

Tyagi, Aastha: **Hindutva Self-fashioning- Young Hindu Nationalists of India**

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Short Outline

1.	Introduction
2.	Students for Hindutva, Students by Hindutva: A History of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)
3.	<i>Bhaiyas, Didis, and Karyakartas</i> (Older brothers, Older sisters, and Activists): How Emotional Practices and <i>Judaav</i> (Affective Connections) Shape the Hindu Nationalist Movement
4.	<i>Tayyari</i> (preparation) for Aspiration: Self-fashioning as a Student Leader and the Drive to Fight University Elections in the ABVP
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Summary

This doctoral thesis is titled ‘Hindutva Self-Fashioning: Young Hindu Nationalists of India’. In this study, I investigated the socialisation processes and everyday lives of members of India’s largest Hindu nationalist coalition, the Sangh Family. The Sangh family is headed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the RSS. For my case study, I chose the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP; All India Students’ Committee). ABVP is the student wing of the RSS. ABVP was founded in 1949 and is present in all major universities in India. With almost three million members, it is the largest students’ organisation in the world. The ABVP has two goals. Its first goal is to further the Hindu nationalist movement on university campuses. Its second goal is to work for students. Through the ABVP, the movement has been able to invite university students, distinct caste groups, women with access to higher education, and students coming from non-Hindu nationalist networks. ABVP students are Hindu nationalists who

describe themselves as ideological warriors and political agents. For us, ABVP also becomes a crucial site to study the movement because most BJP members currently leading the government are celebrated ABVP alumni.

This thesis showed the everyday lives of Hindu nationalist university students in India. For this, there were two main questions: how are young people socialised in the Hindu nationalist habitus and how do they learn the desired practices? What are the different networks, structures, and practices through which they participate and contribute to the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement? To investigate these questions, the method used was ethnography. Along with participant observation and interviews, I also relied on archival research and social media analysis. After fieldwork, I relied on thematic coding to organise my data.

Through the fieldwork, I was able to map the networks (based on kinship, caste and friendships), affective practices, sites of socialisation and individual motivations of university students as agents of Hindutva. Stephan Greenblatt used the term 'Renaissance self-fashioning' in literary theory to explain how individuals in the Renaissance era were fashioning their own personas according to what was valuable in their context to attain material and symbolic benefits. I found the term 'self-fashioning' useful to explain the way my interlocutors were pragmatically engaging with the Hindu nationalist ideology. Self-fashioning emerged as a marker of socialisation and articulating aspirational goals in the language of the movement.

The findings were divided into four chapters with the Introduction and the Conclusion bookending the thesis. The first chapter linearly outlined the history of the ABVP to highlight the contribution of students to the Hindu nationalist movement. Hierarchy and strategies of disavowal emerged as the organising principles of the RSS-ABVP, concepts that are imperative to the functioning of the organisation. In the second chapter, I illustrated the familial, caste, friendships and romantic relationships as networks and connections that sustain the movement from the ground-up. Here, I relied on Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation of habitus and capital. The climax of this socialisation is self-fashioning among the Hindu nationalist students using the learnt elements of the habitus and feeling rules. The fourth chapter of the thesis used the site of electoral politics in the university as a site of self-fashioning among ABVP students. Student politics emerged as essential for a reserve cadre building in the Hindu nationalist movement (and for its electoral wing, the BJP). Aspiring students were acutely aware of the

‘investments’ they were required for their place in the Indian politics. Students leverage identity and socio-economic factors to fight elections. The last chapter in the thesis shows the link between self-fashioning and violence within the ABVP. The chapter was categorised into three types of protests (with increasing scope for violence). The chapter showed that student members’ involvement in protests and violence yields benefits for them-- and the movement. Thus, protesting and violence become ways of socialisation and self-fashioning.

My study showed three kinds of organizational strategies used by ABVP to attract and retain members, as well as to introduce them to the Hindu nationalist environment: first is *judaav* or affective connections; second is the strategy of disavowal, and third is *seva* or service. The findings from this study are situated at the intersection of Hindu nationalism, youth studies, student politics, gender studies, studies of right-wing and conservative movements, anthropology of democracy and friendships. In this thesis, I documented a crucial historical moment for Hindu nationalism in India, adding to the literature on the movement about the emerging contemporary form of urban *Hindutva*. Secondly, I add to the literature on student and campus politics of the ABVP by analysing how the ABVP retains its role as a student organisation while performing an imperative role for the Hindu nationalist movement. Thirdly, I analysed how young individuals engage with the ideology to articulate their own dreams and aspirations. Fourthly, I showed the different ways in which ABVP women participate and mould the Hindu nationalist movement. These women are students or researchers, they are single or unmarried. They wear their Hindu and more importantly, their caste identity as an armour. These women are care-givers, leading agendas, are leaders, and they are not afraid to be violent to achieve their goals. They engage opposing women on the protest site and subsequently, also enable the presence of men. The ABVP women articulate conservative academic practices and are representative of how conservative, right-wing women work on university campuses.