy and Opportunity

Rather than reiterate the points made in this chapter, I would like to conclude with an observation on another potential important source for the BJP's popularity pertaining to the nature of its organizational functioning: a degree of internal party democracy. While Hindutva's anti-democratic tendencies have received much justifiable criticism, the relative democracy of BJP internal party organization in Chhattisgarh has proved attractive to new recruits. The fact that the BJP has a well-honed system of elections for internal party posts has allowed it to build an image of a party more open to political outsiders, which is of obvious significance to the state's marginalized Adivasi communities. While by no means a panacea, holding regular elections for internal posts provides at least some emphasis on party functionaries having to gain popular support, infusing the party structure with a much needed dose of accountability.

Local BJP functionaries mentioned that while favorable connections with party leadership is necessary, the party's holding of elections to fill local party posts, coupled with its insistence on single-term limits provide a channel for popular sentiment to also influence candidate selection.⁷⁸ In contrast Congress workers grumbled that the party's removal of internal elections had ensured people who were 'liked in Raipur and Delhi, but not with their own communities' staffed the organization.⁷⁹ Even Chandradas Mahant, the Chhattisgarh State Congress President, admitted to me that the move away from elections to nominations was a tactical mistake committed due to the misgivings of powerful state elite reluctant to relinquish their posts.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Interview with Krishna Rai, BJP party worker, Jashpur, 29th March, 2008.

⁷⁹ Interview with Sarwan Bhagat, Congress Party worker, Jashpur, 20th March, 2008.

⁸⁰ Interview with Chandradas Mahant, Congress state president, Raipur, 5th April, 2008.

The Sangh machinery in Chhattisgarh continues to churn as evidenced by the party's strong performance in ST constituencies in the 2008 Assembly elections. The argument made in this paper lays bare the multifarious ways in which this organizational advantage has improved the BJP's standings with the Congress' most loyal support base. By eradicating an important gesture towards democratic accountability, the Congress has certainly hurt its electoral chances with Adivasis within, and very possibly beyond, the boundaries of this fledgling state. While no one pretends the BJP is an organization devoid of power politics, by dismantling a system of internal elections the Congress has made its elite biases discomfortingly explicit. In a state like Chhattisgarh, where charges of corruption, inefficiency, and even violence hound both parties, even the façade of democracy can help woo subaltern voters faced with poor choices.

CHAPTER 5

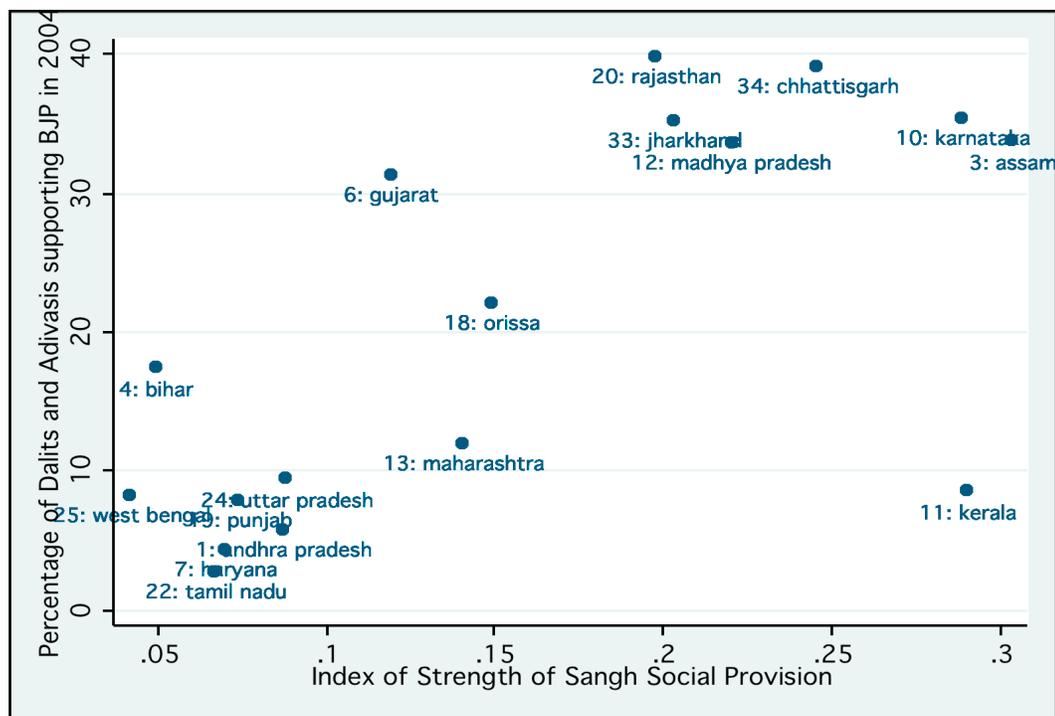
HINDUTVA HALTED: KERALA AND THE LIMITS OF THE SERVICE STRATEGY

4.1 Introduction

The close study of Chhattisgarh detailed in the previous chapter largely confirmed the central hypotheses proposed and tested in Chapter 3. Participation in, and approval of Sangh social service organizational activities was found to be highly influential in increasing the likelihood of Dalit and Adivasi voters supporting the BJP. The study of Chhattisgarh also provided crucial information on the mechanisms through which service activities are used to mobilize electoral support in an environment where the strategy has proved successful. In such favorable conditions, the BJP's electoral fortunes across the different Chhattisgarhi districts were largely determined by the per capita organizational presence of the Sangh's service wings.

The conclusion seemed a simple case of supply-side voternomics: if you build chapters, they will come (and vote). However, local conditions may not always be as amenable to the social organizational strategy as they appear to have been in Chhattisgarh. In order to understand what aspects of a state's political arena help or hinder the Sangh's service model, it is necessary to examine a case where the strategy has been actively attempted, but has failed to produce results: an 'off-the line' outlier case from the national sample.¹ Taking another look at the all-India results in Figure 5.1, the only significant outlier in the sample is clearly Kerala, which has the second-highest concentration of Sangh service organizations per capita, but one of the lowest levels of success for the BJP among Dalit and Adivasi voters.

¹ The phrase 'off-the-line' in the context of a mixed-methods, nested research design is borrowed from Evan Lieberman, "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, No. 3, (August 2005): pp. 435-52.



Source: CSDS National Election Study 2004

FIGURE 5.1: Performance of BJP with SC/ST electorate in 2004

Kerala is the only state in the sample where the Sangh organizational strategy has been tried to its fullest extent, yet failed to produce results. It thus provides a unique opportunity as a case to determine the limits to the welfarist approach in generating electoral support. The research for this chapter was designed and conducted with this objective in mind, and was carried out during July and August of 2007. Once again a major source of information was a voter survey, conducted among 262 Dalit and Adivasi voters in three districts in the state. One of the purposes of the survey was to ascertain whether the aggregate failure of the BJP in the state masked pockets where the organizational strategy was in fact successful. To gauge this, the survey was carried out in districts which varied in terms of the concentration of Sangh social service wings, mirroring the Chhattisgarhi research design. The questionnaire also largely replicated the one carried out in Chhattisgarh, but included a few locally relevant questions which shall be discussed later in the analysis.

In addition to the survey work, I carried out extensive interviews with the leadership of the BJP, as well as all the major wings of the Sangh in the state. In these interviews, the Sangh strategists discussed the evolution of the movement in Kerala, including the reasons for the recent emphasis on recruiting Dalit and Adivasi voters. These interviewees also explained their understanding of the difficulties of their tasks in Kerala with remarkable candidness, helping make sense of the state's peculiar situation with respect to recruitment. Finally, I conducted research for this chapter both at the State Assembly Library in Thiruvananthapuram, and the clippings department in the Parliament Library in New Delhi, to gather secondary source materials about contemporary political development in the region.

The chapter begins with a description of the arc of Hindu nationalism's development in Kerala, including the decision of the Sangh to utilize the social service strategy to target Dalits and Adivasis in the state during the early 1990s. The next section presents the results of the survey analysis, which examines the success of this strategy in attracting support at both the district and individual level. The results show that BJP support does not co-vary with the aggregate strength of Sangh social service wings at the district level, unlike the national and Chhattisgarh patterns. The organizational approach does remain extremely *effective* at the individual level, in that those who participate in Sangh activities remain far more likely to vote for the BJP than non-participants. However, the strategy is highly limited in its *extensiveness*: despite building up a robust social service network, the Sangh has not recruited a sufficient number of participants to constitute a solid electoral base, as it did in Chhattisgarh.

The second half of the chapter seeks to analyze why the causal mechanisms that successfully linked Sangh service work to mass electoral success were not evidenced in Kerala. Through a detailed discussion of Kerala's political development,

I argue that an active history of lower caste activism, built on and extended by the region's strong communist movement, produced a terrain hostile to Hindu nationalist tactics of subaltern recruitment. Drawing on a mixture of survey data, interview evidence, and a wide array of scholarly literature on Kerala politics, I argue that the dialectic development of communism and lower caste social activism created a strong legacy of social provisioning for Dalit and Adivasi communities, which weakened demand for Sangh services. At the same time it politicized these communities horizontally along caste and class identities, and explicitly in opposition to the region's elites. Such politicization significantly diminished the efficacy of subsequent overtures by upper-caste Hindu nationalists seeking to integrate subaltern populations vertically into a pan-Hindu alliance. I conclude by outlining how the service approach's failure has forced the Sangh to return to its roots in 'agitational politics' to generate support. Given that this strategy has historically not proven successful across India in mobilizing Dalit and Adivasi voters, the outlook for the BJP in the state continues to appear bleak.

5.2 The Trajectory of Hindu Nationalism in Kerala

While the RSS was formally established in 1925, its work in Kerala began only in 1942, and remained largely restricted to the Malabar region until the 1960s. Initially, the RSS sent three *pracharaks* [full-time activists] to Kerala: one to the city of Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram) in the south, one to Ernakulam in the center, and one to Calicut (Kozikhode) in the north of the state.² Initially, the work of the RSS was confined to urban areas, and consequently their recruitment pools were circumscribed to upper caste Hindu personnel. Indeed, the very first RSS *shakha* was

² One of these *pracharaks*, D.B. Thengadi, went on to establish the Sangh's labor union, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), a few years after his stint in Kerala (interview with R. Hari, Ernakulam, 6th August, 2008).

held in the Raja of Calicut's house. This limited social reach was the product of multiple factors, as Ranga Hari, one of the first Malayali* *pracharaks*, noted:

He [the RSS *pracharak* who recruited R. Hari] came around to get acquainted with us, and in those days we were learning in an English-medium school, so we had absolutely no difficulty conversing with him in English. He could not speak Malayalam and we could not speak Hindi. So at that time, all three *pracharaks* contacted only the English-speaking classes. So their reach was limited- the first batch happened to be among the English speakers in the state only. At first *bauthiks* [meetings] were in English, even joking was in English.³

There were early demographic exceptions to the RSS's elite base, primarily due to the organization's early activities among some fishing communities in Malabar, in the north part of the state. However these outreach programs remained small in scope and were certainly not broad enough to substantively change the RSS's elite profile.⁴

According to other observers, there are more unsavory reasons for the upper caste bias in the RSS' membership in Kerala. Many Brahmin communities in areas like Thalassery, Kannur, and Kozikhode were worried about the threat that wealthy Muslim business communities in these areas posed to their commercial interests. These communities began funding the RSS in return for the use of the organization's youth cadres to 'protect them or indeed help them in setting up their own sphere of dominance.'⁵

* Malayali refers to the dominant ethno-linguistic community of Kerala, identified primarily as those who speak Malayalam, but increasingly this category has been broadened to include non-Malayalam speakers identifying with certain regional cultural practices or emigrants descended from Malayalam speakers.

³ Interview with R. Hari, Ernakulam, 6th August 2008.

⁴ K. Jayaprasad, *RSS and Hindu Nationalism: Inroads into a Leftist Stronghold*, New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1991, p. 150.

⁵ Interview with Ramesh Babu, Thiruvananthapuram, August 2nd, 2008.

The RSS' growth in its first two decades in Kerala was slow. From 1950 to 1967 the organization expanded from 250 to about 650 *shakhas*: certainly not enough to constitute a mass movement in the state.⁶ However, in 1968, two local political developments delivered the RSS with opportunities to effectively generate support for its cause in Kerala. The first was the decision of the Kerala state government, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (henceforth CPM), to re-draw internal borders to create a district of Mallapuram, which would have a Muslim majority population. The RSS managed to somewhat effectively portray this move as pandering to Muslim communities by handing them an electoral constituency, a charge which gained the Sangh some support among upper-caste Hindus in the state. The second agitation from which the RSS benefited was its call to restore the Thali Temple, which was allegedly destroyed by the famous Muslim ruler, Tipu Sultan of Mysore, in the late eighteenth century. Neither of these agitations radically transformed the fortunes of the RSS in the state, but they did succeed in providing opportunities for the organization to put itself on Kerala's political map.

James Chiriyankandath notes that the RSS experienced two other periods of political success in Kerala. The first was during the period of Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi, during which many political organizations including the RSS had to go underground, following bans on their assembly.⁷ Chiriyankandath notes that the RSS' 'martial ethos', in keeping with its self-perception as the defenders of Hindu traditions (see Chapter 2), allowed the organization to weather this political storm comparatively well. Indeed, with the lifting of the ban of 1977, the RSS emerged as a force in the

⁶ Figures from K. Jayaprasad *op. cit* 1991, pp. 150-60.

⁷ James Chiriyankandath, 'Bounded Nationalism: Kerala and the social regional limits of Hindutva', in Thomas Blom Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot (eds.) The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 202-227, p. 210.

state, with its membership doubling to 35,000 and the *shakhas* increasing from 900 in 1975 to 1500 in 1977.⁸

However it was not simply the RSS' paramilitary structure (especially those of its youth wings) that facilitated its growth during the Emergency. This period was also important in bringing RSS personnel together with activists of the organized Left, who had become a significant force in the state. The forced camaraderie of jail brought members of these two ideologically disparate organizations to unite in their common opposition to shared persecution by an increasingly draconian Congress central government:

So RSS led the agitation [against the Emergency], some other parties did also, and some Marxists were arrested, so during that time we all shared the same jails- my neighbor was a socialist trader, and of course we were detained in a limited way. Because we were political prisoners, we were free to move about, so people could hold discussions.⁹

During the Emergency period, we were all in jail, and the Communists were also with us. Then after the elections held in 1980, there was some sort of an understanding with the Left and us because the fight was against the Emergency, not each other.¹⁰

After the Emergency, the Jana Sangh, the precursor to the BJP, actually entered into a broad alliance which included the parties of the Left. Participation in this coalition increased the Sangh's political stature within Kerala considerably, giving some of the party's leadership a chance to assume positions of political importance in the state.¹¹

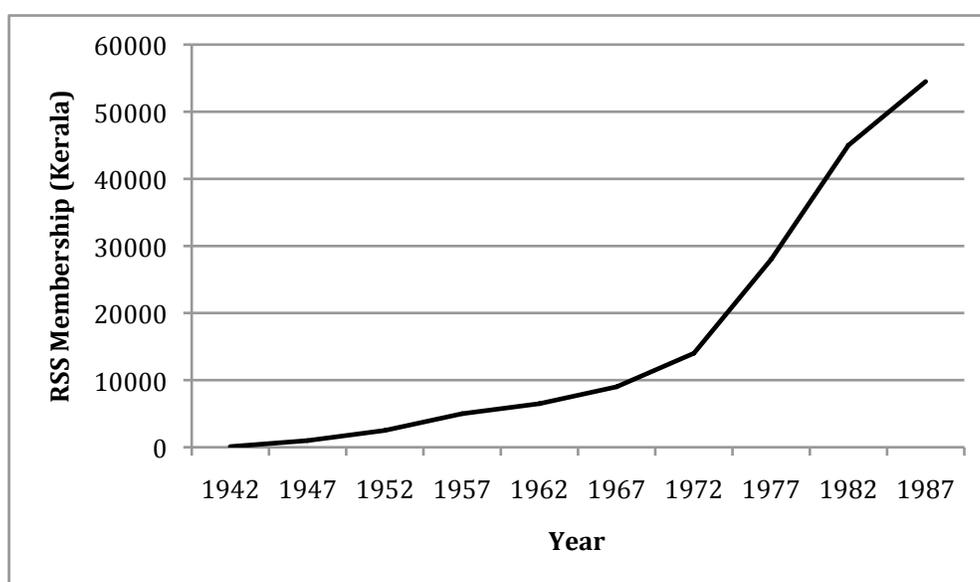
⁸ K. Jayaprasad, *op. cit* 1991, p. 157

⁹ Interview with P. Parameswaram, Thiruvananthapuram, August 4th, 2008

¹⁰ Interview with O. Rajagopal, Thiruvananthapuram, August 4th, 2008.

¹¹ For example, former Jana Sangh state president O. Rajagopal became state president of the governing coalition.

The other period in which the RSS expanded significantly in Kerala was during the early 1980s, when the national Sangh organization held a massive convention in the state with the goal of creating a united front of various Hindu organizations (a Hindu ‘Maha Mandalam’ [‘Great Association’]). This convention was also centrally concerned with countering ‘the widespread perception that the Sangh Parivar institutions catered primarily for caste Hindus’.¹² The graph below charts the growth of the RSS membership in the state:



Source: K. Jayaprasad (1991), p. 162

FIGURE 5.2: Expansion of RSS in Kerala

However by most internal admissions, this expansion remained almost completely confined within upper caste communities. A focus on broadening the Sangh’s social appeal reflected a wider national concern at the time (as was discussed in Chapter 2) following the high profile mass conversions of lower castes to Islam and Buddhism in the early 1980s. The strategy for expansion also followed the national

¹² Chiriyankandath, *op. cit.* 2001, p. 213. Also see J. Chiriyankandath, ‘Hindu nationalism and regional political culture in India; A study of Kerala,’ *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (Spring 1996): pp. 44-66.

model, which increasingly turned towards an agitational mode of base building.¹³ The reverberations of the Ram Janmabhoomi [Birthplace of Ram] marches, which as Chapter 2 outlines were gathering momentum in Northern India during the late 1980s and early 1990s, began echoing thousands of miles away in Kerala.

As their brothers to the north demanded the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, Sangh activists in Kerala began to focus their local attentions on the building of a church near a Hindu temple in the town of Nilakkal.¹⁴ The Nilakkal agitation successfully pressured the church to be moved and built at a nearby site acceptable to all parties. Given the dearth of triumphs for the Sangh in Kerala, this victory was a huge boost to the movement's cadre. The Sangh used this precious momentum to build the Hindu *Munnani*, a political Hindu front which began systematically organizing agitations around central concerns of the wider Hindu nationalist agenda, including the demand that caste-based reservations only apply to lower caste Hindus, (not Christian or Muslim converts), that steps be taken to prevent conversion in the first place, and that cow slaughter be banned in the state.

Yet even as the RSS and its cultural affiliates were establishing a presence in the state, the movement's political arm, the BJP was unable to make any headway with the Kerala electorate. As stated at the outset of this chapter, Kerala is a particularly puzzling case, precisely because an extensive organizational network of the Sangh has not translated into success for the movement's electoral arm. Even today, Kerala boasts the largest number of RSS *shakhas* [chapters] in the country, with just under 4000 currently active in the state. Given Kerala's modest size, the state ranks first in *shakhas* per capita by a wide margin. However even the increased activities of the Hindu *Munnani* were not able to deliver results for the BJP in terms of

¹³ K. Jayaprasad, *op. cit.*, p. 202

¹⁴ The church was built on a farm, at the site where an ancient cross was allegedly discovered.

vote share, with the party securing only 6.5% of the popular vote in 1987. Faced with successive dismal electoral outcomes, the RSS-BJP leadership in the state began realizing the importance of expanding their following among Dalits and Adivasis. O. Rajagopal, who was a Cabinet Minister with the BJP-led national government in power from 1999-2004 argued:

I personally feel, I have been espousing this cause, that we have to concentrate on these SC/ST [Dalit/Adivasi] people—because they form 12% of the population--- that is the total amount of the vote we secured in the state in 2004 [national elections]now I told you, we don't have a special vote bank as such. Now how to compete in a popular democratic system without the support of a certain electorate? So taking into account these various aspects, we feel if we want to make a good quantum jump, we have to concentrate on these sections. The caste aspect only really comes up in the case of SC/STs not in the case of the Nairs or the Ezhavas [both 'higher' in the caste hierarchy], because they already have groups for themselves to do this. See these Nair and Ezhava organizations are officially unaffiliated, but have been working for so many years now, that by now they are affiliated in practice with the Congress or the Communists. So in the Nair and Ezhava communities, we will have sympathizers, but their organization leaders will not be siding with you.¹⁵

In Kerala, the Sangh felt Dalits and Adivasis remained relatively unincorporated into the state's political and associational life, providing an opening for the BJP to recruit them through the service strategy. J. Nandakumar, a senior RSS activist in Kerala explained:

After 1989, especially after the centenary celebrations of [RSS founder] Dr. Hedgewar, there was a focus on service activities in Kerala. There were many

¹⁵ Interview with O. Rajagopal, Thiruvananthapuram, August 4th, 2008.

service activities before, but more emphasis was given to building these service activities now. Colony work in SC/ST [Dalit/Adivasi] areas became much more important. We started so much work in Wayanad - Vivekananda Medical, and Attapady in Palakkad. And then we set up orphanages, and even taking children from parents who cannot afford to raise them—RSS front organizations are now running 52 orphanages in the state. And mentally retarded students are also being taken in. Regularly Seva Bharati is conducting so many activities, especially in these medical hospitals where they give out free food to patients and bystanders. In Trivandrum alone they were giving 2000-2500 meals everyday, and in Calicut, in Kasaragod.

The buildup of service organizations in the state was impressive, as is evident in the high concentration of service activities in the state, second only to Assam in the national sample. However setting up service organizations did not translate into success for the BJP electorally. Yet it is possible that there is unevenness within the state: the strength of the Sangh's social service wings in Kerala might have indeed benefitted the party at the polls in certain parts of the state, or with particular individual voters.

This case study of Kerala is once again centrally concerned with the potential variation within the state at both the district and individual level. The three hypotheses in particular being examined are the same as those examined in the Chhattisgarh case.

TABLE 5.1: List of Hypotheses

H1 (testing if the aggregate presence of Sangh social service organizations matters for overall BJP performance): *A greater proportion of Dalit and Adivasi voters will support the BJP in those states/districts where the Sangh social service organizational network is stronger.*

H3: (Testing whether the Sangh service approach creates participation linkages that help the BJP): *Dalit and Adivasi voters who are members, or take part in the activities of Sangh social organizations specifically should be more likely to vote for the BJP than those who are not participants.*

H4: (Testing whether the Sangh service approach creates opinion linkages that help the BJP) *Among Dalit and Adivasi individuals who are **not participants** in Sangh organizational activities, those who have a good opinion of these activities are more likely to support the BJP.*

5.3 Survey Analysis:

To test these central questions, I designed and conducted a survey of 262 Dalit and Adivasi voters in Kerala during July 2008. The survey was conducted in districts selected to vary on the key organizational variable of the strength of Sangh social organizations. The number of Sangh social service projects in each district is listed in Table 5.2. The three districts surveyed were Palakkad, Wayanad and Thiruvananthapuram, which are shown on the map of the state below, and six villages were sampled in each district. In Kerala, each district is further subdivided into *taluks* corresponding to the *tehsil* level in Chhattisgarh. One village was randomly selected from a list of villages in each *taluk*, and as each district had fewer than six *taluks*, the remaining villages for each district were picked from *taluks* selected at random. This process ensured that each portion of the district was covered in the sample. Within each village, once individual Dalit and Adivasi respondents were surveyed, using the same process used in the Chhattisgarh surveys (see Chapter 4, and for questionnaires see Appendix 1).

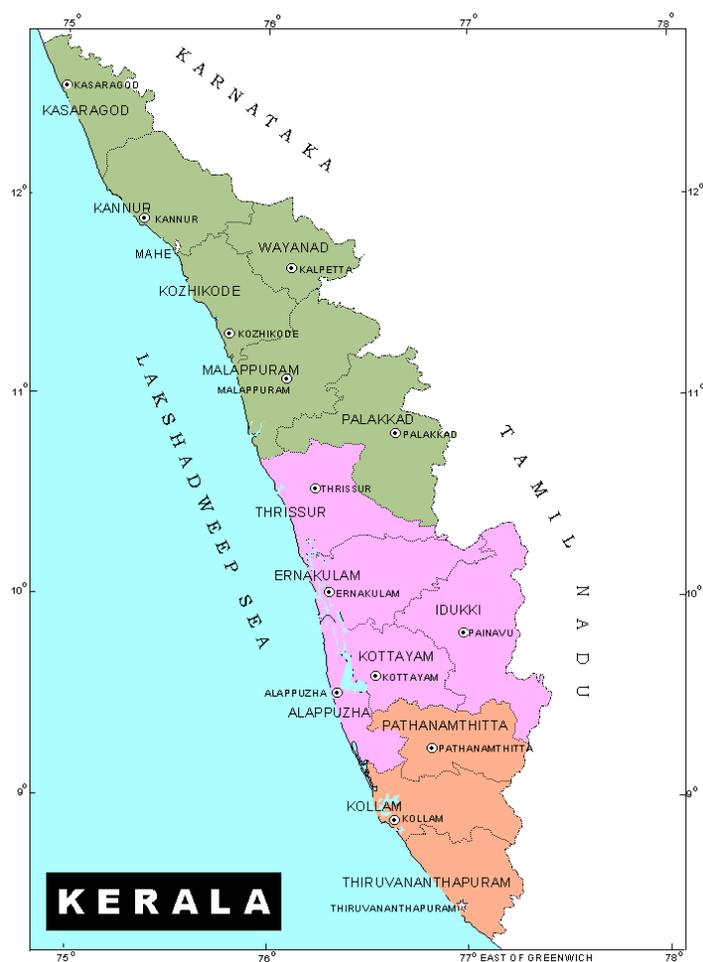


FIGURE 5.3 District Map of Kerala¹⁶

TABLE 5.2: District-wise Distribution of Sangh Social Services

Source: Data collected from Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (Kozikhode) and Sewa Bharati, (Kochi).

District	Number of Sangh Service Projects (Sewa Bharati +Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram)	SC/ST Population
Palakkad	80 (VKA: 20)	472, 243
Wayanad	85 (VKA: 63)	169,426
Thiruvananthapuram	180 (VKA: 15)	391,750

¹⁶ Map source: Kerala State Board for Prevention and Control of Water Pollution, available at www.keralapcb.org.

For reasons that will be discussed later in the chapter, the challenge the BJP faces in terms of its quest to secure the support of subaltern Hindu voters in Kerala comes from the two Communist Parties, the Communist Party of India (CPI), and Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM), which have been traditionally dominant with this electorate.¹⁷ The results of the local survey conducted for this study buttressed the idea that the CPM is dominant with Dalit and Adivasi communities in Kerala. 45.38% of the respondents supported the CPM during the 2006 Assembly elections in the state, with the Congress placing second with 36.54% and the BJP a distant third with only 12.31% of the vote. These results confirm the larger analysis conducted by the Center for the Study of Developing Society during the 2004 National Election used in Chapter 3, where the CPM won over 50% of the Dalit and Adivasi vote, while the BJP won a mere 7.8%.

In Chapter 3, we saw that Kerala was a state in which the per capita level of Sangh social provision was comparable to that of Chhattisgarh at .3. We can further see in Table 5.3 that two of the districts, Wayanad and Thiruvananthapuram, are well above even that high average and thus indisputably qualify as high-strength districts, while the third district of Palakkad qualifies as ‘low-intensity’ with an index of only .169. If the pattern exhibited by the national and local data in Chapters 3 and 4 were to hold, then we would expect to see relatively high levels of support for the BJP in Thiruvananthapuram and Wayanad. Instead however, Table 5.3 shows that the vote share of the BJP does not seem to correlate with the presence of Sangh welfare organizations.

¹⁷ In the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, the CSDS National Election Survey found that 69.23% of Dalit and Adivasi voters supported either the CPI or CPM, compared to only 12.82% for the Congress, and only 5.13% voting for the BJP. Even with the Other Backward Caste (OBC) group, who are placed one rung above Dalits and Adivasis in the caste hierarchy, the BJP could secure only 6.86% of the vote, compared to 41.67% for the two communist parties.

TABLE 5.3: Voting Patterns Across the Districts

Source: Author-conducted survey (2008)

District	Index of Sangh Service Strength Per Capita	Percentage Voting for the BJP
Palakkad	.169	17.07%
Wayanad	.501	6.67%
Thiruvananthapuram	.459	13.64%

The results thus indicate that unlike in Chhattisgarh, **H1** does not seem to hold in Kerala at the *district* level, corroborating the results in Chapter 3, which showed the state to be the one significant outlier at the *state* level as well. The BJP could only muster 6.67% of Dalit/Adivasi support in Wayanad, the district with the highest level of Sangh social strength. Compare this to the party's performance in Bastar, Chhattisgarh, which has a comparable index of service provision, but where the BJP won the support of over two-thirds of the survey respondents. The impact of the second organizational variable, participation, was also tested in the survey to see if membership in, Sangh service organizations made Dalit and Adivasi voters more likely to support the BJP.

TABLE 5.4: BJP Support by Linkage Type

Source: Author-conducted survey (2008)

District	Participants	Non-participants
Palakkad	75% (N=3/4)	14.1% (N=11/78)
Wayanad	25% (N=1/4)	5.81% (N=5/86)
Thiruvananthapuram	100% (N=4/4)	9.52% (N=8/86)

It should be noted that unlike the Chhattisgarh case, I have collapsed the membership and participation distinction from the outset. This decision was due to the fact that in the entire sample, *only one respondent* was a formal member of a Sangh social service organization, and thus the sample size was too small to be of further analytical value, even as this result in itself provides a telling indication of the strategy's failure. However, the results do indicate that participation at an individual

level does remain a powerful factor in determining BJP support with Dalit and Adivasi voters. A significantly higher percentage of participants vote for the BJP than non-participants, mirroring the Chhattisgarh results. Thus at the level of simple cross-tabulations at least, there appears support for **H3**, indicating that when Sangh social organizations can involve a particular voter in their activities, the voter is more likely to support the BJP. However it bears noting even at this stage that the low level of support in Wayanad, even among members of Sangh social organizations, indicates an important point of difference with the Chhattisgarh case where at least 90% of participants in Sangh supported the BJP in every district, compared to 66.66% of participants in Kerala.

Further, even as the *efficacy* of the participation linkage appears to remain fairly robust, the *extensiveness* of the linkage, compared to the Chhattisgarh case, appears to be significantly more limited. In the Kerala sample there are only 12 participants out of 262 respondents (4.58%), compared to 84 participants out of 360 (23.33%) in Chhattisgarh. These results suggest that the real puzzle lies in understanding why a strong network of social service organizations in Chhattisgarh is able to recruit participants, while a similarly strong network in Kerala yields far fewer participants. For example, comparing the high-intensity districts across the two cases (Jashpur and Bastar in Chhattisgarh, Wayanad and Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala), we see that the Sangh organizations in Chhattisgarh get 3.5 times as many participants per project in their areas of aggregate strength. What explains this discrepancy?

5.31 Statistical Tests of Confounding Factors:

Before analyzing the reasons behind the diminished success of the Sangh with respect to the extensiveness of the participation linkage, it is necessary to first test whether the efficacy of this linkage remains robust after statistically controlling for

those factors which might potentially confound the apparent relationship between participation and voting decisions. Replicating the analysis of the previous two chapters, I only control for those variables which are associated strongly with both the key explanatory factor A and dependent variable B, in a way that its inclusion as a control will eliminate the original statistical correlation between A and B. From Chapters 3 and 4, these variables were: Income, Religiosity, Communalism, and Caste Leader Influence. The hypothesized effects of these variables on the both the key independent variable, and on the outcome are re-summarized in the table below (for a more detailed discussion of the reasons for each variable’s inclusion, see Chapters 3 and 4).

TABLE 5.5: Summary of Potential Confounding Factors

Potential Confounding Variable	Expected Impact on Joining Sangh Activities	Expected Impact on Voting for the BJP
Religiosity (<i>Religiosity</i>)	Increasing religiosity makes a voter more likely to join Sangh organizations (+)	Increasing religiosity makes a voter more likely to support the BJP (+)
Communalism (<i>ConversionBan</i>)	Holding more communal values makes a voter more likely to join organizations affiliated with those causes (+).	Holding more communal values makes a voter more likely to vote for the party most supportive of a communal agenda. (+)
Class (<i>Income</i>)	Wealthier, upwardly mobile lower caste voters are more likely to join upper-caste staffed organizations (+)	Wealthier lower caste voters are more likely to support BJP’s elite-friendly policies and leadership (+)
Caste Leader Influence (<i>CasteCom</i>)	Those identifying with lower caste community leadership are less likely to join upper-caste dominated organizations. (-)	Those identifying with lower caste community leadership are less likely to support BJP’s largely upper-caste leadership. (-)

Hypothesized direction of impact in parentheses.

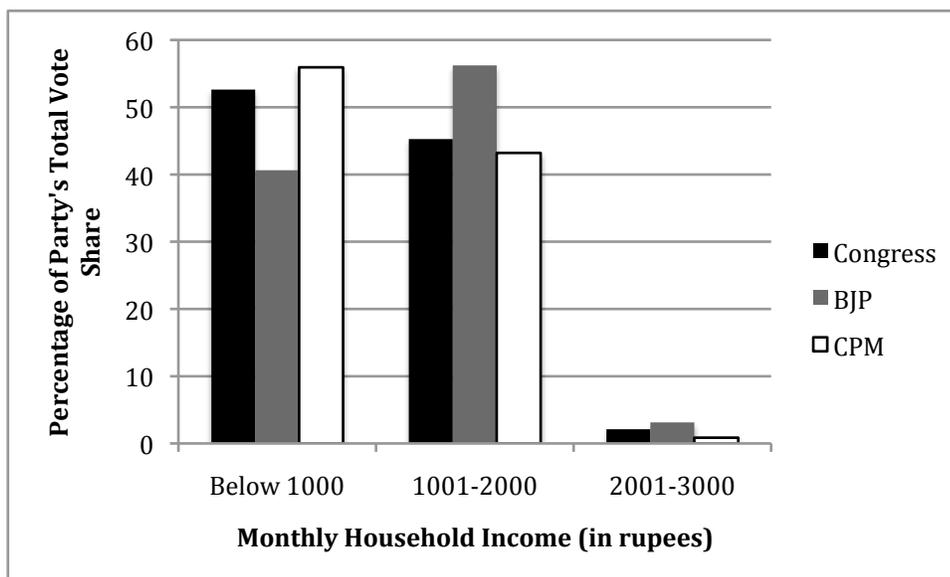
One of the advantages of this careful selection of a few independent variables is that it affords the opportunity to examine each of the confounding factors individually, both statistically and graphically. Before continuing to the statistical tests, it is useful to examine the graphical disaggregation of the BJP's pattern of support with respect to the variables listed in Table 5.5, especially in comparison to the Congress and the CPM, the other major parties in the state.

Graphs 5.3-5.5 present this disaggregation with respect to the variables of income, religiosity and communalism. *Income* is measured as monthly household income of the respondent. *Religiosity* is a composite index variable combining the frequency with which a respondent prayed, and the frequency with which they attended temple, mosque or church. To measure communalism, I once again asked respondents their view on the banning of religious conversions. Like in Chhattisgarh, this was the single most important item on the local Sangh ideological agenda, once again due to the long presence of Christian missionaries in the state (I discuss the salience of missionary activity and the issue of conversions in greater detail later in the chapter).¹⁸

Some simple descriptive data concerning these key control variables provide some interesting initial insights into how the basis for BJP support might be somewhat different in Kerala than it was in Chhattisgarh. Figure 5.4 suggests that, as in Chhattisgarh, the BJP support among Dalit and Adivasi voters in Kerala is not predicated on the votes of a 'creamy layer' of class elites within these lower caste communities. Indeed among those sampled in Kerala, *no respondent* had an income of over Rs. 3000 a month, and there is no significant difference between the BJP and its primary political competitors in terms of the distribution of the party's support across

¹⁸ Indeed in Kerala, these missionary networks have far deeper historical roots and a far broader reach than in Chhattisgarh, making the issue of conversions perhaps even more politically charged.

income categories. While the CPM is marginally more dependent on the absolute poorest voters than either the BJP or the Congress, the BJP still finds over 95% of its support coming from the two lowest income categories.

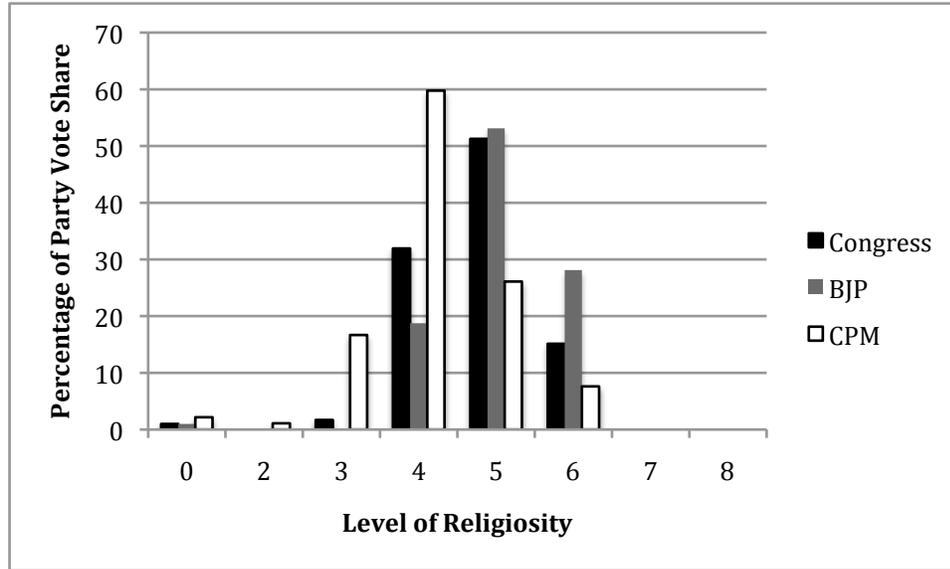


Source: Author-conducted survey (2008).

FIGURE 5.4: Distribution of supporters by Income

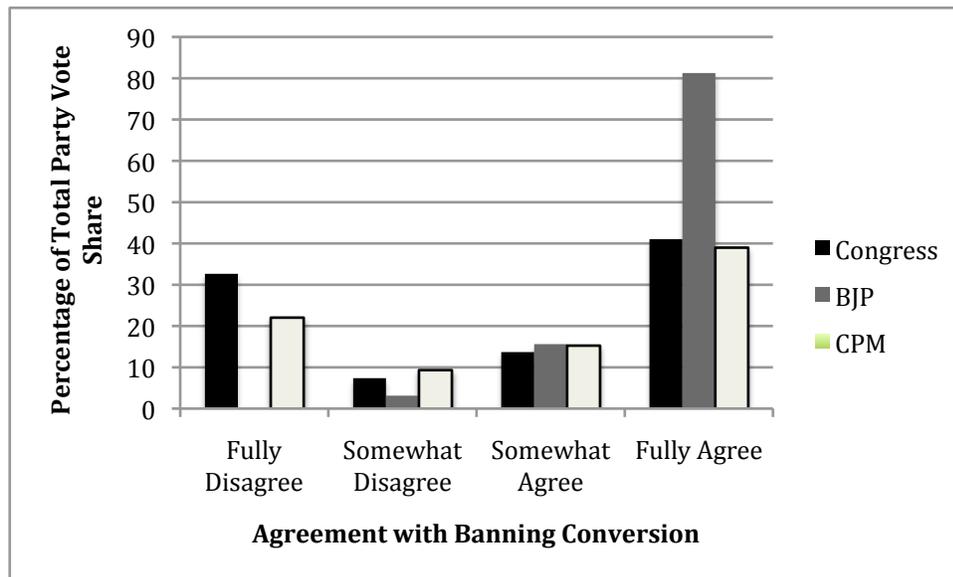
Figure 5.5 shows that, with respect to religiosity, the Congress and BJP largely mirror each other with respect to their support patterns. A majority of supporters of both parties fall in the same category of religiosity (where the index score is 5), whereas communist party supporters are (not surprisingly) more likely to be less pious, but the difference is quite marginal.

However, when we turn to the variable measuring communalism in Figure 5.6, we see a much starker difference than was present in the Chhattisgarh case. Whereas in Chhattisgarh, we saw that the vast majority of supporters of *both* the Congress and average BJP were very communal in their attitudes, in Kerala we see a clear difference across the parties. The proportion of BJP support coming from the ‘fully agree’ with banning conversions category is nearly double that of either other major party.



Source: Author-conducted survey (2008).

FIGURE 5.5: Distribution of supporters by Religiosity



Source: Author-conducted survey (2008).

FIGURE 5.6: Distribution of supporters by Communal Values

Further, even when we restrict the sample to only those identifying themselves as Hindus, we find the statistics unchanged, with 80% the BJP's support still coming from the most communal category, compared to 47% for the Congress, and 43% for

the CPM respectively. In Chhattisgarh, the BJP and Congress were not distinguishable in terms of the proportion of their support coming from communal voters. *Taken together, the results from the two states seems to indicate that more communal values distinguish the average Dalit or Adivasi supporter of the BJP in a way that they did not in Chhattisgarh.* This distinction might provide important clues for differences in how the BJP wins its support in Chhattisgarh as compared to Kerala, which will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections of the chapter.

5.4 Regression Results:

The above section provided some descriptive data on the profiles of Dalit and Adivasi supporters of the BJP and its political rivals among the voters surveyed. However, as in the previous chapter, it is necessary to address the statistical impact of controlling for these confounders on the relationship between organizational variables and the BJP's electoral performance. In this section, I present the results of logistic regression models designed to test the individual-level hypotheses **H3** and **H4**, and identical to those presented in Chapter 4. The dependant variable is again an individual voter's choice to vote for the BJP (coded 1) or not (coded 0). Model 5.1 is used as a baseline, in which the only variables included are the three which are associated with the organizational hypothesis: *Sanghpart*, which measures if a respondent has taken part in Sangh organizational activities, *SanghOpinion*, which measures the opinion a respondent has of Sangh social service work on a scale from 0 (lowest) to 3 (highest), and *Age*, which measures a respondent's age in years.¹⁹ Models

¹⁹ As outlined in Chapter 4, if organizational work truly is important in generating electoral success, and since these activities (particularly in the sphere of education) are largely targeting the young, an implication of the organizational hypothesis proposed here would be that the BJP should perform better with younger respondents.

5.2-5.5 include potential confounders from Table 5.5 individually, and then Model 5.6 includes all the potential confounders simultaneously.²⁰

TABLE 5.6: Logistic Regression on Probability of Supporting BJP

	Model 5.1	Model 5.2	Model 5.3	Model 5.4	Model 5.5	Model 5.6
<i>Sanghpart</i>	2.613** (.770)	2.509* (.817)	3.246** (.983)	2.819** (.781)	2.820** (.763)	3.457** (.995)
<i>SanghOpinion</i>	3.183** (.559)	3.227** (.585)	3.015** (.626)	3.183** (.559)	2.828** (.615)	2.561** (.706)
<i>Age</i>	-.026 (.022)	-.019 (.022)	-.013 (.025)	.027 (.023)	-.023 (.023)	.014 (.027)
<i>Religiosity</i>		.736 (.311)				.739 (.368)
<i>ConversionBan</i>			1.163* (.396)			1.007* (.386)
<i>Income</i>				-.079 (.452)		-.655 (.553)
<i>CasteCom</i>					3.240* (.976)	2.865 (1.182)
<i>Constant</i>	-1.862 (.799)	-5.618 (1.824)		-1.702 (1.209)	-2.138 (.850)	-8.865 (2.471)
N:	262	260	238	262	262	236
Log Likelihood:	-68.781	-65.552	-58.539	-68.766	-62.951	-51.319

(standard errors in parentheses) ** Significant at the .01 level
*** Significant at the .001 level

As with the descriptive analysis, the statistical models highlight important similarities and differences with the Chhattisgarh results. Consistent with the results in

²⁰ The analysis in this section was once again done using statistical simulation using the *Clarify* software package cited in Chapters 3 and 4.

both the national and local analyses, all six models find strong support for the individual-level hypotheses **H3** and **H4**. The variables *Sanghpart* and *SanghOpinion* were found to be significant statistically, and the coefficients on both variables remained stable across the different model configurations. These results indicate that the mechanisms of the organizational hypothesis are strong even in hostile terrain. The biggest difference from the Chhattisgarh results is the consistently significant impact of *ConversionBan*, which is not surprising given the distribution presented in Figure 5.6. The significance of this variable suggests that ideology plays a stronger role in distinguishing a subaltern BJP supporter in Kerala than it does in Chhattisgarh, the theoretical implications of which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

The substantive impacts of the key explanatory variables included in the logistic regression model exhibit considerable similarities with the previous chapter's findings. Table 5.7 summarizes the changes in predicted probability of a voter supporting the BJP as each explanatory variable varies from its minimum to its maximum observed values, holding other factors to their mean values. Once again, we see that both *Sanghpart* and *SanghOpinion*, in addition to being extremely significant, also have large substantive impacts, increasing the likelihood of a voter supporting the BJP by 40-55 percentage points depending on the model specification.

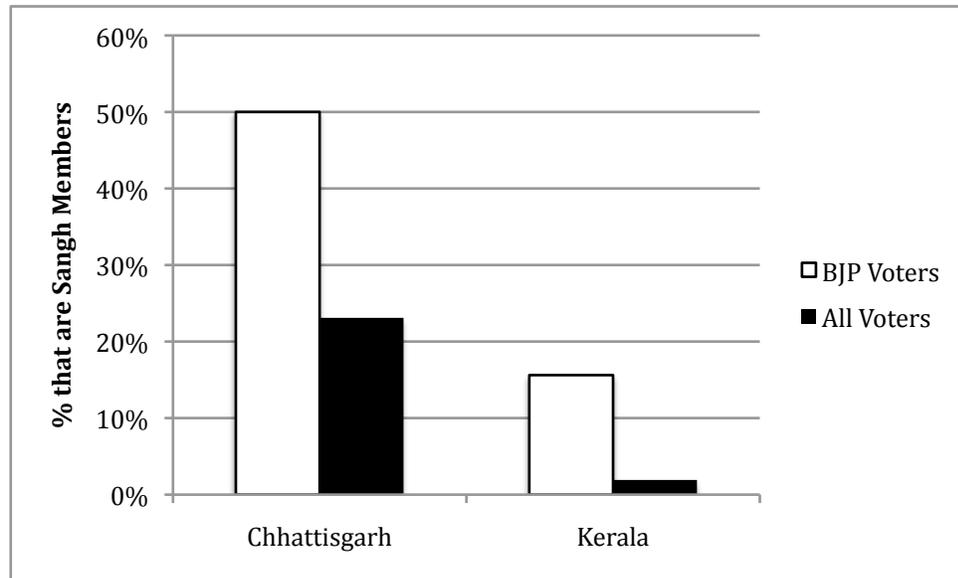
Interestingly, unlike the Chhattisgarh case, *Age* does not appear either statistically significant or substantively impactful, indeed even the direction of the variable's effects are not consistent indicating its impact is extremely model dependent. In Chhattisgarh, *Age* returned a highly significant negative coefficient, with a very large substantive impact. Coupled with the qualitative analysis on the nature of the Sangh service strategy, the analysis in Chapter 4 concluded that these results were a signal of the Sangh's success in making the BJP the party of the young in Chhattisgarh. Given that the social service approach largely targets the young, this

result appeared to provide further confirmation of the strategy’s success. In Kerala however, the young do not appear any more likely to vote for the BJP, providing yet another indication that even as the organizational approach appears very successful with those it recruits, the numbers of these recruits is too limited to shift significant numbers of voters towards the party.

**TABLE 5.7: Changes in Predicted Probabilities for Key Causal Factors
(Values in percentage points)**

Variables	Model 4.1	Model 4.2	Model 4.3	Model 4.4	Model 4.5	Model 4.6
<i>Sanghpart</i>	44.30%	40.00%	49.46%	44.68%	46.98%	51.80%
<i>SanghOpinion</i>	55.20%	53.99%	44.10%	55.36%	46.11%	32.95%
<i>Age</i>	-8.4%	-5%	-5.53%	8.73%	-6.92%	4.66%
<i>Religiosity</i>		18.10%				6.53%
<i>ConversionBan</i>			15.42%			12.76%
<i>Class</i>				.05%		-4.66%
<i>CasteCom</i>					56.92%	41.93%

Figure 5.7 demonstrates the importance of a strategy’s extensiveness quite clearly. In Chhattisgarh an incredible 50% of BJP supporters, and indeed over 20% of *all* voters had participated in Sangh activities, which coupled with the substantial impact of participation on voting decisions clearly demonstrated the ability of the service strategy in building an electoral base for the party. In Kerala, by contrast, while the effect of such participation remains pronounced, the proportion of voters who participate in Sangh activities is much lower *despite a similarly strong presence of Sangh organizations*.



Source: Author-conducted survey (2008).

FIGURE 5.7: Percentage of Sangh Members by Voter Type

There remains the possibility that the service approach is helping the BJP even with the few supporters it has managed to attract in the state, by building a good opinion of the Sangh through their outreach activities. In Chhattisgarh, the evidence presented suggested the influence of a good opinion of Sangh activities in influencing the likelihood of *non-participants* supporting the BJP. Thus while the number of participants in Kerala are few, it is possible that the strong aggregate presence of the Sangh service network has built a good opinion of the Sangh with poor voters, especially given the significant impact of the opinion variable.

However a look at the data suggests this mechanism is also not pervasive enough to build an electoral base. In Chhattisgarh, almost 40% of *all* voters had a positive view of Sangh organizations and over 70% of those voters supported the BJP, suggesting the importance of this linkage mechanism in spreading the party's appeal. In Kerala, while 68% of those with a good opinion of Sangh organizations voted for the BJP, only 8.3% of all voters held such positive views. As with participation, while

the mechanism appears robust, its extent is once again limited despite a strong organizational presence.

Two key findings thus emerge from this analysis. Firstly, service-based linkages remain robust even in a setting in which the BJP does not perform well electorally as a whole. Secondly, what differentiates the party's performance in the two cases analyzed is that in Chhattisgarh, where Sangh organizations were present they attracted participation, but failed to do so in Kerala. Two questions arise from this comparison:

- 1) Why did the organizational strategy, which seems so efficacious in attracting participants in Chhattisgarh, fail so spectacularly in Kerala?
- 2) If participation in Sangh activities is so low even among BJP supporters in Kerala, then what explains how the party *does* appeal to those SC/ST voters who do support it electorally?

In the Chhattisgarh case study, I turned to more qualitative techniques of analysis to outline the causal mechanisms linking the observed association between participation levels and voter support for the BJP. Similarly, I turn in this chapter to supplementing survey data with more qualitative evidence to understand why these mechanisms were not effective in recruiting support for the BJP in Kerala.

5.5 Hindu vs. Dalit: Communism, Lower Caste Movements, and the Sangh

In the following section, I outline the historically connected development of a vibrant lower caste civil society and strongly redistributive communist movement in Kerala.²¹ I argue that lower caste social protests, spurred by the extreme form of caste oppression that characterized social relations in Kerala, had provided a platform for

²¹ In stressing this interplay of state and society, I draw on Patrick Heller's argument in 'Degrees of Democracy: Some Comparative Lessons from India' *World Politics*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Jul., 2000), pp. 484-519.

the state's strong communist movement to build a base of support from. Leftist governments then used their stints in power to push through radical reform (by Indian standards) and furnish subaltern populations with public provisioning far exceeding the national norm.

This high level of provisioning in turn weakened material demands for the services Sangh operatives relied on to enter subaltern communities that were distrustful of the upper caste dominated Sangh. This strategy proved successful in a state like Chhattisgarh where basic social services had been historically under-provided. Additionally, lower caste protests and communist grassroots activism, coupled with the influential missionary presence in Kerala produced a vibrant associational life in Kerala, crowding out the Sangh social service chapters, and preventing them from recruiting participants. Equally importantly, caste-based and leftist associations politicized Dalits and Adivasis horizontally along caste and class identities, and in explicit opposition to local upper castes, hindering later attempts by the Sangh to integrate these populations vertically into a 'Hindu' political community.

5.51 Early Local Legacies:

Caste politics in Kerala has had a turbulent history that began well before the formal establishment of the state. Indeed some historians have argued that the question of caste relations has informed political activity in Kerala far more than Indian nationalism did, even during the early twentieth-century heyday of the independence movement. Any explanation for the particular volatility of caste in Kerala has to begin by acknowledging that even by Indian standards, hierarchy in the region was particularly pronounced. Not only were there untouchable castes, but 'unseeable' ones

such as Pulayas and Cherumas who were expected to keep a certain distance from upper castes, as their presence was seen as polluting even from a distance.²²

Patterns of land ownership in Kerala exacerbated conditions of social oppression, as holdings were concentrated in the hands of the Namboodiris, a small, elite Brahmin caste who accumulated large estates in part through the appropriation of surpluses generated by the cultivation of temple lands.²³ Below the Namboodiris in the local caste hierarchy stood the Nairs, who were given the responsibility of overseeing the former's estates. Next were the Ezhavas, who were seen as *avarna* or outcastes, and undertook a range of occupations including most famously the tapping and brewing of toddy.²⁴ Finally were the Pulayas and Cherumas mentioned above, the Dalits of Kerala, who were regarded as 'untouchable'.

Against this backdrop of rigid caste hierarchy, there were local patterns of governance and popular mobilization within the territory of contemporary Kerala that informed modern political development in ways crucial for understanding the future failures of the Sangh. The standard narrative of twentieth century political development in Kerala begins with a description of the merging of three different provinces to create the new state in 1956. The two provinces of Travancore and Cochin were formerly princely states, ruled indirectly by the British during the *Raj* [colonial rule]. The third major province of Malabar was ruled directly by the British, and was formerly part of the Madras presidency, but was fused with the former two during the period where newly independent India re-drew the boundaries of its

²² Dilip Menon, Caste, Nationalism, and Communism in South India: Malabar 1900-1948. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 19.

²³ Genevieve Lemercinier, Religion and Ideology in Kerala, Louvain: University Catholique de Louvain, 1983, Ch. 3.

²⁴ In today's governmental lexicon, Ezhavas are classified under the category of 'Other Backward Castes', and Pulayas under 'Scheduled Castes'.

constituent states along linguistic lines, following the passing of States Reorganization Act of 1956.²⁵

The pre-independence local histories of all three provinces provided different influences that combined to constitute a political arena the Sangh's strategy has been unable to penetrate. Direct colonial rule in Malabar for instance, resulted in the imperial imposition of a property rights regime favored by British administrators that granted formal ownership of land to powerful landlords. As Ronald Herring notes, enacting such a system enabled landlords to legally evict tenants and raise rents, which caused considerable agrarian unrest, including the well-known Moplah (Mapilla) Rebellion in 1921.²⁶ These (often militant) revolts against landlords and the colonial state established historical precedents of radical social protest that proved crucial in informing future opposition to the dominant tactics of Gandhian passive resistance that were so hegemonic in other parts of India.²⁷

While incidents in Malabar helped build rich legacies of radical protest, local developments in the provinces of Travancore and Cochin proved equally, if differently, influential in shaping lower caste political consciousness. Both provinces were formally ruled by monarchs, and overseen by colonial administrators. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these monarchs implemented a series of

²⁵ Prior to this Act, Indian states were divided into different types following the country's colonial experience, where certain territories called 'provinces' were governed directly by British officials, while others, known as 'princely states' continued to be governed by local rulers, although these too were indirectly under British control. For a general account of the politics of language-based interest groups mobilizing for re-organizing Indian states along linguistic lines, see Jyotindra Das Gupta, Language Conflict and National Development: Group Politics and National Language Policy in India. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.

²⁶ Ronald Herring, "Stealing Congress' Thunder: The Rise to Power of a Communist Movement in South India", in Kay Lawson and Peter Merkl (eds) When Parties Fail: Emerging Alternative Organizations, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 389-418, p. 393.

²⁷ Indeed the Mapilla Rebellion were actively condemned by Gandhi, who limited his critique to a denouncement of the exploitative practices of certain landlords, in keeping with his generally conservative position on agrarian protest specifically, and radical protest more generally (see Herring *op. cit.* (1988), p. 394).

modernizing reforms including granting tenants some measure of ownership rights, and expanding educational access.²⁸ In addition to growing state provision of services, Christian missionaries also expanded their network in the region, such as the London Missionary Society (LMS) and Church Missionary Society (CMS), which were operating in Travancore by the middle of the nineteenth century. Missionaries, often themselves from working class backgrounds, exhibited a mixture of sympathy with lower caste oppression and moral superiority over local populations.²⁹ The combination spurred them to highlight the deplorable conditions of lower castes to induce conversions, while also expanding their own system of social services. In 1830, the LMS was running about 100 schools with 3000 students, and by 1890 this figure had risen to 300 and 14,000 respectively.³⁰ A majority of students came from lower caste backgrounds, as the state had not historically seen fit to open public schools to these subaltern communities.

In response, upper castes fearing that mass defections of lower castes would destroy the social structure upon which their privilege depended, relented on their prior hostility to the idea of opening government schools to lower castes.³¹ As a result of increasing public access and growing missionary activities, education levels in Travancore and Cochin grew rapidly, surpassing Malabar and indeed the rest of India, as Table 5.8 shows.

²⁸ These measures included the Pattom Proclamation (1865), which is often called the Magna Carta of the Travancore peasantry, and conferred ownership rights on tenants. See Desai, *op. cit.* 2007, pp. 53-61.

²⁹ Dick Kooiman, Conversion and Social Equality in India, New Delhi: Manohar, 1989, p. 45.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 89

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 254.

TABLE 5.8 Literacy Rates: Kerala vs. India 1911-1951

Source: Kerala Figures from Kerala Human Development Report (2005), p. 13.
India Figures from Thakran (1990) in Desai (2007), p. 60.

Year	% Literate			
	Travancore	Cochin	Malabar	India
1911	15.0	15.1	11.1	N/A
1921	24.2	18.5	12.7	8.0
1931	23.9	28.2	14.4	N/A
1951	46.7	43.3	31.3	17.0

A mixture of local factors thus contributed fundamentally to shaping Kerala's unique political trajectory. The intersection of extreme caste discrimination and iniquitous land ownership patterns, lower caste protests against these conditions, colonial administrative policies, local reform and missionary presence combined to create two legacies of particular importance for an understanding of the Sangh's subsequent difficulties in the state. These factors co-produced a legacy of radical poor peasant protest, and an early record of government provision of various social services. The next section details how two important local historical forces, lower caste associations and communists, built on these twin legacies to create a socio-political environment especially well suited to rebuff later Hindu nationalist efforts to woo subaltern Hindus through social services.

5.52 Lower Caste Activism and Socio-cultural Reform

Building on local histories of protest, and spurred by the extreme form of caste-based discrimination in a state famously labeled 'a madhouse of caste' by Swami Vivekananda, lower castes in Kerala began to systematically organize against

their mistreatment.³² Caste-based movements developed in the early twentieth century, mostly in response to specific discriminations each community experienced. For example, Ezhavas protested bans on their access to temples of higher castes, as well as the reservation of government posts for caste Hindus. Ezhavas were particularly well positioned to protest their subjugation, as a great many had benefitted from the previously mentioned expanding public provision of schooling in Travancore and Cochin. A small, but important middle class within this lower caste group began organizing collective demonstrations, and found their spearhead in the figure of Sree Narayana Guru, and his organization, the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), which was founded in 1903 and became the flagship association for Ezhava reform.³³

While the SNDP receives the majority of scholarly attention on Kerala's caste reform movements, the activities of Pulaya (Dalit) social organizers are critical for the purposes of this project's concern with subaltern political behavior. Pulaya subjugation was far more extreme than anything experienced by Nair or Ezhava communities, and during the 19th century, many Pulayas were formally enslaved. Their first escapes from caste hierarchy came through waves of conversion to Christianity, facilitated by the aforementioned missionary networks. In 1907, the Pulaya reformer Ayyankali, under the inspiration of Sri Narayana Guru, founded the Sandhujana Paripalana Sangham [Association for Protection of the Poor], which was followed in 1913, by the founding of an All Cochin Pulaya Maha Sabha [Pulaya Great Assembly]. The Sangham (and later the Sabha) demanded the admission of lower castes into schools, and Ayyankali even organized agricultural laborer strikes until the schools were opened to Pulayas.³⁴ The Pulaya and Ezhava associations did form alliances on

³² Quote from S.N. Sadasivan, A Social History of India, New Delhi: APH Publications, 2000, p. 611.

³³ Lemercinier, *op. cit.* 1983, pp. 247-51.

³⁴ Kerala Human Development report, p. 12

occasion, most notably in an agitation to open access to the temple at Vaikam to both caste communities.

It is important to note the complex nature of these lower caste movements with regards to their views on social reform. Neither the SNDP nor Pulaya associations were radical organizations seeking to overthrow the caste system, but rather fought for equal status for their communities within it. Understanding this distinction is crucial for making sense of the conservatism lacing the rhetoric of Narayana Guru and other lower caste reformers, who often exhorted their followers to emulate upper caste rituals and practices in order to gain parity, rather than reject them as part of the praxis of caste. For these leaders, part of such upper caste emulation (or ‘Sanskritization’, see Chapter 2) necessitated a purging of those practices which marked their own communities as subaltern:

[Ezhavas] became increasingly concerned to renounce their assigned religious and cultural identities as enthusiastic practitioners of the forms of Hinduism considered in reform discourses as most barbarous and superstitious...

Narayana Guru himself called lower-caste temples ‘places of filth and superstition’...he also replaced offerings of toddy and blood [traditional Ezhava offerings] with fruit and flowers [preferred by upper castes]

....Narayana Guru is seen among SNDP leadership foremost as a reformer, whose teachings and spiritual leadership helped the community rid itself of superstitions and *backward*, low status practices [original emphasis]³⁵

Such social conservatism and aspirational mimicry inherently limited these movements as sources of fundamental challenges to existing social orders. Missionary activism too, was limited by an ‘emphasis on individual conversion and respect to

³⁵ Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella, Social Mobility in Kerala, London; Virginia: Pluto Press, 2000, pp. 155, 163

civil authorities', coupled with the maintenance of distinctions from local populations, resulting in pronounced racial discrimination within missionary service wings. Yet lower caste associations in particular were significant harbingers of subsequent radical reform in two respects. Firstly, they helped aggregate lower caste communities into a populace that was politicized *horizontally along caste identities*. Indeed, such within-caste politicization was also adopted by upper caste communities, which developed influential caste associations at the same time.³⁶

As will be outlined later, this politicization posed important obstacles for the Sangh's later attempts to politicize lower castes *vertically across castes and religious identities*. Further, lower caste movements did provide important instances of early opposition to the hegemonic embrace of the elite-led nationalist independence movement. In 1924, the SNDP linked its efforts with the Indian National Congress in demanding rights for lower caste Hindus to use the roads surrounding the Vaikam Temple in Travancore. Yet Narayana Guru defied Gandhi's efforts to restrict the protest tactics to non-violent forms of civil disobedience, which Manali Desai notes was critical for later, more radical political movements seeking to break with the Congress' model of passive resistance.³⁷

5.53 Communism and Social Provisioning

In Kerala, this more radical movement was communism, which drew on lower caste mobilizational predecessors, but overhauled the latter's restricted mandate of

³⁶ T.J. Nossiter, Communism in Kerala: A Study in Political Adaptation, Berkeley: University of California, 1982, p. 29. The Nair Service Society (NSS), founded by Munnathu Padmanabhan in 1914, sought to push through social reforms within the relatively elite Nair community, including making the partition of properties in the traditional Nair joint family complexes (*taravads*) legally recognized. Over time the NSS expanded to take the lead in a number of social reform movements, on occasion linking up with the SNDP to challenge Namboodiri Brahmin socio-cultural hegemony in the state, even as the Nairs and Ezhavas occupied very different spaces in the region's caste hierarchy.

³⁷ Manali Desai, State Formation and Radical Democracy in India, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 70.

largely targeting cultural practice.³⁸ Communists were able to draw of Kerala's legacy of autonomous lower caste protest, and the relative marginality of the nationalist movement compared to local concerns, to forge their own support base in the state.³⁹ Communism became a national political presence in the 1920s with the founding of the Communist Party of India (CPI). However, after the CPI was banned in 1934 following its denouncing of the Congress as a bourgeois party, communists began working mainly as a left-wing within the Indian National Congress in the Congress Socialist Party wing, which continued even with the reinstatement of the CPI in the late 1930s.⁴⁰

In Kerala, working within the Congress umbrella, communism became firmly entrenched in the first three decades of the twentieth century. This consolidation was helped in large part by the general weakness of the nationalist movement in the state, aided further by the legacy of lower caste mobilization. However where lower caste movements had limited their reform goals to socio-cultural parity, communists sought widespread change in lower caste living conditions. Communists skillfully linked the nationalist demand for independence from colonial rule, to the local demand for reform of the agrarian power structure. Their popularity among lower castes in Kerala was helped by the strong overlap between class and caste status in the state, due to aforementioned high initial concentration of land and wealth in upper caste hands. Extreme levels of impoverishment allowed class to become a powerful basis for

³⁸ Lemercinier, *op. cit.*, 1983, pp. 250-60.

³⁹ EMS Namboodiripad, the longtime leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Kerala, cites the importance of these earlier movements in his analysis of Kerala's unique socio-political trajectory: A significant difference between Kerala and the rest of India is the fact that the first form of political agitation and the corresponding organizations for carrying on such agitations were based on particular sub-castes and religious communities [as opposed to national mobilizations]

In E.M.S. Namboodiripad, 'Castes, Classes, and Parties in Modern Political Development', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 4, (Nov., 1977), pp. 3-25, p. 19.

⁴⁰ For a more detailed analysis of the phases of the Indian communist movement, see Valerian Rodriguez, 'The Communist Parties in India', in Peter Ronald deSouza and E. Sridharan (eds.), India's Political Parties, New Delhi: Sage, 2006, pp. 199-252.

solidarity among tenants and laborers of the backward castes, facilitating collective action among them.⁴¹

Communist activists in Kerala, informed by previously mentioned disagreements between lower caste reformers and Gandhi, grew skeptical of what they understood to be the conservatism of the nationalist movement's attempts to consistently downplay existing differences between caste groups in order to avoid enacting substantive reform to the caste or agrarian system. Such resistance provided a legacy of lower-caste opposition to upper-caste attempts at incorporation in the nationalist movement that made Kerala very hostile terrain for Hindu nationalists attempting a similar task of caste unification many years later.

Thomas Isaac, the present Kerala Finance Minister in the Communist-led government, notes that the search for an alternative to the elite-friendly nationalist movement at the time attracted Kerala's political activists to the Communist social platform.⁴² Communists both in the CPI, and within the left wing of the Kerala Congress Party, began using existing mobilizational networks to their advantage. Socialists within the Congress transformed philanthropic workers associations into trade unions, and developed links with lower caste associations.⁴³ At the same time these embedded radicals began building up mass organizations of various professions, most significantly of elementary teachers, 'who became the backbone of the library

⁴¹ Desai compares Kerala caste relations with those in West Bengal, the other bastion of leftist politics in India, and notes that the caste system in the latter state was less hierarchical, and thus a pre-existing reform movement spearheaded by lower caste associations did not exist. In contrast, the presence of these associations in Kerala fundamentally affected the development of communism in the region, giving it a grassroots character that the movement in Bengal did not possess. Manali Desai, 'Party Formation, Political Power, and the Capacity for Reform: Comparing Left Parties in Kerala and West Bengal, India', *Social Forces*, Vol. 80, No. 1, (Sep., 2001), pp. 37-60.

⁴² Thomas Isaac, 'The National Movement and Communist Party in Kerala', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 14, No. 8/9, (Aug. - Sep., 1986), pp. 59-80, p. 62. Menon echoes this sentiment, arguing that 'a partial explanation for the lack of a wider involvement might lie in the fact that nationalism did not specifically address the problem of caste inequality that was so salient in Malabar', p. 90.

⁴³ Isaac, *op. cit.* 1986, p. 63.

and literacy movements and then chief organizers of political and mass activities in the village.’⁴⁴ Herring notes:

The radicals of the Congress patiently organized, village by village... These organizational linkages were aided by the enormous respect for learning, and relatively high literacy rate, in Kerala. Naturally enough, school teachers and students were important in spreading the message and their respect in village society enhanced their efforts.⁴⁵

This use of teachers echoes observations in the previous chapter about the central importance of the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram’s use of its teacher-activists as the backbone of their political mobilization efforts in Chhattisgarh. In Kerala, the Sangh had been beaten to the proverbial punch.

Even as they expanded their organizations from within the Congress, and were protected from national bans by doing so, communist workers began articulating the differences between their ‘Congress of the poor’, embedded within the more conservative mainstream ‘Congress of the rich.’⁴⁶ The Communists also strategically linked their demands to those for a separate ethnic Malayali state, allowing them to benefit from the rising tide of Malayali national feelings in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Once in power in 1957, the grassroots nature of the communist movement and its lower caste base of support gave the leftist government powerful imperatives for implementing socio-economic reforms of a scope unrivalled in India.

In the spheres of agrarian and educational policy, the reforms were particularly wide-ranging. M.A. Oomen notes that the Kerala Land Reform Act acquired its radically progressive quality (by Indian standards) precisely because the communist

⁴⁴ Isaac, *op. cit.* 1986, p. 64.

⁴⁵ Herring, *op. cit.* 1988, p. 396.

⁴⁶ Communist leader P. Krishna Pillai coined this formulation during the late 1930s, See T.J. Nossiter, Communism in Kerala, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p. 70.

party drew so heavily on the support of agricultural laborers and peasantry.⁴⁷ In addition to extensive land reform, Kerala under both communist *and* Congress governments made impressive strides in terms of human development, even as its macroeconomic growth remained unimpressive. Indeed, due in part to competition with the communists, even the Congress party unit in Kerala espoused far more radical policies than its counterparts in other parts of India.⁴⁸ The state has the highest HDI indicator in India, a reflection of its impressively high literacy rate of 91%, as well as its relatively good performance in the area of public health with an rural infant mortality rate roughly 1/7th of the national average of 70 deaths per 1000 infants born.⁴⁹

Going back to the typology of party strategies to appeal to poor voters developed in the introductory chapter, we can see that Kerala represents a very different case from that of Chhattisgarh presented in Chapter 4. In Chhattisgarh, the early dominance of the Congress with subaltern voters was predicated on the clientalist method, until the BJP used its social organization strategy to make significant inroads in certain areas. However in Kerala, parties (especially those of the left) have used pro-poor policies and mass organizational networks to consolidate their advantage with poor voters. The state therefore offers a very different terrain, or what social movement theorists might call ‘political opportunity structure’, for the Sangh to have to negotiate. It is to these failed attempts that we return for the remainder of the chapter.

⁴⁷ Oomen does however critique the ‘dismal implementation’ of certain aspects of the land reforms, including the redistribution of surplus land over the ceiling limits. See M.A. Oomen, ‘Land Reforms and Socio-economic Change in Kerala: an introductory study’ in Kerala Land Reform: Essays on the Kerala Economy, Madras: Christian Institute for Study of Religion and Society”, 1971), p. 9.

⁴⁸ Herring, *op. cit.*, (1988), p. 411.

⁴⁹ Literacy and mortality data from Kerala Human Development Report, United Nations Development Programme, released by State Planning Commission, 2005.

5.6 Explaining the Sangh's Struggle

The nexus of lower caste mobilization and communist activism outlined in the previous section was highlighted by leaders of the BJP and its organizational affiliates as producing two related obstacles for the movement's attempts to generate support among Dalits and Adivasis in the state:

- 1) High levels of public social goods provisioning that choked off demand for Sangh-provided social services.
- 2) An extremely dense organizational domain, packed with communist-affiliated cooperatives and unions, and autonomous lower caste associations, which forged horizontal linkages within caste communities preventing Sangh chapters from forging vertical linkages between these communities.

5.61 The Public Provision of Social Goods: Weakening Demand for Sangh Services

Dalit and Adivasi voters in Kerala seem to recognize the superior performance of their state in the field of human development. On the survey conducted for this study, respondents were asked how they thought their state compared to the rest of India in terms of public health and educational services. 80.84% of those surveyed they thought their state performed 'Better' or 'Much Better' compared to only 0.77% who said they thought the state performed 'Worse' than others Indian states. As a consequence, leaders of the Sangh admitted that they were essentially 'not able to do very much in the social service sector', due to the relative strength of public policy in that area.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Interview with K.R. Ummakanthan, organizing secretary of state BJP unit, Thiruvananthapuram, 5th August, 2008.

While not one of the best-performing states in terms of most macroeconomic indicators of growth, Kerala has managed to remain among the top Indian states in terms of per capita spending on development by devoting an above-average percentage of its resources towards education and healthcare.⁵¹ The state has also routinely spent a higher amount of its budget on social security and welfare expenditures, ranking only below much wealthier states like Punjab and Haryana.⁵² However the entirety of its success cannot be understood as based on spending, since it routinely ranks outside the top five in expenditures, but is placed first in terms of human development.⁵³ Much of the success of Kerala is explained by the relative efficiency of its services, including what some analysts have called the most effectively run public distribution [of foodstuffs and basic consumer goods] system in the country.⁵⁴

An extensive review of the success of Kerala in achieving high human development levels despite low per capita income levels is not within the scope of this chapter, as a wide range of specialists has exhaustively studied the subject.⁵⁵ While explanations for this policy success are vigorously debated, it seems clear that the nexus of a politically active lower caste citizenry with an organizationally powerful leftist movement compelled the state into broader provision of social goods than most

⁵¹ The Human Development Report written on the state concluded that 'Kerala's development experience has been pronouncedly more impressive in various non-income dimensions of well-being than in the income dimension.' Kerala Human Development Report, *op. cit.* 2005, p. 57.

⁵² Data from Kerala Human Development Report, *op. cit.* 2005, p. 57.

⁵³ Per capita development spending figures from the Handbook of Statistics on State Government Finances, Reserve Bank of India, 2005-06.

⁵⁴ As quoted in M. Suchitra, 'Undermining a fine system', *India Together*, January, 2004.

⁵⁵ Well-known work on the 'Kerala model' of development includes Richard W. Franke and Barbara H. Chasin, 'The Kerala Experiment: development without growth', *Technology Review* Vol. 95, No. 3, 1990, pp. 42-51. For a more critical appraisal of the Kerala model, see J. Tharamangalam, "The perils of social development without economic growth: The development debacle of Kerala, India," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 30, No. 1: 1998. Also see K. K. George, Limits to the Kerala Model of Development: An Analysis of Fiscal Crisis and its Implications, Thiruvananthapuram: Center for Development Studies, 1993.

other poor Indians have enjoyed access to.⁵⁶ Lower caste and subsequent communist activism thus contributed to weakening the demand for social services provided by the Sangh.⁵⁷ As BJP state secretary M.S. Kumar indicated:

We are doing social work not in the way of getting results in Kerala in terms of getting members. We are doing service anyway—if we get results good, but we know we may not. We will work even if not getting result. The thing is in Kerala that there [are] so many organizations also doing these activities- so see even service activities are competitive in Kerala.⁵⁸

‘Development’ as a discourse to be deployed for political gain was still open for exploitation in Chhattisgarh, precisely because no political formation had yet appropriated it. In Kerala however, through relatively strong government performance, coupled with a history of strong non-governmental (including missionary) interventions, this space was already occupied prior to the Sangh’s turn to service provision in the early 1990s.

⁵⁶ There are heated disagreements over the principal source of the state’s achievements in human development. Amartya Sen for example credits the enlightened policies of pre-independence rulers in Travancore-Cochin in sowing the seeds for progressive governance. While clearly important in providing a platform for future educational expansion, Desai (op. cit. 2007) notes that early reform need not have translated into continued social policy success, as evidenced by reformist princely states which did not have postcolonial leftist governments, and saw marked stagnation in their post-independence progress on human development indicators.⁵⁶ From 1951-1991, Kerala increased its lead over the all-India average, attaining 95% literacy by the end of this period compared to the all India level of 51%. For an accessible glimpse of the debate between Sen and Barbara Chasin and Richard Franke, see ‘The Kerala Difference’, *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 38, No. 17, October 24th, 1991, available at www.nybooks.com/articles/3117.

⁵⁷ As George Mathew explains, Kerala’s high investments in education and health is seen as inextricably linked to the active history of lower caste movements in the state:

The combative elements of Kerala society began with the rise of lower classes against the rigid caste system, and the fact that the ‘opposition to caste inequalities’ took a particularly pro-mass education form. There was a dialectical response: the spread of education helps to overcome the traditional inequalities of caste, class and gender, just as the removal of these inequalities contributes to the spread of education

George Mathew, ‘Amartya Sen and the Kerala Model’, *Hindu*, 9th January, 2001. Also see K.V. Nambiar, ‘Reflections on the Kerala model: A rejoinder’ *Hindu*, 4th February, 2000.

⁵⁸ Interview with M.S. Kumar, Thiruvananthapuram, August 9th, 2008.

5.62 Crowding out the Sangh:

In addition to strong public provision weakening demand for the services offered by Sangh organizations like Sewa Bharati and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Kerala's vibrant associational life has further diminished prospects for subaltern recruitment in two related ways:

- 1) The sheer density of existing organizations has 'crowded out' the Sangh service network, making it difficult for their chapters to attract members.
- 2) Subaltern Hindu associational life in Kerala has politicized lower castes as *caste communities*, obstructing the Sangh's attempts to ideologically integrate them into a Hindu electorate.⁵⁹

Organizational space in Kerala is highly competitive, which meant that building Sangh chapters in different localities did not automatically translate into community participation in the same way it appeared to in Chhattisgarh:

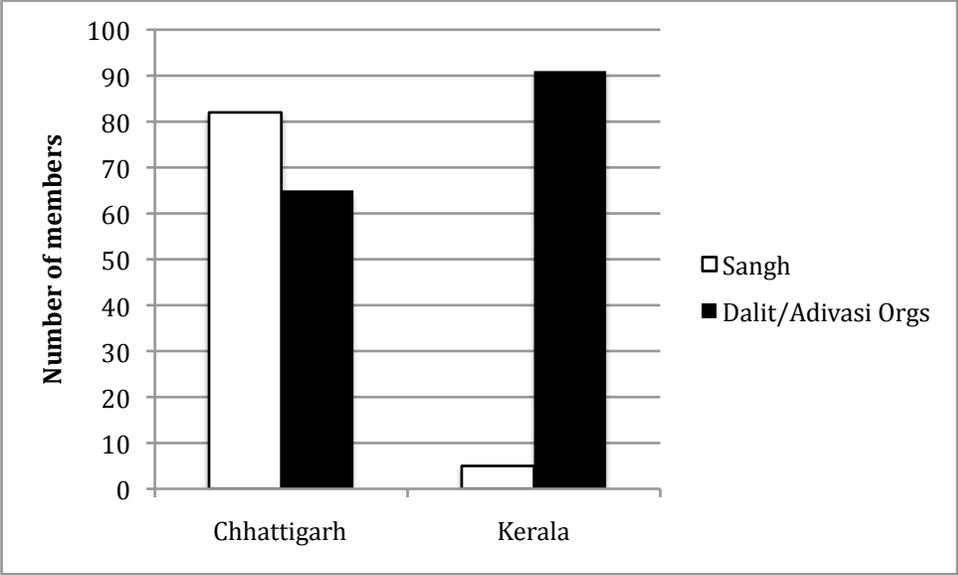
'...there are many obstacles provided by the cooperative movement. BJP is nowhere in the cooperative movement in Kerala- cooperative banks, cooperative societies, milk societies, these societies are very close to the common man, but we have no presence in this area.'⁶⁰

Cooperatives provide a perfect example of local politicized associations that provide services and organize communities in ways that disrupt the working of the Sangh machinery, which in certain parts of Chhattisgarh had been allowed to work relatively unimpeded by associational competition. In addition to cooperatives, which are often linked to either the communists or the Congress, the continuing strength of local caste

⁵⁹ Similar problems existed for the Sangh in neighboring Tamil Nadu. Sangh commentators noted that the 'long history of anti-Brahminism' in Tamil Nadu posed a problem for Sangh expansion given the movement's Brahmin base in the state. . M.V. Kamath, 'The Brahmin Question in Tamil Nadu', *Organizer*, November 22, 1987.

⁶⁰ Interview with K. Surendran, Thiruvananthapuram, 5th August, 2008.

associations, discussed earlier in this chapter, continues to be a thorn in Hindutva’s side. In particular, the SNDP and the Pulaya Mahasabha (the major Dalit association in the state) proved to be an obstacle for the BJP’s efforts at establishing organizational dominance with subaltern Hindus:



Source: Author conducted survey (2008).

FIGURE 5.8: Associational Membership in Kerala and Chhattigarh

Figure 5.8 shows the dramatic difference in membership in lower caste associations compared to membership in Sangh organizations in the two case studies. What makes the comparison even more instructive is the fact that even in Chhattigarh the Sangh was organizationally dominant in two districts where lower caste associations have traditionally been weak (Bastar and Jashpur), and this was where the BJP found success. In Kerala, the Sangh has attempted to go head-to-head with these associations, and results indicate this strategy has not yielded electoral dividends.

In part this is because, as Figure 5.8 demonstrates, many Dalits and Adivasis in Kerala had been mobilized prior to the Sangh’s recent overtures. However, it is not simply the density of associational life, but its political character that is crucial to

examine here. In this regard it is imperative not to de-politicize the concept of civil society, or indeed the related concept of social capital, as certain neo-Tocquevillian accounts have been criticized for doing.⁶¹ The nature of mobilization within Kerala's associations, and the relations of these associations with the Sangh influence the latter's attempts to recruit its own subaltern base. While the nature of civil society has been largely analyzed with respect to its effects on democratic institutions and their performance, it is equally important in determining the prospects for new social forces seeking to penetrate a given political terrain, including religious nationalists like the Sangh Parivar.

Initially, the Sangh believed it had a chance to secure the support of influential Nair and Ezhava voters in the state by forging lasting political relationships with both the Nair Service Society (NSS) and the SNDP, the respective caste organizations for each community.⁶² However once the Jana Sangh (the early incarnation of the BJP) was formally established in Kerala, it made the Sangh's political ambitions clear, and its self-projection as an apolitical, cultural organization became a much harder sell. Consequently, both the NSS and SNDP began to distance themselves from the Sangh. This division became even more explicit when the two caste organizations attempted to form their own political parties, the NDP and SRP respectively, which competed with the Jana Sangh:

⁶¹ Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. For a compelling critique, see Sheri Berman, 'Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic', *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (April 1997), pp. 401-429.

⁶² Initially, the relations between the RSS and both caste associations were actually quite strong. In fact one of the NSS district presidents in the 1960s, Govinda Menon was also the state president of the RSS. Indeed, NSS founder M. Padmanabhan attended several RSS programs, a point RSS leaders like to reiterate. Similarly relations with erstwhile SNDP leader R. Sankar and the RSS were also quite cordial according to several RSS sources, and Sankar even extended formal support to the RSS resolution against cow slaughter during the 1950s (Interview with P. Parameswaram, Thiruvananthapuram, 4th August, 2008). Both P. Parameswaram and K.R. Ummakanthan, as well as R. Hari attested to the initial good relations between the three organizations.

Then in these caste organizations slowly the political ambitions crept in. NSS started a political party NDP, and SNDP started SRP, and bigger political organizations like Congress and Marxists also instigated their interests. And so NSS and SNDP were also thinking that if we are connected with Sangh people, it might affect our political capabilities, particularly if they wanted to ally with either the Congress or the Marxists during elections.⁶³

Neither caste party really succeeded politically, but the electoral links forged with the Communists and Congress remained, so that the two organizations were each seen as linked to one of the major poles in Kerala electoral politics: the NSS with the Congress, and the SNDP and the Dalit Pulaya Mahasabha with the CPM.

So have these allegiances made it difficult for the BJP to create a base in these communities? Yes in the sense that we now have to recruit them at the individual level and go to each and every one to convince them to support us...⁶⁴

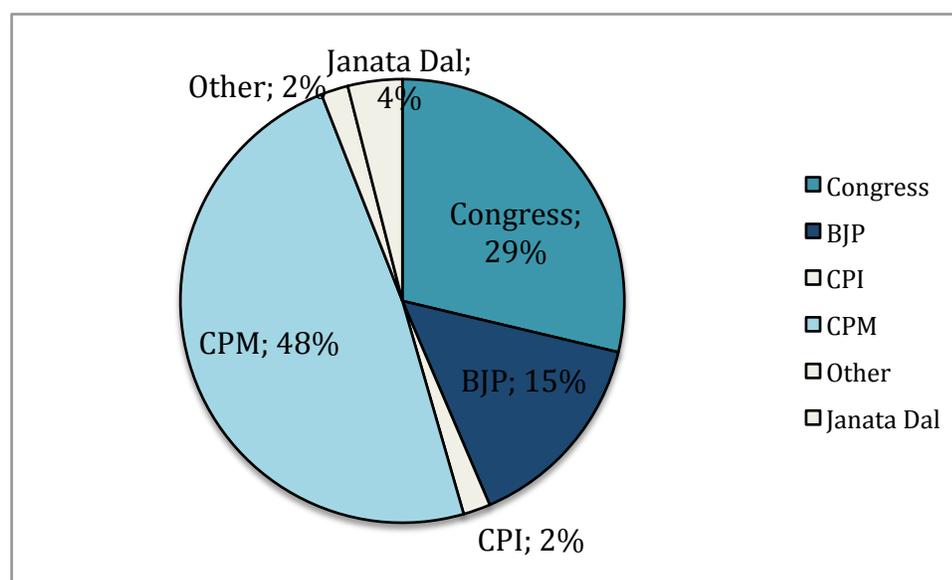
This story fits with the statistical analysis presented before. Those individuals recruited to participate in Sangh activities vote for the BJP, but the curtailing of any spillover effects witnessed in Chhattisgarh has limited the number of such recruits. While there have certainly been oscillations in the closeness of these alliances over time, both the SNDP and the Pulaya Mahasabha have been historically tied to the CPM, despite the BJP's recent attempts to make overtures to both associations.⁶⁵

⁶³ Interview with K. Ummakanthan, Thiruvananthapuram, 5th August, 2008.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Reports of the SNDP accusing higher castes for dominating supposedly egalitarian communist party structures have surfaced from time to time. See P.K. Surendran 'Third Front May Emerge in Kerala', *Times of India*, January 8th, 1994. Such tensions have been compounded by the fact that the majority of the communist leadership in the state has been upper caste: the longtime CPM leader EMS Namboodiripad was a Brahmin, past leaders such as Nayanar and current CM VS Achutanandan are Nairs. Further the Sangh and the SNDP have allied even in recent times, most significantly when they joined hands to critique the Left Front government's decision to take control over the organization responsible for overseeing the administration of temples and temple lands. See AV Verghese, "Devaswom Bill draws flak", *Deccan Herald*, 14th January, 1998. With respect to the BJP's recent overtures to the SNDP, O. Rajagopal was reported to have developed close ties to SNDP general

However, even with the caveat that lower caste associations are only loosely linked to left parties, the pattern of allegiance is quite clear in the survey, with over 52% of Pulaya Mahasabha members voting for the CPM, while less than half that number (24%) voted for the Congress, and less than 5% for the BJP. More generally, Figure 5.9 shows how the CPM, in addition to recruiting voters through its internal organizational apparatus, also dominates even among respondents who profess membership in a *non-party organization*, a reverse of the national and Chhattisgarhi trends where the BJP was pre-eminent among such voters:



Source: Author conducted survey (2008)

FIGURE 5.9: Party Share of Non-party Associational Members

According to leaders of the Sangh movement in Kerala the pervasiveness of caste as a structuring force in local politics has been difficult to overcome. K.R. Ummakanthan, the senior *sanghathan mantri* (organizing secretary) for the BJP in Kerala, who is also an RSS full-timer explained:

secretary Vellappaly Natesan (K. Venugopal, 'CPM-SNDP ties hit new low', *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore, 1st February, 2000).

It is difficult to be a third front because we cannot address regional or caste aspirations—caste cannot be a major factor for us [as they seek a cross-caste vote], so caste organizations or caste-based politics can become a major obstacle for us. Further national issues have to be taken up by all major parties, and by us as a third force also, so it becomes difficult to create a multipolar party system, so that creating a cross-caste coalition, particularly for a party associated with upper-castes in the state is far more difficult than in other parts of the country.⁶⁶

In summary an active history of lower caste political mobilization was built upon by communists and caste associations in Kerala, and produced a strongly redistributive state machinery which furnished Dalits and Adivasis with far higher levels of public provisioning than the national norm. At the same time, both political forces mobilized lower castes against their upper caste oppressors, and in doing so politicized them horizontally within caste groupings.⁶⁷ The simultaneous weakening of demand for Sangh services coupled with the abundant supply of organizational alternatives explicitly hostile to Hindu nationalism's mission seems to have delivered a serious body blow to the social organizational strategy of the BJP and its affiliates in Kerala.

⁶⁶ Further, it cannot be asserted that the BJP's poor performance is purely the result of tactical voting by lower caste voters who would have supported the party if they thought it had a chance of winning. Respondents were asked whether they would have supported the BJP if it had a chance of winning the assembly polls, and over 90% of non-BJP supporters said they would still not support the party.

⁶⁷ K. Jayaprasad, an RSS-affiliated researcher at the Bharatiya Vichara Kendrum run by P. Parameswaram in Thiruvananthapuram, who has written extensively on the RSS in Kerala argued that 'the main obstacle the Sangh faces is how to replace the social functions caste organizations played in Kerala society with their own activities. *Seva* (service) activities will have to play a major role, but as yet have not paid dividends.' Interview with K. Jayaprasad, Thiruvananthapuram, August 9th, 2008.

5.7 Stuck in 'Agitational' Mode

The social service strategy has clearly not worked in Kerala. From winning 6.5% of the vote in 1987, the party actually saw its electoral share decrease to 5.7% by 1996, 5.48% in 2001, and 4.75% in 2006. Nor is it true that these aggregate statistics cover up pockets of success in the state. As the table below indicates, only in one district (Kasaragod) did the party manage to poll over 10% of the vote since 1987.

TABLE 5.9: BJP Vote Share in Assembly Elections

District	1987	1991	1996	2006
Kasaragod	16.1	13.8	16.8	12.34
Kannur	5.3	3.6	4.9	1.96
Wayanad	6.1	6.2	7.0	2.6
Kozhikode	8.8	4.9	7.7	4.85
Malappuram	7.9	5.8	6.0	2.03
Palakkad	5.4	5.2	6.4	4.34
Thrissur	6.0	5.1	6.0	4.45
Ernakulam	4.3	3.8	4.6	2.03
Idukki	2.2	2.6	1.1	.83
Kottayam	2.1	3.4	3.5	1.94
Alappuzha	3.6	2.7	3.2	3.52
Pathanamthitta	7.7	5.4	6.	6.46
Kollam	4.8	2.7	3.5	3.59
Thiruvananthapuram	11.7	5.9	6.6	7.55
Kerala	6.5	4.7	5.7	4.75

Sources: Data for 1987, 1991, and 1996 from Chiriyankandath (2001), p. 219. 2006 data from Kerala Government Information Center, Thiruvananthapuram.

Perhaps the strongest indication of the party's lack of success in the state comes from the fact that its most celebrated achievement to date was the party leader O. Rajagopal's securing of 228,052 votes in the 2004 National election from the Thiruvananthapuram constituency, the most ever by a BJP candidate.⁶⁸ However Mr.

⁶⁸ This performance was literally mentioned in every single interview I conducted in the state with BJP functionaries, irrespective of their rank within the party. Data from 'UDF-LDF fight, BJP slips in Kerala by-poll', *Indo-Asian News Service*, November 7th, 2003.

Rajagopal still only placed third in this race, and was greatly aided by the fact that under the previous BJP-led government he was given an appointment in the national Cabinet berth as a Railways Minister, allowing him to acquire a bigger profile on the basis of railways construction initiated in the state.⁶⁹ The only other significant political office held by the BJP in the state was another appointee, Sikander Bakht, the most prominent Muslim face of the party, who was appointed Governor of Kerala in April 2002, once again by the BJP-led government in New Delhi, and remained in the post until his death in 2004.⁷⁰

The failure of the social organizational strategy in Kerala despite the Sangh's considerable efforts is quite clear. However two questions remain unanswered. First, why did Hindu nationalists expend so much effort in attempting to implement service-based recruitment in such inhospitable political terrain? The answer to this question is difficult to establish concretely since Sangh and BJP activists were evasive when asked about the matter directly. However, this analysis does highlight a couple of factors that may prove important in furnishing an explanation. Firstly, Kerala's relatively small Hindu population made it even more imperative for the BJP to win support from all segments of the Hindu electorate than in other states. Secondly, as this chapter has outlined, Kerala's active missionary networks drew the Sangh's cadre to the state several decades ago, with the result that the RSS had extensive networks of *shakhas* in the state even prior to 1990 (see Figure 5.2). While *shakhas* did not provide

⁶⁹ I am grateful to Ramesh Babu for this observation, interview, Thiruvananthapuram, 2nd August, 2008.

⁷⁰ 'Sikander Bakht is new Kerala Governor', *Nationwide International News*, April 2, 2002.

The BJP-led coalition the National Democratic Alliance did record a victory in the state through the triumph of one of its allies, the Indian Federal Democratic Party in the Muvattupuzha constituency. However, even this success was short-lived as the winning candidate, PC Thomas, defected shortly afterwards to the Communist-led LDF. Further, the BJP candidate, CK Padmanabhan contested the same Thiruvananthapuram seat in a 2005 by-election and could barely garner over 36,000 votes, a crushing defeat for the party. 'Kerala BJP begins damage control exercise,' *Hindustan Times*.

November 27th 2005. Rajagopal himself contested again in the State Assembly elections in 2006 from Palakkad constituency, and was soundly defeated by both Congress and Communist candidates. See 'Kerala results "utter disappointment"', says BJP, Indo-Asian News Service, May 11th, 2005

social services, the existence of this network meant that the Sangh had a strong reservoir of cadres to tap in order to implement a service strategy in the 1990s.

In addition to this supply of activists, the sentiments expressed by Rajgopal and others quoted earlier reveal that BJP leaders truly believed that Dalits and Adivasis were underrepresented in state politics. Due to their belief that the Congress was a party dominated by religious minorities, and the Communists were a party dominated by Namboodiris and Ezhavas, Sangh activists saw Dalits and Adivasis as the only populations that had not been systematically incorporated into either of the state's major political blocs. This confluence of electoral necessity, availability of personnel, and a sense of particular opportunities available with marginalized communities seem to have informed the Sangh's seemingly curious allocation of effort to recruitment in Kerala.

In addition to understanding the Sangh's initial motivations, a question remains as to whether Hindu nationalists in Kerala intend to continue emphasizing a service strategy despite its apparent failure. The very structure of the empirical inquiry, as detailed in Chapter 3, eschews trying to 'explain' the outcome in general, in favor of a more focused analysis of the nature of the relationship of a specific set of key causal variables with that outcome. As such, the research design is not aimed at uncovering any and every potential linkage the BJP has managed to forge with poor voters. However this question, as well as what the future strategy for the Sangh is in the state, is worthy of further attention.

The regression analysis seems to strongly indicate that the Sangh has not managed to even make a class-based linkage with elite Dalit and Adivasi voters: richer respondents in the sample were no more likely to support the BJP than their counterparts lower down the income scale. Support for the idea that the BJP is making inroads among more pious members of these communities is also less than convincing,

as the variable *Religiosity* is not statistically significant in the models tested earlier. Instead, the BJP in Kerala seems to be far more reliant on voters identifying with Hindu nationalism ideologically in order to get support among SC/ST voters. More importantly, the organizational variables which were also statistically significant, were found to be limited by the simple fact that very few respondents participated in, or had a good opinion of Sangh social service organizations. The mechanism was robust, but its pervasiveness in Kerala society was extremely low.

However, the variable, *ConversionBan* is both statistically and substantively significant across different specifications. As Figure 5.6 showed earlier in the chapter, over 80% of the BJP's support comes from voters fully supportive of banning conversions, compared to less than 40% for the other two parties. Other less locally specific agendas such as the building of the Ram temple at Ayodhya also received majority support among BJP voters, compared to less than 2% of voters for either the Congress or Communists. In Chhattisgarh, by contrast, there was far less difference between Congress and BJP voters ideologically, and the *ConversionBan* variable was not significant in the models tested.

What the data therefore seems to suggest is that the BJP is still primarily appealing to lower caste voters along ideological axes, compared to Chhattisgarh where the social service model seems to now be dominant in influencing the decisions of Dalit and Adivasi voters. Moreover, the Sangh leadership in Kerala repeatedly indicated that rather than distance themselves from communal politics, they are trying to develop a vote bank in the state through 'agitational politics', not social organization which is simply not offering any purchase in the state. Both P. Parameswaram and O. Rajagopal spoke of the importance of upcoming agitations around issues ranging from the persecution of Hindus in Kashmir to the inaction of the central government in permitting the construction of a temple in Ayodhya.

However the current central strategy among the Sangh leadership for developing a following among lower caste voters revolves around leading agitations that would create internal fissures within Dalit and Adivasi communities along religious lines. Specifically, the Sangh has been organizing protests against the findings of the government-appointed Sachar Commission, which recommended that Muslims be offered the same mechanisms to ensure ‘social uplift’ as those accorded to Scheduled Castes and Tribes, citing high levels of poverty and unemployment among Indian Muslims. The Sangh has translated this demand as tantamount to asking the central government to permit Muslims access to government quotas for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, thus portraying the report as an attempt by Muslims to encroach upon benefits meant for lower caste Hindus.

The Sangh has also connected this demand with that of converted Dalit Christians to be allowed access to reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.⁷¹ Currently converted Christians and Muslims, unlike their Sikh and Buddhist counterparts, are constitutionally not recognized as having Scheduled Caste origins, a matter under review by the Supreme Court. Christian and Muslim organizations have long argued that neither the stigma, nor the socioeconomic marginalization of a person is removed with conversion, necessitating their continued recognition as a Scheduled Caste.⁷² The Sangh views this demand as hypocritical: since an incentive given by Christian missionaries to Dalits to convert was the shedding of their caste identity, it is unfair to then demand access to public benefits afforded to these caste groups.

⁷¹ The most visible demand for this access within Kerala was made on the 15th of March, 2006 in Thiruvananthapuram, where about 500 Dalit Christian organizations met and agreed to boycott political parties not clearly supporting Dalit Christian reservations. (‘Dalit Christians to Vote for Parties Supporting Dalit Christian Reservation.’ *All India Christian Council Newsletter*, March 2006).

⁷² This view found support in several National Commission Reports, most famously the controversial Mandal Commission report. See M. Madhu Chandra, ‘Will Dalit Christians Get Justice?’ *Countercurrents*, 16th July, 2007. Available at www.countercurrents.org.

In response to these perceived dual threats from Kerala's influential minority communities, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad [Worldwide Hindu Association, VHP], the 'cultural protection' wing of the Sangh has set up an SC/ST Reservations Protection Council in September of 2007 in Kerala. K.V. Madanan, the working president of the council, argued that reservations were laws meant 'for the emancipation of SC/ST communities exclusively. He maintained that the Sachar report, as well as demands from converted SC/ST Christians to be allowed access to quotas reserved for lower castes went against the very spirit of reservations, which were for Hindu uplift. Further, if converted Christians and Muslims were also given access as potential political candidates to constituencies reserved for SC/STs, then he argued 'the greatest loser will be the BJP', necessitating urgent action by the Sangh. His discussion of Sangh work highlighted the emphasis on agitational and symbolic politics over a service model for the movement in Kerala:

The focus on SC/STs has been gradually increasing. For example we are showing that untouchability is eradicated- and also we are taking up the right for SCs to perform *puja* [prayer] irrespective of caste, whether *savarana* [high-caste] or *avarana* [out-caste]. We are taking up this and so many other agitations, most notably concerning the threat that SC/STs face from converted lower caste minorities. Through such struggles we will build a base within these communities.⁷³

Such rhetoric was repeated by BJP leaders, particularly the state head of the party's Scheduled Caste and Minority *Morchas* [activist wings].⁷⁴ O. Rajagopal organized a state-level seminar in August, 2008 in Ernakulam for leaders of various caste

⁷³ Interview with K. V. Madanan, Ernakulam, 7th August, 2008.

⁷⁴ Interviews with P.M. Velayuthan (SC Morcha), Ernakulam, 8th August, 2008 and K.V. Sabina (Minority Morcha), Ernakulam, 8th August, 2008..

organizations working with Dalit and Adivasi communities, to talk about the threat they faced from Muslim and converted Christian populations:

I told these groups: look the SC/ST population in Kerala is about 35 lakhs [3.5 million]. Now the converted Christians say they number 45 lakhs [4.5 million]. Because see anyone of these converted Christians can just say ‘oh my grandfather was a Scheduled Caste’, and then pay some money to an official to get the certificate needed. So this is a great danger—and I told them that whatever benefits you are now enjoying, imagine if another 45 lakh people are suddenly added on and they [the converted Christians] are better funded- they will take more than half, perhaps all of the remaining reserved spots.⁷⁵

The Sangh’s intentions are quite clear here: if the Dalit and Adivasi population of the state can be polarized into Hindu and non-Hindu sections, the prospects for it to harvest the former community’s votes will improve through an agitational strategy. This focus on building a vote-bank among Dalits and Adivasis itself emerged from the fact, stated earlier in the chapter, that the Sangh still believes its best chances of expansion in the state are with SC/ST communities who despite the efforts of communists and caste associations still remain *relatively* less well-organized and connected with pre-existing organizations, compared to Nairs and Ezhavas. The state leader of the BJP’s Yuva Morcha (youth wing), K. Surendran, noted:

What is important is the caste groups not with NSS and SNDP. That area is better to concentrate on, because NSS and SNDP is very close to parties, NSS with UDF [the Congress-led political coalition] and SNDP with LDF [the Communist-led coalition]. We might even get good relations with NSS and

⁷⁵ Interview with O. Rajagopal, Thiruvananthapuram, 4th August, 2008

SNDP but a better option is to create our own organizations with new populations such as the SCs and STs.⁷⁶

The state unit of the party seems fixed in its belief that an agitational approach will yield dividends. M.S. Kumar, a state secretary for the party noted:

In the last two years we are conducting so many agitations against corruption, terrorism—these agitations give BJP a good face in Kerala. Tomorrow also there is a big agitation for the Amarnath issue [a communally charged land dispute in the Kashmir valley] . So this agitative face of BJP is helping us to get broader support from all sections of society.⁷⁷

However, if the BJP's own history serves as any guide, it appears highly unlikely that an agitational strategy will prove successful in recruiting subaltern voters. As was outlined in some detail in Chapter 2, the deployment of such tactics during the 1980s proved far more successful for the Sangh with higher castes than with either Dalits or Adivasis. The fact that the Sangh has returned to these tactics in Kerala is thus a symbol of their desperation to expand their electoral base in a difficult political terrain.

5.8 Conclusion

Features of local political contexts must therefore be taken into account in tempering the central argument presented here, problematizing ideas of an easy universalism, and positing instead a more nuanced approach for making sense of the ground realities we seek to analyze. The contribution of this chapter is in proving that the service organizational approach is not impeded simply by the costliness (both financially and temporally) of setting up new chapters and wings to penetrate new, equally passive socio-political communities. In some settings, as is clearly the case in

⁷⁶ Interview with K. Surendran, Thiruvananthapuram, August 5th, 2008.

⁷⁷ Interview with M.S. Kumar, Thiruvananthapuram, August 9th, 2008.

Kerala, even strong organizational presence cannot ensure electoral success: the receptivity of these communities to Sangh overtures is itself variable. Thus, only where underlying political conditions are enabling, in terms of poor conditions of development, and low vibrancy of lower caste associational life can the organizational approach hope to succeed.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING POOR CHOICES

6.1 Re-visiting the Argument

The variable success of the upper caste, Hindu nationalist, BJP with lower caste voters provided this project with a unique opportunity to analyze the intersection of two crucial issues for scholars of democratic politics. Firstly, the dissertation sought to understand the conditions under which an elite party could win the mass support required to succeed in elections. Additionally, the project sought to understand how religious nationalists expand their appeal among poor voters. The central puzzle motivating this work was why lower castes in India, who [not only share conditions of material destitution but live materially destitute and culturally marginalized lives, exhibit highly varied electoral preferences. These divergent choices shatter certain homogenizing assumptions of sociological theories of electoral politics, which presume common socio-economic experiences will inform similar political preferences. The introductory chapter outlines an analytic framework which outlined the ways in which specific parties seek to forge linkages with poor voters, and the contextual factors that might cause these tactics to vary in efficacy at both the state and individual voter level.

From within this broader framework, the project shifts to focus on the fortunes of the BJP. I argue in Chapter 1, that the BJP was the most compelling case for analysis, as its upper caste support base and leadership made it (in the eyes of most scholars) the least likely major party to succeed with lower caste electorates. Chapter 2 outlines why the strategies available to other political parties, such as enacting pro-poor policies or promoting lower caste leaders, were untenable options for the BJP. Such approaches involved unacceptable compromises to the interests of the party's

upper caste constituencies. Further, the BJP's preferred tactics of communal agitations, while successful in consolidating an upper caste base for the party, were unable to recruit subaltern voters who had been alienated by the movement's Brahminical ideology. The BJP thus faced a particularly daunting challenge in its quest to forge a broader electoral consensus.

My central argument holds that where the party succeeded in this difficult task, its triumph was due to the work of service-providing affiliates within the Hindu nationalist movement. Chapter 3 presents an initial national analysis using survey data from seventeen states, which shows quite clearly that the pattern of the party's gains with poor voters at the state level appeared to be significantly correlated with the aggregate presence of these service wings. Individual-level regression analysis further supports this organizational hypothesis, highlighting the major advantage the BJP appeared to hold among subaltern voters who were members of civil society associations. Equally importantly, the empirical analysis in Chapter 3, including matching techniques, reveals that neither piety nor support for Hindutva are the primary determinants of Dalit and Adivasi voters' choice to support the BJP. Thus the linkage being forged by organizational affiliates between poor voters and the BJP, while electorally effective, cannot be understood simply as the product of ideological conversion by manipulative elites, but should instead be understood as the result of participating in Sangh-sponsored service activities due largely to pragmatic motivations.

The case study of the Hindu right's efforts in Chhattisgarh in Chapter 4 sought to build upon this national analysis. The results of a local survey conducted for this study found that even in a more controlled intrastate comparison, the BJP fared much better with lower caste voters in districts with dense Sangh service networks. In addition, the local survey helped provide a more nuanced understanding of the

multiple ways in which the service strategy forged linkages with poor voters. The analysis found that both participation in Sangh activities, and positive opinions of Sangh social work dramatically increased the likelihood of a subaltern voter supporting the BJP. Moreover these organizational variables were again much more influential than a respondent's class, piety, or even ideological affiliation with Hindutva. Thus, while service organizations have undeniably helped train a small, intensely committed cadre, the links they have established with a broader subaltern population appear to have been instrumentally based on their opinion of the benefits of Sangh services.

Chapter 4 also demonstrated the advantages of a mixed-methods design, using interviews with political leaders and grassroots activists to outline the causal mechanisms behind the significant statistical relationships emerging from the survey analyses. Interviews with Sangh activists and observation of Sangh organizational activities made evident the myriad ways in which service outreach was used to turn voters towards supporting the BJP. I demonstrated how these organizations use a discourse of 'apolitical' service work to gain access to distrustful subaltern communities, and then over time use their activities to counter the poor opinion of the Hindu right prevalent among these populations. Further, the Sangh's grassroots activists utilized their self-constructed neutrality to great effect in mobilizing support for the BJP at the polls, including through such indirect tactics as spreading rumors about rival candidates, and providing moral seals of approval for Hindu right leaders.

This case study of Chhattisgarh was paired with the analysis of a state, Kerala, in which the Sangh deployed its social service strategy, but failed to generate comparable electoral success. In contrast to Chhattisgarh, a local survey conducted in the state found no improvement in the BJP's performance in districts where its affiliates had a dense network. The individual level analysis indicated that while

participants in Sangh activities were still more likely to support the party, Sangh chapters were able to recruit far fewer respondents than in Chhattisgarh. Thus while the *efficacy* of the strategy remained strong, its *extensiveness* was severely curtailed. Further, while the national and Chhattisgarhi data had indicated that the Sangh was recruiting support for the BJP beyond the small minority of lower caste voters ideologically committed to Hindutva, the results in Kerala indicate that a similar transition has not been effected in the state. Instead, BJP supporters here were marked by a commitment to sectarian politics, indicating that service wings have been unable to forge the wider non-ideological linkages that they had proved so effective in constructing elsewhere.

A combination of survey and interview data pointed to the salience of two factors in furnishing an explanation for the service approach's reduced potency. Firstly, an active history of lower caste protest, built upon and radicalized by the region's strong communist movement, produced a legacy of superior relative public availability of basic services. In turn, such provision reduced the demand for those services offered by the Sangh. Equally importantly, prior lower caste political activism had created vibrant contemporary caste associations in the state, a relative rarity in India. These associations have forged horizontal political bonds among lower castes, and between lower castes and leftist political parties, preventing the attempts of the Sangh to forge vertical, cross-caste coalitions of support for the BJP. As this comparative instance shows, the ability of a service approach to deliver results for the BJP remains highly contextually contingent on prior levels of human development, and subaltern political activity.

6.2 Theoretical Implications and Areas for Future Research:

6.21 Religious Nationalism and the Poor: A Comparative Perspective

While this dissertation has been a comparative study of several states in one country, its central argument does resonate with accounts of the growing appeal of religious parties in other parts of the world. Studies of Islamist parties in particular have focused on the importance of service-providing organizational networks in spreading their appeal in the Middle East, North Africa, and South-east Asia.¹ Like Hindu nationalism, many Islamic movements began with relatively narrow pools of support, and such tactics were seen as crucial in generating wider popularity.² Carrie Rosefsky Wickham outlines the construction of a ‘“parallel Islamic sector” in Egypt, that is, a sector largely independent of – and competitive with- the cultural, religious, and service-oriented arms of the Egyptian state.’³ This sector consists of private mosques, Islamic voluntary associations (including welfare societies), cultural organizations, health clinics, and schools, and even for-profit organizations such as Islamic banks, which all sought to mobilize support for Islamists across social classes.⁴

¹ In a broad analysis of the causes of the popularity of political Islamists, Mark Tessler notes:
In some countries, Islamic groups have also built support through the provision of social services and through community assistance projects carried out under the banner of religion. The operation of clinics, schools, day care centers and welfare distribution programs are among the most common of these activities.

Mark Tessler, ‘The Origins of Popular Support for Islamist Movements’ in John P. Entelis (ed.) Islam, Democracy and the State in North Africa, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, pp. 93-126, p. 112.

² For example, Glenn Robinson notes that ‘In terms of social class, the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood tended to be urban, upper-middle-class-merchants’, who were better off than the populations they recruited, a situation very similar to that of the BJP’s. Glenn E. Robinson, ‘ Hamas as Social Movement’, in Quentin Wiktorowicz (ed.), Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, pp. 112-139.

³ Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, Mobilizing Islam, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 95.

⁴ Ibid, p. 97.

Groups like Hamas in Palestine and Hizballah in Lebanon have also had a long history of engaging in social welfare activities, but like the Sangh, these activities were initially circumscribed to the provision of emergency relief.⁵ Where the Sangh had first established its service credentials by taking care of Hindu refugees fleeing Pakistan during the Partition of the subcontinent, Hizballah's initial service work in the late 1980s focused on providing care for displaced Shiite communities in the southern suburbs of Beirut.⁶ However, like the RSS, Hizballah began realizing the potential political gains of service work, and, as Judith Harik puts it, 'the impact that the effective provision of social services, free from corrupt practices, could have on its support and popularity.'⁷

During the early 1990s (when the Sangh also began emphasizing a service-based strategy), Hizballah began to expand and develop wings devoted to addressing basic material needs of poor citizens, to the point where in certain areas it had outstripped the Lebanese state's provision of key services:

Hizballah is arguably the most effective and efficient political party in the country... . Its medical facilities are far better than those available in government hospitals, on which the poor would otherwise have to rely... . In addition to medical care, a network of schools, firms, community centers, and public assistance facilities (e.g. food distribution centers for the needy) fall under Hizballah's wing. Hizballah maintains its own engineering and construction company, and it has been quick to lend material support and expertise to those whose homes have been damaged or destroyed, whether by Israeli attacks or as a

⁵ See for example, Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

⁶ See Judith Harik, 'The public and social services of the Lebanese militias', Papers on Lebanon Series no. 14, Oxford: The Centre for Lebanese Studies.

⁷ John Williams, 'Circumstantial Pragmatism: The Flexible Ideology of the Lebanese Hizballah', *Journal of Middle Eastern Geopolitics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2006), pp. 37-49, p. 42.

result of internecine clashes within Lebanon.⁸

The Jihad al-Bina', which focuses on the construction of Hizballah's social work projects accelerated its activities during the 1990s, as did the party's Health and Educational units.⁹ John Williams noted that this expansion of services was concentrated in the party's strongholds in southern Lebanon and the Beirut suburbs, which were also areas of relative underdevelopment. Na'im Qasim, Hizballah's second-in-command, stated quite explicitly that this work was expected to yield political dividends, arguing that 'social work serves to enrich supporters' confidence in the viability for the Party's cause and course.'¹⁰

Analyses of the political trajectory of Hamas in Palestine also draw attention to the significant role played by social services in raising the group's popularity. Sara Roy argues that during the years of the Oslo peace process (from 1993-2000), Hamas found its more militant activities losing appeal, and began to shift emphasis towards service activities to expand its support base. This recent expansion 'went beyond the traditional boundaries of religious education and proselytizing', and encompassed a range of medical, educational, and financial activities among the poor and working classes, again with the explicit purpose of expanding the political appeal of the movement.¹¹ While there is considerable disagreement over the level of separation between these service wings and Hamas' more militant branches, there is little dispute over the fact that these chapters have increased their presence substantially over the

⁸ Augustus R. Norton, 'Hizballah of Lebanon: Extremist Ideals vs. Mundane Politics', New York: Council on Foreign Relations.

⁹ Williams notes that Hizballah operates six hospitals and more than twenty dispensaries, in addition to several schools, local mosques and cultural centers, and agricultural cooperatives, and provides several million dollars worth of financial aid to young students (Williams, *op. cit.* (2006), p. 43).

¹⁰ Na'im Qassem, Hizballah: The Story from Within, London: SAQI Books, 2005, p. 86, as quoted in Williams, *op. cit.* (2006), p. 43.

¹¹ Sara Roy, 'Hamas and the Transformation(s) of Political Islam in Palestine,' pp. 15-16, *Current History*, (January 2003), pp. 13-20.

past two decades, and have been instrumental in helping Hamas' reputation among low-income populations.¹²

Analyses of political Islam also echo other findings of this project. Judith Harik's survey of Lebanese voters provides one of the few empirical analysis of political support for religious nationalists, where she also finds that deep religiosity, or even attachment to the specific political goals of Hizballah, fail to distinguish those who support religious nationalists from those who do not.¹³ However, Harik concludes that this reality is to the advantage of the party, indicating that it has expanded its appeal beyond a small, ideologically committed core. While agreeing that garnering non-ideological support helps the party at the polls, I disagree that the movement will necessarily see such gains as an unmitigated success. Given that the stated goal of most religious nationalists is nothing short of social transformation, the inability of service strategies to facilitate ideological shifts is a significant shortcoming.

Further, while invaluable in providing information of voter opinions, Harik's analysis was not designed to specifically examine the potential mechanisms of a service-based approach. Indeed, despite the prevalence of arguments stressing the importance of services, there remains a significant shortage of empirical analyses of the specific mechanisms through which such work affects political behavior. Any assessment of the generalizability of the argument presented here about the BJP would at a minimum require some of the tools of analyses used in this dissertation, from

¹² While Roy (*op. cit.* 2003) argues that Hamas service organizations have increasingly distanced themselves from an exclusive focus on spreading the movement's Islamist ideology, Matthew Levitt argues that service wings remain fundamentally connected, and subservient to the central political apparatus of Hamas. Moreover, he states that the function of these activities is to radicalize and recruit young Palestinians for the movement's more militant activities. See Mathew Levitt, 'Hamas from Cradle to Grave', *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2004, pp. 3-15.

¹³ Judith Harik, 'Between Islam and the System: Sources and Implications of Popular Support for Lebanon's Hizballah', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Mar., 1996), pp. 41-67.

voter surveys to multi-level interview work, to be replicated in other regions where religious nationalists are a salient political force.

6.22 Movements, Parties and Movement Parties:

In addition to its comparative implications, the present study also highlights the theoretical utility of bridging the largely separate literatures on political parties and social movements. As Donna Van Cott notes in her study of ethnic parties in Latin America, social movement theory can provide key insights about those parties spawned by organizations engaged in sustained collective action.¹⁴ Skeptics might note that engaging with social movement discourse might introduce an unnecessary degree of conceptual baggage and terminology, without sufficiently offsetting analytic gains. Indeed concepts like ‘political opportunity structures’ and ‘discursive framing’ have been repeatedly criticized as prone to conceptual stretching even within the study of social movements. Suggestions for their extension to other of subjects of analysis is thus bound to cause many scholars of parties and electoral behavior concern.¹⁵

¹⁴ Donna Van Cott, *From Movements to Parties in Latin America*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

¹⁵ See Jeff Goodwin and James Jasper, “Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory,” *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1999, pp. 27-54. The debate on how to define ‘opportunity structures’ in particular, of which factors to include and exclude, is as lengthy as it is heated. There is an inevitable tension between seeking a definition which can encompass the realities of specific political contexts and one which is so broad as to render any argument based on it little more than a tautology. Political opportunity have been variously defined to include the openness of access to political institutions, the stability of political alignments, the availability of allies and support groups (McAdam, Tarrow), the state’s capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam), the location of the movement in the protest cycle (Brockett), the ability of the government to meet political demands (Kitschelt), and changes in public policies (Costain, Meyer), not to mention a host of regionally and temporally specific factors. See: Charles Brockett, *Political Movements and Violence in Central America* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ann Costain, *Inviting Women’s Rebellion: A Political Process Interpretation of the Women’s Movement*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1992; Herbert Kitschelt, “Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies”, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 16, No. 1, (January, 1986), pp. 57-85; Douglas McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982; David Meyer, ‘Institutionalizing Dissent: The United States structure of political opportunity and the end of the nuclear freeze movement.’ *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 8, No. 2, (June 1993), pp. 157-79, and “Protest and Political Opportunities”, *Annual*

However the fact remains that many of these concepts do resonate with the present study in ways that are theoretically productive to acknowledge. Like many accounts of social movements, this dissertation has noted the influence of factors such as public policies and density of associational life as structuring the political opportunities for the BJP's expansion efforts. At the same time, I have argued that a permissive contextual setting does not automatically produce results. Success was predicated on the formulation and implementation of a strategy by 'mobilizing structures', which in Hindutva's case were networks of highly dedicated Sangh cadres. In addition to expending a considerable amount of organizational effort, these activists had to skillfully 'frame' their activities as both apolitical and removed from the casteist discourse of Hindutva, in order to gain access to initially distrustful subaltern communities.¹⁷ This interplay between opportunity structures, mobilizing agents, and cultural framing resonates with important analytic frameworks used in social movement theory more than those dominant in the study political parties and party systems, which tend to alternate between extremes of social structuralism or rational actor models.¹⁸

Acknowledging shared terrain might offer an avenue for a more conceptually eclectic approach to studying political parties, and particularly for studying the relatively under-examined sphere in which parties and social movement actors

Review of Sociology, Vol. 30, (2004), pp. 125-45; Sidney Tarrow Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994;

¹⁷ David Snow and Robert Benford, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 26, (2000) pp. 611-639; Hank Johnston, "Verification and Proof in Frame and Discourse Analysis" in Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg eds. Methods of Social Movement Research. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002; William Gamson and David Meyer, "Framing Political Opportunity" in Douglas. McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald (eds.) Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 275-90.

¹⁸ In particular, this mixture of factors is emphasized in the 'political process' analytic framework (see Doug McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). For an application of political process theory to the study of religious nationalism, see Robinson, *op. cit.* 2004.

interact. For example, the next section outlines how the concept of ‘radical flanks’, developed to understand relationships between different social movement organizations, provides a useful prism through which to understand the complex relationships between political parties and their movement affiliates. Such applications in turn force movement theorists to consider how their frameworks are problematized when applied to organizations operating in electoral arenas.

A) Radical Flanks

In the historical narrative offered by this dissertation, the efforts of Hindu nationalism’s different wings were depicted as acting largely in concert with each other towards achieving a common set of goals. However, this argument certainly does not mean to imply that the relations between different chapters of the Sangh Parivar are always harmonious. Hindutva suffers from many internal fissures, which often conform to moderate-radical divides that characterize many, if not most social movements. In particular, many members of the BJP, prompted by electoral concerns and alliance politics, tend to favor non-militant mobilizational tactics and a downplaying of the most extreme communal rhetoric. However, the party’s Sangh partners reject any attempts at ideological dilution, and often advocate utilizing any means necessary to ensure social adherence to Hindutva’s core principles.¹⁹

Existing consensus in the social movement literature would predict this moderate-radical divide to have one of two outcomes. In one scenario, moderates benefit in their relations with actors external to the movement because they are relatively pragmatist compared to their radical partners.²⁰ Former BJP Prime Minister

¹⁹ See Christophe Jaffrelot, *op. cit.*, 1993.

²⁰ Douglas McAdam, ‘Studying Social Movements: A Conceptual Tour of the Field/’ Program on Nonviolent Sanctions and Cultural Survival, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1992.

Atal Beharee Vajpayee has been understood to be a principal beneficiary of this effect, as his perceived rhetorical moderation on issues of sectarian militant tactics won him plaudits from electoral partners and news media.²¹ Alternatively, some scholars have argued that the activities of a radical flank can serve to discredit the entire movement, including its moderate factions. Analysts of Indian politics have typically understood the impact of the Sangh's activities on the BJP's electoral fortunes to fall into this latter category.²² For example, the BJP's poor performance in the 1993 Assembly elections was widely understood as the fallout from the 1992 Babri mosque demolition and subsequent communal mobilizations orchestrated by its Sangh affiliates. Similarly, the party's loss of power in 2004 was understood, even by some of the BJP's own allies, to be at least partially the consequence of widespread disapproval of Sangh-organized violence against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002.²³

However, I have argued in this dissertation that the Hindu right's efforts with Dalits and Adivasis suggest two further potential 'flank effects'. Unlike the conventional 'positive' and 'negative' effects described above, Devashree Gupta has argued that in many instances, radical flanks can produce gains or losses for *both* moderates and radicals at the same time.²⁴ This dissertation's argument concurs with such an assessment. Not only do groups like the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram succeed in

²¹ While he was himself a former *swyamsevak* [RSS worker], and remained committed to the RSS as an organization, Vajpayee largely avoided referring to the Ayodhya demolition during his 1996 election campaigns, and stressed that the party manifesto be centered on issues of governance rather than Hindutva. See Pralay Kanungo, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 228.

²² Herbert Haines, "Black Radicalization and the Funding of Civil Rights: 1957-1970", in Douglas McAdam and David Snow (eds.), Social Movements: Reading on their Emergence, Mobilization, and Dynamics. Los Angeles: Roxbury, 1997. For accounts of the BJP-RSS moderate-radical divide, see Hansen, *op. cit.* 1999, p. 228. and Jaffrelot, *op. cit.* 1993, p. 323.

²³ 'BJP dismisses TDP chief's post-mortem of poll debacle', *Indian Express*, May 11th, 2005. 'Trinamool to weigh option on joining govt. after polls', *Hindu*, April 3rd, 2009.

²⁴ Devashree Gupta, 'Radical Flank Effects: The Effect of Radical-Moderate Splits in Regional Nationalist Movements', working draft, Conference of Europeanists, Chicago, March 14-16, 2002.

mobilizing participants for their own activities, but their work can serve to recruit historically unsupportive populations to vote for the relatively more moderate BJP.

The case of the BJP also challenges social movement theory's common depiction of radical flanks as influencing moderate wings *indirectly*, either through making the latter relatively palatable or by discrediting the movement as a whole. Instead, the BJP-Sangh relationship highlights how a radical flank can also *directly* exert its influence to constrain moderate actors from modifying their ideology, tactics, or personnel.²⁵ Chapter 2 outlined the Sangh's displeasure when the BJP moved to embrace economic liberalization, or when it sought to increase the proportion of lower castes in its candidate list, since it viewed both policies as perversions of Hindutva's doctrine.

When the party ignored these condemnations, the Sangh took active steps to punish its moderate partner. For example, when the BJP continued to advocate liberalization, the RSS floated a new organization, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, which undertook several protests directed at the then-BJP government's policies, badly embarrassing the party. Similarly, when the party downplayed its communal positions in its 1996 manifesto, the RSS leadership publicly 'admonished the BJP for straying from the path of Hindutva'.²⁶ Subsequently, the RSS established committees to monitor and constrain non-conformist (with the Sangh agenda) candidates in states

²⁵ Analysts might argue that the RSS cannot be thought of as a 'radical flank' of the BJP because are not separable groups within the same movement. However, I would argue here that while the two are interconnected, they have separate leaderships, policies, and methods for working. Their connections should therefore not prevent us from using a 'radical flank' framework from observing and analyzing the very palpable heterogeneity within the Sangh.

²⁶ Both the former *sarsanghchalak* (supreme leader) of the RSS, Rajendra Singh, and M.G. Vaidya, an influential RSS leader voiced concerns, with the latter noting that 'the BJP should make Hindu nationhood its main plank. It should not bother about the charges of communalism. It will not lose a single vote by using the word 'Hindu' (see Kanungo, *op. cit.* 2002, p. 230). The RSS has also exerted influence on the BJP's selection of personnel. While a senior secretary, K. Sudarshan, the current *sarsanghchalak* (supreme leader) of the RSS, reportedly stormed into Vajpayee's residence late at night at the time of ministry making in March 1998 to prevent Jaswant Singh from being inducted into the Union Cabinet as the Finance Minister (Kanungo, *op. cit.* 2002, p. 258).

like Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Thus the case of Hindu nationalism makes clear how radical organizations can impose direct costs on a more moderate political partner, constraining the latter from crafting its platform with purely electoral concerns in mind.

The relationship between the Sangh and the BJP cannot therefore be characterized as the product of any single flank effect, but is best understood as a strategic interaction between the party and movement arms, with a complex set of costs and benefits of association for each side. For the RSS, its association with the BJP often involves accepting a dilution of its ideological doctrine, alliances with candidates/parties with whom it actively disagrees on core issues, and a shelving of controversial agenda items such as the construction of a Ram temple at the site of the razed mosque at Ayodhya (see Chapter 2 for more details). Yet the BJP's success has also provided the RSS with a political voice in Delhi, and a degree of protection from persecution by rival political formations.²⁷

Deriving from this complex relationship, we can further hypothesize how the net benefits of association for both sides might vary across Indian states in accordance with the changing cost structure of this interaction. For example the benefits to the BJP of close relations with the Sangh are increased where the latter have a strong and effective service organizational network, and lessened where the Sangh leadership is more active in interfering with the party's agenda. Similarly for the RSS, adherence to the BJP's requests might be more profitable in states in which the party is a serious contender, and can offer tangible political benefits. While beyond the scope of this study, a systematic comparison of these relations across India is yet to be undertaken, and will prove invaluable to our understanding not just of Hindutva, but more broadly

²⁷ Indeed, as Chapter 2 outlines, the RSS initially created the Jana Sangh precisely so that the movement would have a political force to counter both Congress and Communist forces seeking to curb the Sangh's activities.

of the internal dynamics between religious nationalist parties and the movements in which they are embedded.

It is also important to note that applying a radical flanks framework to the case of a political party forces social movement theory to expand some of its conceptual foundations. In the study of radical flanks, as indeed with that of movements more generally, costs and benefits are often determined by the actions of the state, which either affords movement actors greater opportunities, or uses repressive apparatuses to constrain them. However when examining political parties as part of this radical-moderate interaction, especially in functioning democracies, we must look beyond the state and to individual voters who the party wishes to recruit. For it is not only the long arm of the state, but the perceptions of these ordinary citizens (and ultimately their vote) which shape the payoffs which structure movement- party interactions.

B) Movement Parties:

In addition to the potential for bridging certain theoretical literatures, this dissertation also offers some specific lessons for scholars of political parties and electoral participation.²⁸ The BJP's reliance on a strategy predicated on its organizational prowess runs counter to Herbert Kitschelt's definition of how a 'movement party' typically operates:

Movement parties are coalitions of political activists who emanate from social movements...they make little investment in a formal organizational party structure...Movement parties also lack extensive and intensive formal organizational coverage. They lack a staff of paid professionals and a physical infrastructure of communication (offices, vehicles, etc).²⁹

²⁸ I borrow the term from Herbert Kitschelt (See 'Movement Parties', in Richard S. Katz and William J. Crotty (eds.), Handbook of Party Politics, London: Sage, 2006, pp. 278- 289).

²⁹ Kitschelt, *op. cit*, 2006, p. 280.

While shallow organizational roots may characterize certain movement parties, particularly in Western Europe, the argument presented here suggests that the tactics of the BJP and other religious nationalist parties provide a powerful check on this definition's generalizability.³⁰

The findings of this project also offer an empirical counter to conclusions of the demise of Maurice Duverger's 'mass parties', and their replacement with electoral-professional parties narrowly focused on techniques and technologies to win votes.³¹ Characterized by a broader goal of societal transformation and the utilization of grassroots networks, parties like the BJP ironically share much in common with the European socialist parties which informed Duverger's initial conceptualization.³² Indeed in poor democracies like India, it is often such mass parties of the left (the Communists in Kerala) or the right (the BJP in Chhattisgarh), who prove most successful with subaltern voters precisely *because* they build and retain these local linkages.

³⁰ Even beyond the case of religious nationalists, Van Cott notes that in the cases she examines in Latin America, successful ethnic parties were those emerging from organizationally well-institutionalized social movement networks. Van Cott, *op. cit* (2005), p. 9

³¹ Maurice Duverger, Political parties, their organization and activity in the modern state. London, Methuen; New York, Wiley, 1954. The concept of 'electoral-professional' parties is defined by Angelo Panebianco in Political parties : organization and power. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

³² However, apart from their obvious ideological differences, religious nationalist parties are differentiable from their leftist counterparts in one significant respect. For Duverger, a critical aspect of mass parties were how they relied on mass membership dues for financing their activities, a departure from the elite 'caucus' parties, which depended largely on the financial resources of a few, wealthy backers. However, while religious nationalist parties like the BJP tend to conform to Duverger's conception of mass parties in terms of their organizational structure, they diverge dramatically on this issue of financing. Instead of relying on membership dues, these parties rely on their national and transnational elite core constituencies in funding party activities, including the costly provision of services focused on in this dissertation.

6.3 Choices for the Poor: Looking Ahead

This dissertation was written in the months leading up to India's 2009 national elections, and utilized data from the previous parliamentary elections held in 2004. While the BJP performed poorly overall in 2009 (losing badly to the Congress-led coalition), this dissertation is specifically concerned with how the party fared with subaltern voters. The National Election Study conducted in 2004 was replicated in 2009, and provides data with which to test this project's argument *after* the analysis was completed, still a relatively rare practice in the field of political science. Unfortunately the full results are not yet accessible to researchers, but some initial conclusions can still be drawn from the available information .

Disaggregated results indicate that the party's performance with subaltern voters in states where the service networks are strong remained remarkably stable. For example in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Jharkhand the party replicated its relatively strong performance with Dalits and Adivasis, winning between 30-40% of the combined vote share of these populations. In Chhattisgarh, the party continued to lead the Congress among the state's sizeable Adivasi population, winning over 43% of their votes.³³ That the BJP managed to retain support among subaltern voters understood to be its *least* likely supporters, even during an election in which it suffered significant aggregate reverses among other constituencies, attests to the efficacy of the service strategy in facilitative environments.

However, the replicability and sustainability of this approach remain questionable. The inherent contradictions in the BJP's strategy of following elite-friendly policies while relying on its Sangh affiliates to establish a pro-poor reputation will be more clearly revealed where the party has prolonged periods of incumbency,

³³ Figures from National Election Study 2009 results as quoted in 'How India Voted' special section, *Hindu*, 26th May, 2009.

and is forced to establish a public policy record.³⁴ Moreover, the service approach seems unlikely to even initially succeed where it faces effective governance and a politically active subaltern citizenry.

The strength of these restricting factors is in turn influenced by another variable: the nature of the political opposition the BJP faces in a state. Specifically, the service strategy appears to succeed in states where Hindutva competes against a clientelistic governing party (most often the Congress). The reasons for this are not hard to fathom given the argument presented here. Clientelistic parties do not offer widespread public provision of goods *nor* do they build dense organizational networks connecting the party to voters. Thus in states like Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, the BJP's Sangh partners face little associational competition in their service activities, *and* the demand for these services is high due to the opposition's negligent governance. By contrast, in 2009 the BJP was unable to make any inroads with poor voters in states with relatively strong social policy records like Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Haryana. Nor were its fortunes any better in Uttar Pradesh, where lower castes have been politicized through the Dalit-led BSP, which again captured a majority (over 60%) of Dalit support.

Another layer of complexity is introduced by the fact that opposition party strategies need not remain constant: whether or not the BJP's approach will succeed in the future will in large part rest on the nature of these fluctuations. Naturally, there is no clear consensus on this issue, with some scholars forecasting a continuation of patronage politics, while others believe a turn to a more responsive style of

³⁴ Electoral evidence suggests that the BJP's state unit in Rajasthan suffered due to its inability to establish a pro-poor policy orientation during its tenure in the state assembly from 2003-08, leading to the party's loss of power in the 2008 assembly elections and then again in the 2009 national elections.

government is likely.³⁵ In part, the direction in which individual Indian parties shift will be a product of how their respective elites understand the voting choices of the country's poor. As long as the perception remains that these are homogenous vote-banks easily influenced by caste elites and shallow rhetoric, the imperatives for following clientelistic tactics tinged with populist promises remains strong.

If, however, subaltern communities are understood to cast their ballots on the basis of actual policy performances (or what analysts term 'retrospective voting'), the incentives for parties to forge programmatic linkages are heightened. The conclusions of this dissertation strongly support taking the second view of poor voters. The varied success of both the BJP and other national parties with subaltern citizens suggest the latter can no longer be easily conceptualized as a 'natural' electorate. This is not to say subaltern voters do not exhibit common preferences, especially at the state level where they face similar political options. Instead, this argument indicates that such shared interests are the results of common socio-economic experiences, mobilizational histories, and political options, and not primordialist attachments to ascriptive identities, or indeed false consciousness induced by manipulative elites.

In accordance with this view, the 2009 election results indicate that lower caste voters are increasingly eschewing historical affiliations with certain parties or leaders, and rewarding those who better look after their social and material interests. Indeed, the recent victory of the Congress was understood by many as a product of its shift towards implementing pro-poor policies, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) or agrarian loan debt forgiveness with greater resolve than it had in the past.³⁶ However, I would like to reiterate that such broad pronouncements

³⁵ See Steven Wilkinson, 'Explaining changing patterns of party-voter linkages in India', in Hebert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson (eds.), *Patrons, Clients, and Policies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 110-140.

³⁶ See Venkatesh Ramakrishnan, 'Congress resurgence', *Frontline*, June 5th, 2009, pp. 4-8, and Venkatesh Athreya, 'Not a mandate for neoliberalism', *Frontline*, June 5th, 2009, p. 9.

tend to reflect ecological fallacies: most voters surveyed in the NES 2009 did not reference NREGA as a significant factor in their voting decision. Instead, the effect of measures like NREGA appears limited to the few whose households directly benefitted from these policies, suggesting that poor voters have a sharp sense of when their interests are being served.³⁷

However judging by this interest-driven framework, the relative failure of communist parties in their stronghold states in these past elections would seem to present a puzzle, given that these parties were described earlier as championing the interests of the marginalized. However once again aggregate results mask the fact that the *poor* remain wedded to the left: in both West Bengal (50%) and Kerala (70%), communists established a significant lead with Dalit and Adivasi communities, beating their nearest rivals by over twenty percentage points.³⁸ It was instead the loss of wealthier supporters, with whom the communists have much weaker ties, that hurt left parties in both states. Moreover, even the poor who did appear to leave the left, appeared to do so for pragmatic reasons. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the communist (CPM) government in Bengal was heavily criticized for deploying force to clear agricultural workers from farmlands designated for future industrial production. Interestingly, the NES 2009 indicates the CPM lost votes among agricultural workers (down from 58% in the 2006 Assembly elections to 46%) hurt by these actions, but *gained* support among the skilled/semi-skilled laborers (from 50 to 56% over the same span) who might stand to benefit from more factory jobs.

Further supporting the idea that material interests determine poor voters more than commonly acknowledged, P. Sainath notes:

³⁷ Based on preliminary data from NES 2009 showing the Congress had a definite edge with respondents benefitting from NREGA or the loan debt forgiveness scheme.

³⁸ All NES figures are from the National Election Study 2009 results as quoted in 'How India Voted' special section, *Hindu*, 26th May, 2009.

In a complex and layered verdict driven by many factors, one factor seems clear: most governments that stressed welfarist measures - particularly cheap rice and employment – gained in last month’s election results. *This was regardless of which party was leading them...*[emphasis added]³⁹

Thus whether on the basis of rice subsidies, employment schemes, factory jobs, or (in the BJP’s case) party-sponsored social services, poor voters appear to exercise their choices on the basis of definable interests and the constantly shifting options available to them. This dissertation has outlined how such a sensibility has offered religious nationalists in India an opportunity to forge broader support among subaltern voters, but has also limited the nature of this support to pragmatic and not emotional motivations. Precisely because the bond appears not to be a deep ideological one, the potential for this support to be siphoned off by alternative political forces offering more concrete gains for the poor remains highly plausible. Religious nationalists ultimately remain the choice of the poor only when the latter in turn face poor choices.

³⁹ P. Sainath, ‘Price of rice, price of power’, *Hindu*, June 10th, 2009, p. 10.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY PROCEDURES AND QUESTIONNAIRES

A.1 Sample Selection, Procedures, and Response Rates:

For the surveys used in this study, several factors were utilized in selecting the sample of respondents. Firstly, the districts sampled within both Chhattisgarh (4) and Kerala (3) were deliberately chosen to vary on the key independent of Sangh service strength within each state. To select villages within each district, I consulted the Indian census directory of villages, and randomly selected six villages within each district from the list. The next issue was the selection of 15 Dalit or Adivasi individual respondents from each village. The first step in this selection was to make a list of the households within the village, or where relevant within the Dalit *basti* or section of the village. This was done with the help of the local *sarpanch* (head of the village) or in some instances the *panch* (deputy head of the village), who supplied the necessary information on the number of households in their village or *basti*.

Once a list of the households had been generated, fifteen were selected at random, and were visited in turn. In each case, the head of household was approached and asked to enumerate the members of the household. A member of the household was then selected based on gender and age criteria, and interviewed with both their permission and that of the head of household's (if different). No more than one member per household was interviewed. At the end of this cycle, depending on how many further interviews were required to complete fifteen responses, another selection of fifteen households was made, and the process repeated until the requisite number of surveys had been completed.¹ All surveys were anonymous.

¹ In one instance, in Palakkad in Kerala, the full 90 surveys could not be completed after exhausting the potential respondent pool. 82 surveys were completed in this district.

With respect to asking about vote choices, the survey replicated a technique used on the National Election Study to ensure comparability of results. Each respondent was supplied a dummy ballot with the party's name and symbol and was asked to put the ballot in a sealed ballot box which was only opened after leaving the village (a respondent ID number was placed on each ballot to match it with the corresponding completed survey). Lastly, the survey in Chhattisgarh was carried out in Hindi (translated from the English version reproduced below by the author), and in Kerala was carried out in Malayalam (translated by Dr. Sajad Ibrahim, the Department of Political Science, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram).

Response Rate:

Chhattisgarh (4 districts, 24 villages):

<i>A. Completed:</i>	360
<i>B. Refused:</i>	169
<i>C. Not at home:</i>	107
<i>D. Communication/Language Issues:</i>	24
<i>E. Ineligible (No one of required gender/age):</i>	62
<i>Response Rate (A/ A+B+C+D):</i>	54.54%

Kerala (3 districts, 18 villages):

<i>A. Completed:</i>	262
<i>B. Refused:</i>	112
<i>C. Not at home:</i>	168
<i>D. Communication/Language Issues:</i>	40
<i>E. Ineligible (No one of required gender/age):</i>	71
<i>Response Rate (A/ A+B+C+D):</i>	45.02%

5. While voting, what is the most important consideration for you, the candidate, your party, your caste community's interest or something else?

1. Candidate 2. Party 3. Caste Community
4. Something Else 8. Don't Know

6. For you, in this election which were the biggest/most important issues? (**Record exactly in the order mentioned and probe for 2nd and 3rd response**)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

7. In your opinion, which party was the best at:

	Congress	BJP	BSP	Other	Don't Know
a. Curbing Corruption	1	2	3	4	8
b. Had Better Leaders	1	2	3	4	8
c. Providing Employment	1	2	3	4	8
d. Promoting Development	1	2	3	4	8

8. Other than political parties, are you a member of any religious/caste organization or association?

1. No 2. Yes 8. Don't Know

8 a) If yes, which ones? _____

9. Aside from caste and religious organizations, do you belong to any other associations like co-operatives, farmer's associations, or trade unions?

1. No 2. Yes 8. Don't Know

9 a) If yes, which ones? _____

10. In the past five years, has your financial improvement improved, stayed the same, or got worse?

1. Deteriorated 2. Stayed the same 3. Improved 8. Don't know

11. Now I will ask you about a few religious activities. You tell me how you often practice them daily, weekly, only on festivals or never?

	Daily	Weekly	On festivals	Never
a. Prayer (puja/namaz, etc.)	4	3	2	1
b. Visiting temple, mosque, church, gurudwara, etc	4	3	2	1

12. Now I will read out a few options. Tell me to what extent you agree with these options-- fully agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or fully disagree?

	Fully Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Fully Disagree	Don't Know
	4	3	2	1	8
a. One should vote the same way one's caste community votes	4	3	2	1	8
b. On the site of <i>Babri Masjid</i> only Ram Temple should be Built	4	3	2	1	8
c. The problems and needs of Muslims in India have been neglected	4	3	2	1	8
d. Religious conversions should be banned.	4	3	2	1	8
e. Caste community is more important than religious community	4	3	2	1	8

13. Did you ever take part in a protest of any kind with members of your caste community?

1. No 2. Yes 8. Don't know

14. How happy are you with the performance of your local MLA?

1. Not Happy 2. Little Happy 3. Quite Happy
4. Very Happy 8. Don't Know

15. I am going to read you the name of a few organizations. Please tell me if you have heard of these groups, think they are doing good work, and have taken part in their activities.

	Heard of	Good Work	Taken Part in
Rashtriya			
Swayamsevak	2. Yes 1. No	2. Yes 1. No	2. Yes 1. No
Sangh (RSS)			
Seva Bharati/	2. Yes 1. No	2. Yes 1. No	2. Yes 1. No
Vidya Bharati			
Vanvasi			
Kalyan Ashram	2. Yes 1. No	2. Yes 1. No	2. Yes 1. No

Personal Information:

B1. Age: _____

B2. Gender: 1. Male 2, Female

B3 Education Level: _____

B4 Jati: _____

B5 Caste Group:

1. SC
2. ST
3. OBC
4. Other

B6 Religion:

1. Hindu
2. Muslim
3. Christian
4. Sikh
5. Other
8. Don't Know

B7 Size of land owned: _____ acres

B8: I will read you a list- please tell me which of the following do you see yourself as **most** importantly: (IF MORE THAN ONE THEN MARK THE ORDER):

If respondent is SC:

1. Indian
2. Scheduled Caste
3. Harijan
4. Dalit
5. Hindu/Muslim/Christian/Sikh
6. Chhattisgarhi

If respondent is ST:

1. Indian
2. Scheduled Tribe
3. Vanvasi
4. Adivasi
5. Hindu/Muslim/Christian/Sikh
6. Chhattisgarhi

B9: What is your household's approximate monthly income?

1. Below Rs. 1000
2. Between Rs. 1001-2000
3. Between Rs. 2001-3000
4. Between Rs. 3001-4000
5. Between Rs. 4001-5000
6. Between Rs. 5001 to 10,000
7. Above Rs. 10,000

Kerala Survey Questionnaire

District _____

Respondent Number: _____

Village Name _____

Interviewer's Introduction:

I have come from New Delhi and am working for a university located abroad that is interviewing people across Kerala as part of a study of voter choices here. This survey is an independent study for research and is not linked with any political party or government agency. You will not be asked for your name, and none of the information you give will be linked to you in any way. Please spare a few minutes to help us with our study.

1. Who did you vote for in the 2006 Vidhan Sabha Elections ? Please mark your vote on this slip and put it in this box. (Supply dummy ballot and explain the procedure).

2. Who did you vote for in the 2001 Vidhan Sabha election? Please mark your vote on this slip and put it in this box.

3. Did a candidate/party worker or canvassar come to your house during the campaign to ask for your vote?

2. Yes 1. No 8. Don't remember

3a. If yes, do you remember for which party/alliance? (Circle all that apply)

1. LDF 2. UDF 3. BJP 4. Other 5. None 8. Don't remember

4. In deciding whom to vote for, whose opinion mattered to you most?

1. Spouse 2. Other family member 3. Caste community leaders
4. Friends/neighbours 5. No one 6. Others 8. Don't know

5. While voting, what is the most important consideration for you, the candidate, your party, your caste community's interest or something else?

1. Candidate 2. Party 3. Caste Community
4. Something Else 8. Don't Know

6. For you, in this election which were the biggest/most important issues? (**Record exactly in the order mentioned and probe for 2nd and 3rd response**)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

7. Other than political parties, are you a member of any religious/caste organization or association?

1. No 2. Yes 8. Don't Know

7a) If yes, which ones? _____

8. Aside from caste and religious organizations, do you belong to any other associations like co-operatives, farmer's associations, or trade unions (**Give two local examples**)?

1. No 2. Yes 8. Don't Know

a) If yes, which ones? _____

9. In the past five years, has your financial improvement improved, stayed the same, or got worse?

1. Deteriorated 2. Stayed the same 3. Improved 8. Don't know

10. Now I will ask you about a few religious activities. You tell me how you often practice them daily, weekly, only on festivals or never?

	Daily	Weekly	On festivals	Never
a. Prayer (puja/namaz, etc.)	4	3	2	1
b. Visiting temple, mosque, church, gurudwara, etc	4	3	2	1

11. Now I will read out a few options. Tell me to what extent you agree with these options-- fully agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or fully disagree?

	Fully Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Fully Disagree	Don't Know
a. One should vote the same way one's caste community votes	4	3	2	1	8
b. On the site of <i>Babri Masjid</i> only Ram Temple should be Built	4	3	2	1	8
c. The problems and needs of Muslims in India have been neglected	4	3	2	1	8
d. Religious conversions should be banned.	4	3	2	1	8

e. Caste community is

more important than 4 3 2 1 8
religious community

f. Upper castes still

hold most power 4 3 2 1 8
in the state

12. How happy are you with the performance of your local MLA?

1. Not Happy 2. Little Happy 3. Quite Happy
4. Very Happy 8. Don't Know

13. Before this government, there was a UDF government in power. Which party/
alliance do you think best represents the interests of your caste community?

1. LDF 2. UDF 3. BJP 4. Other(specify)_____
5. None 8. Don't know

14. If BJP had a chance of winning, would you have voted for it?

1. No 2. Yes 8. Don't Know

15. Which party is most committed to helping the poor?

1. LDF 2. UDF 3. BJP 4. Other(specify)_____
5. None 8. Don't know

16. How do you think past governments have performed compared to the rest of India in terms of providing education and health services?

1. Much worse than rest of India
2. Worse than rest of India
3. About the same as the rest of India
4. Better than rest of India
5. Much better than rest of India

17. Do you think the BJP looks mostly after the interests of upper-castes?

1. No 2. Yes 8. Don't know

18. I am going to read you the name of a few organizations. Please tell me if you have heard of these groups, think they are doing good work, and have taken part in their activities.

	Heard of		Good Work		Taken Part in	
Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh	2. Yes	1. No	2. Yes	1. No	2. Yes	1. No
Center of Indian Trade Unions	2. Yes	1. No	2. Yes	1. No	2. Yes	1. No
All India Trade Union Congress	2. Yes	1. No	2. Yes	1. No	2. Yes	1. No
Bharatiya Kisan Sangh	2. Yes	1. No	2. Yes	1. No	2. Yes	1. No

Rashtriya

Swayamsevak 2. Yes 1. No 2. Yes 1. No 2. Yes 1. No

Sangh (RSS)

Seva Bharati/ 2. Yes 1. No 2. Yes 1. No 2. Yes 1. No

Vidya Bharati

Vanvasi

Kalyan Ashram 2. Yes 1. No 2. Yes 1. No 2. Yes 1. No

19. Do you think you are better off in Kerala than members of your caste community are outside of Kerala?

1. No 2. Yes 8. Don't know

19a. If yes, why?

1. LDF government policies
2. UDF government policies
3. Missionary social work
4. RSS social work
5. Movements/protests/demonstrations by your caste community

20. Have you, or anyone in your family participated in a movement/protest/demonstration against such discrimination?

1. No 2. Yes 8. Don't know

Personal Information:

B1. Age: _____

B2. Gender: 1. Male 2, Female

B3 Education Level: _____

B4 Jati: _____

B5 Caste Group:

1. SC
2. ST
3. OBC
4. Other

B6 Religion:

1. Hindu
2. Muslim
3. Christian
4. Sikh
5. Other
8. Don't Know

B7 Size of land owned: _____ acres

B8: I will read you a list- please tell me which of the following do you see yourself as **most** importantly: (IF MORE THAN ONE THEN MARK THE ORDER):

If respondent is SC:

1. Indian
2. Scheduled Caste
3. Harijan
4. Dalit
5. Hindu/Muslim/Christian/Sikh
6. Malyali

If respondent is ST:

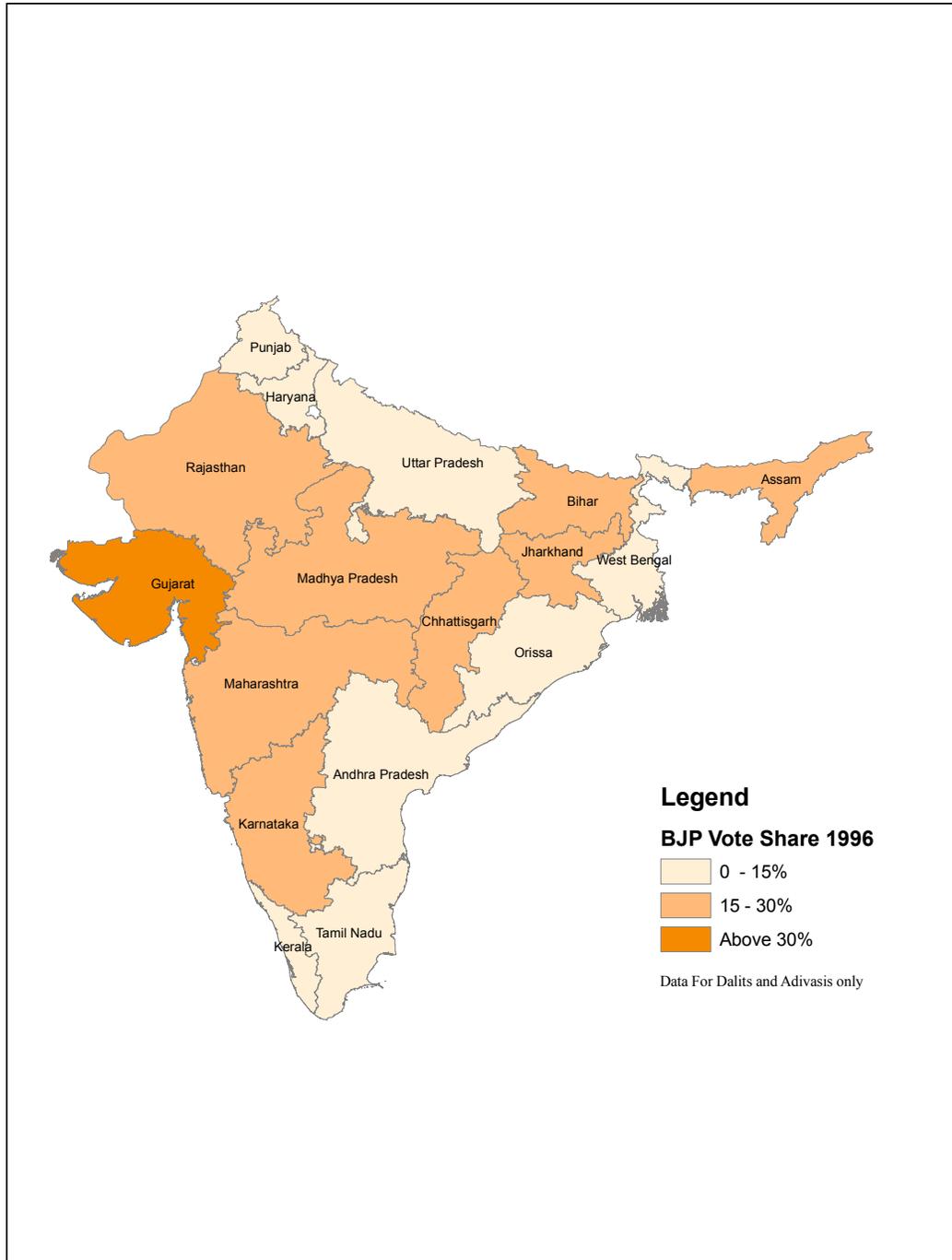
1. Indian
2. Scheduled Tribe
3. Vanvasi
4. Adivasi
5. Hindu/Muslim/Christian/Sikh
6. Malyali

B9: What is your household's approximate monthly income?

1. Below Rs. 1000
2. Between Rs. 1001-2000
3. Between Rs. 2001-3000
4. Between Rs. 3001-4000
5. Between Rs. 4001-5000
6. Between Rs. 5001 to 10,000
7. Above Rs. 10,000

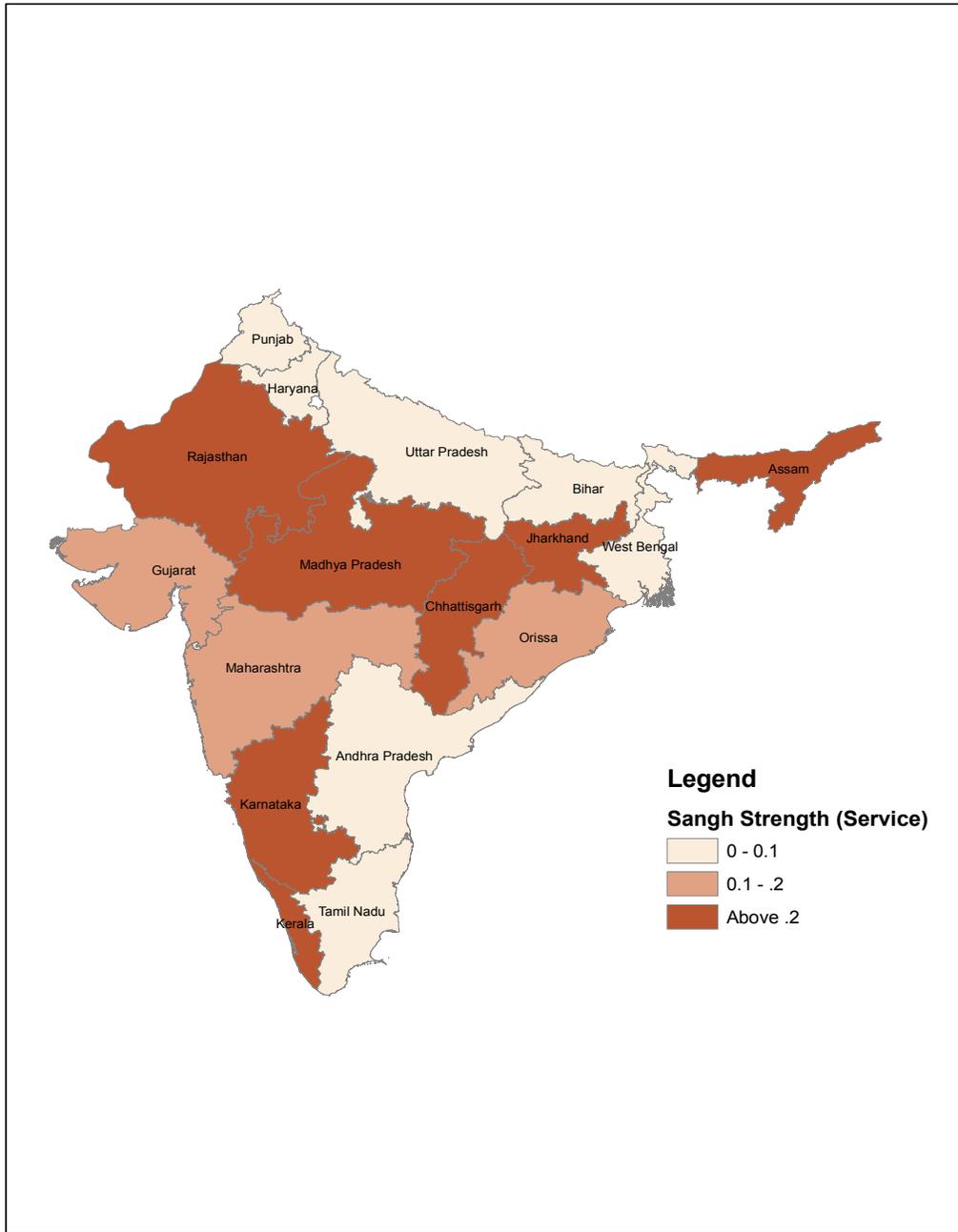
APPENDIX B

Additional Maps and Graphs



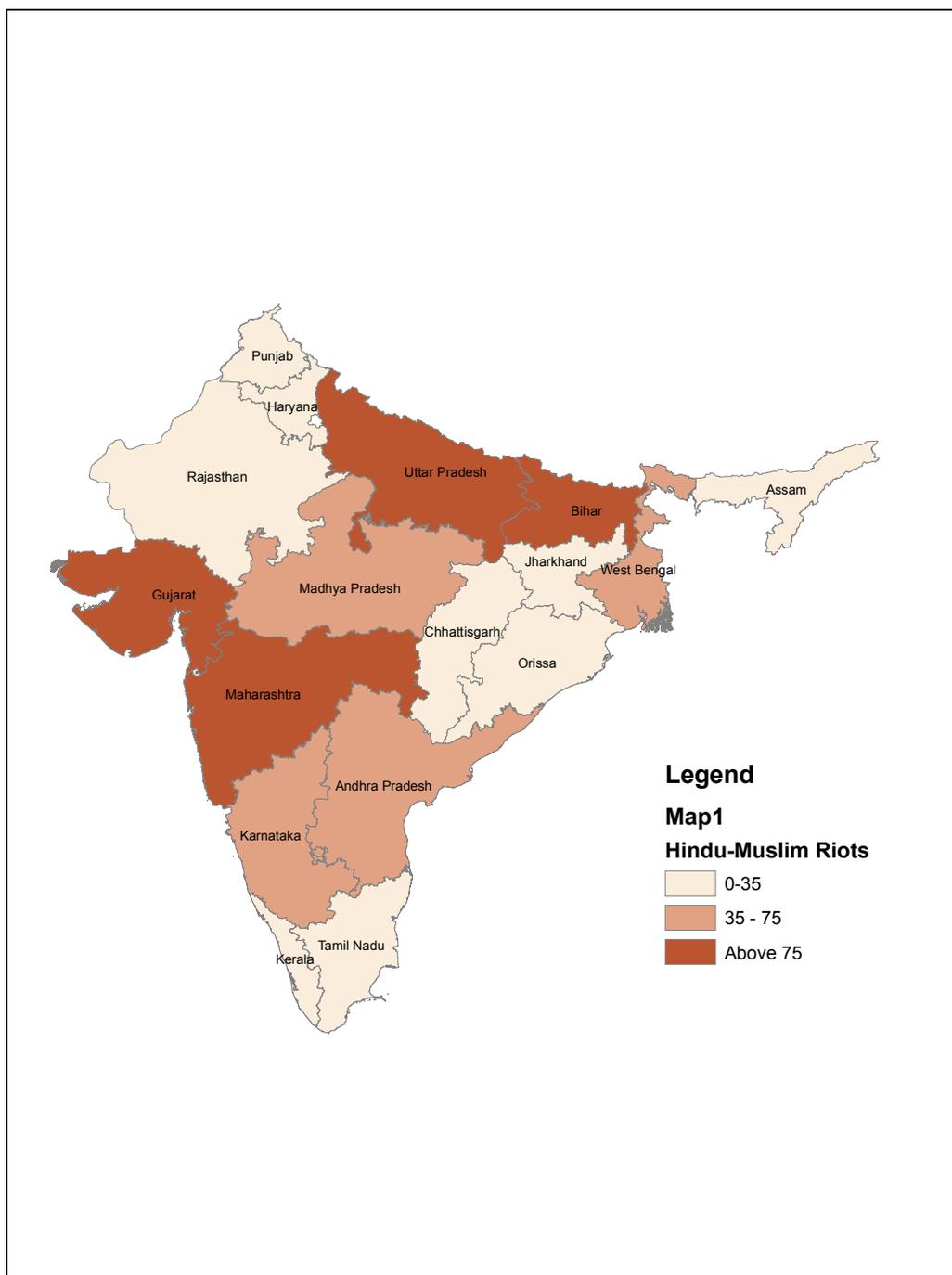
Source: National Election Study 1996, Center for the Study of Developing Society, New Delhi

FIGURE B.1: BJP Performance with Dalits and Adivasis (1996)



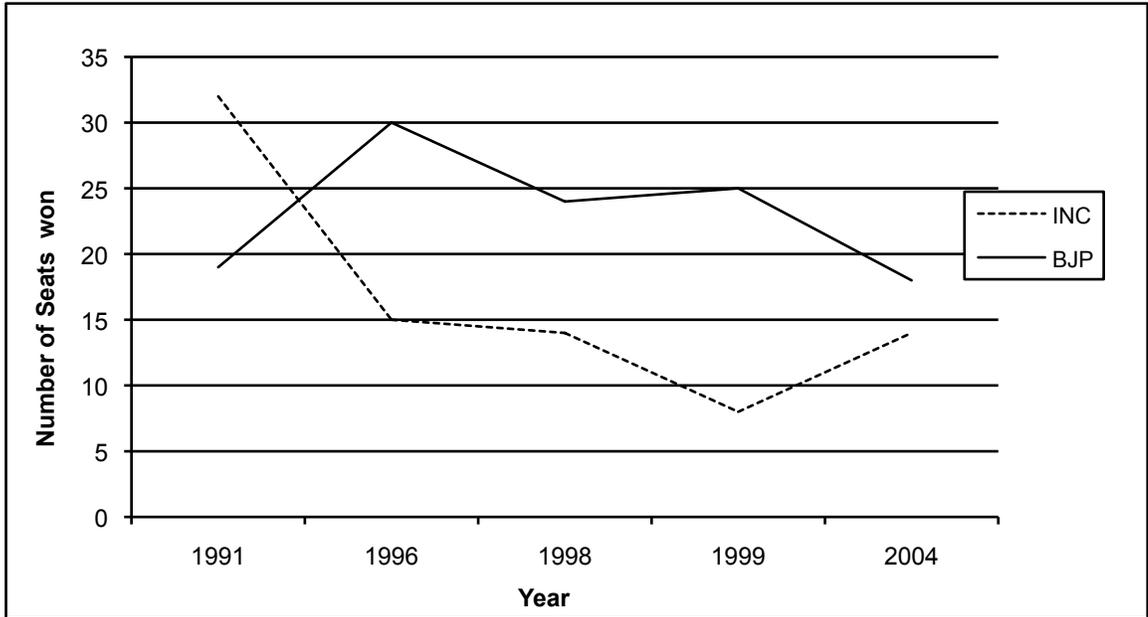
Sources: Seva Bharati figures from Seva Disha 2004, obtained from Seva Bharati office, Bhopal. Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram figures from VKA national headquarters, Jashpur.

FIGURE B.2: Strength of Sangh social service chapters across India



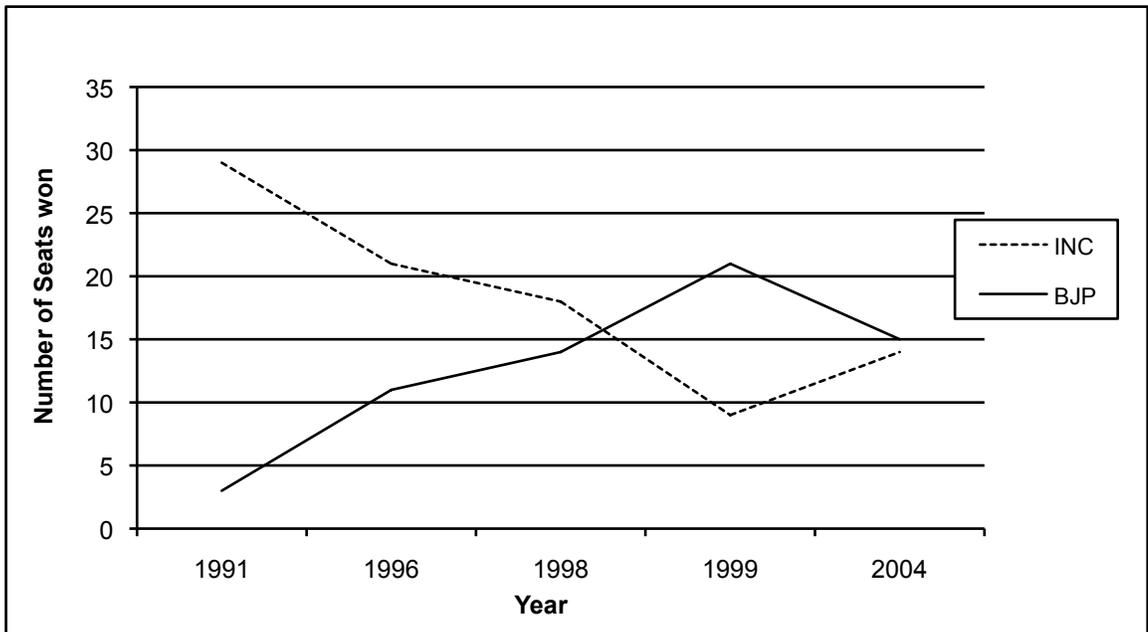
Sources: Ashutosh Varshney and Steven Wilkinson, 2006-02-17, "Varshney-Wilkinson Dataset on Hindu-Muslim Violence in India, 1950-1995, Version 2", hdl:1902.2/4342 Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [Distributor].

FIGURE B.3: Hindu Muslim Riots Across Indian States



Source: Electoral Commission of India Data

Figure B.4: Performance of BJP and Congress in Scheduled Caste Constituencies



Sources: Electoral Commission of India Data

FIGURE B.5: Performance of BJP and Congress in Scheduled Tribe Constituencies

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