



Arenas of Service and the Development of the Hindu Nationalist Subject in India

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‘Arenas of Service and the Development of the Hindu Nationalist Subject in India’

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of
Humanities

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Abbreviations

ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
EV	Ekal Vidyalaya
JN	Jnana Prabodhini
NHSF	National Hindu Students Forum
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SPAR	Society for Participatory Action and Reflection
SSM	Saraswati Shishu Mandir
VHP	Vishva Hindu Parishad
VK	Vivekananda Kendra
VKA	Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram
VKK	Vanavasi Kalyan Kendra

Abstract

The study of the relationship between Hindu nationalism and Hindu activist traditions of *seva* (selfless service) has been principally organised into three approaches: firstly, the instrumentalist deployment of the practice, secondly, the political appropriation of traditions of *seva*, and thirdly, that these related associational spaces are internally homogenous and distinct from alternative 'legitimate' religious arenas. These frameworks largely reflect approaches to Hindu nationalism which place emphasis on its forms of political statecraft and relationship to spectacular violence. These approaches raise manifold concerns.

This thesis retheorizes the relationship between Hindu nationalism and *seva* with reference to primary and secondary sources, together with field research in the *seva* projects of the Vanavasi Kalyan Kendra (VKK), a Hindu nationalist association. Through deploying a reworked understanding of Fraser's (1990) approach to associational space and Butler's (1993, 2007) theorisation of performative acts and subject formation, this thesis contributes to rethinking Hindu nationalism and *seva*.

I demonstrate firstly that the colonial encounter worked to produce a series of social imaginaries which were drawn upon to transform traditions of *seva*. Through their articulation in shared religious languages, practices of *seva* were productive of porously structured Hindu activist spaces in which the tradition was contested with regard to 'radical' and 'orthodox' orientations to Hinduism's boundaries. Increasingly, articulations of *seva* which invoked a *sangathanist* 'orthodoxy' came to gain hegemony in Hindu activist arenas. This influenced the early and irregular Hindu nationalist practices of *seva*. Fractures in Hindu nationalist articulations developed as a result of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) *sangathanist* organisational idioms, allowing the association to inscribe its practices with pro-active meanings. In the post-independence period the alternative arenas of Hindu nationalist *seva* projects expanded greatly, a point evident in the degrees of dialogue between the Sangh and the *sarvodaya* movement. The importance of porous associational boundaries is further demonstrated through noting how engagement in visibilized arenas of popular Hindu religiosity worked to both broaden the fields of reference and vernacularize Hindu nationalist practices of *seva*.

With reference to field research, I demonstrate that central to the expansion of the VKK's arenas of service into spaces associated with *Ayurvedic* care is the incorporation of both refocused and transgressive practices. In the educational projects of the VKK, I note how *seva* works to inscribe daily practices of hygiene, the singing of *bhajans* and daily assemblies with Hindu nationalist meanings, and so works to regulate conduct through the formation of an 'ethical Hindu self'. However, arenas of *seva* are also a location where we can witness subjects negotiating power. I demonstrate this through examining how participants in the VKK's rural development projects rearticulate Othering practices of *seva*, with actors using the discourse to position themselves as active subjects, break gendered restrictions on public space, and advance an 'ethically Hindu' grounded claim on development and critique of power.

This work illustrates that far from being of in consequence to the circulation of Hindu nationalist identities, alternative arenas of *seva* operate as spaces where discourses are performatively enacted, refocused, transgressed and rearticulated. These acts contribute to the consolidation and disturbance of Hindu nationalist subject formations.

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Glossary

Conceptual Terms

Alternative Public: Drawn from a reworked understanding of Fraser's (1990) construct of the counterpublic as a way of thinking through issues of civil society, associational spaces and cultures. The concept outlines an approach to civil society composed of numerous fractured alternative publics structured in differing degrees of access to power, inside of which circulate alternative identities and interests. See further entries: *Porosity, Visibilization*.

Discourse: In Butler's reading (1988, 1993, 2004, 2007) discourse establishes the potential conditions for a range of personhoods. Discourses contribute to the construction of subjectivities through daily embodiment. Identities are a process of performatively enacting discursive norms, creating the illusion of a natural self. The inability of discourse to fully achieve its ideal opens the potential for the performance of alternative meanings and disciplinary policing. See further: *Inscribe, Invoke, Performativity, Rearticulation, Transgression*.

Ethical Hindu Self: Through the reiterative enactment of norms participants attempt to approximate ethical Hindu formations. These acts are seen as exhibiting more than religious markers of the self, in that they are productive of wider ethical Hindu sensibilities. See further entries: *Discourse, Invoke, Inscribe, Performativity, Transgression, Rearticulation*.

Inscribe: Acts are involved in the production and reproduction of meaning (Butler 1988). See further entries: *Discourse, Invoke, Performativity, Transgression, Rearticulation*.

Invoke: Performative acts invoke meanings. Invocation then refers to the ways in which performative acts can reiterate, rearticulate and transgress received norms and meanings (Butler 2007: 192) See further entries: *Discourse, Performativity, Inscribe, Transgression, Rearticulation*.

Porosity: Porous boundaries mean that alternative publics may be structured around collaboration and exchange, allowing for the emergence of shared associational cultures. Porosity points towards reading alternative publics as both externally intersecting and internally diverse, and so partial, resisting homogeneity and closure (Felski 1989). See further entries: *Alternative Public, Visibilization*

Performativity: Associated with the work of Butler (1988, 1993, 2004, 2007), performativity is a theoretical concept which reads subject formations as produced through a series of disciplinary structured and reiterative daily acts. Through performing norms in banal time and space, these discursive practices naturalise the illusion of an

abiding self. See further entries: *Discourse, Invoke, Inscribe, Performativity, Transgression, Rearticulation*.

Rearticulation: This refers to the ways in which actors use language to reinscribe but also question and challenge the normative categories associated with a discourse (Butler 2007: 190, Bhabha 1997). *Discourse, Performativity, Inscribe, Transgression, Invoke*.

Transgression: Human action stretches beyond simply the reiteration of or resistance to power. Through performative acts which fail to invoke normative constructions subjects take up transgressive positions. Transgressive acts are the focus of regulatory mechanisms, ranging from incorporation to disciplinary policing (Butler 2007: 191-193). See further entries: *Invoke, Inscribe, Performativity, Rearticulation*

Visibilization: The concept draws attention to the processes by which both alternative publics and their associated identities become visible within a variety of public spaces (Zavos 2008).

Hindi and Sanskrit Terms

Aabang: Religious Texts Associated with the Adi Tribe

Aam Janata: Colloquial, 'Ordinary People'.

Aarti: Hindu Ritual Practice of Offering Light to a Deity

Abhiseka: Ritual Practice of Offering Liquid to a Deity

Adhinata: Lit. 'Dependency'

Adi Dharm: Associations linked to the Brahmo Samaj Movement

Adivasi: Lit. 'First Inhabitants' / 'First People'

Ahimsa: Non-Violence

Alankara: Musical Techniques

Aryoga: Holistic Health

Ayurveda: Knowledge of Life / Holistic Health

Bare Bare Log: Colloquial, 'Important People'

Bhagwa Dhvaj: Saffron Flag

Bhajan: Hindu Devotional Song

Bhakti: Path of Devotion

Bharat Bhakti Stotra: Sanskrit Hymn

Brahmacharya: Celibacy as a Pre-Condition of Religious Practice

Chamar: A Section of Dalit Identity

Changa: Musical Instrument, Tambourine

Chappals: Sandals

Charak Sambita: Vedic Text

Chikitsaa: Medicine

Chinmaya Mission: Hindu Reform Movement, Est 1953

Chridar: Tight Trousers

Dana: Giving

Darshan: Blessing, Gained Through Vision / Presence of the Divine

Dayaa: Compassion
Desi: Colloquial, 'Indian'.
Diksha: Initiation
Diya: Lamp
Ekal Vidyalaya: Single Teacher School
Faqir: Sufi Ascetic
Gau Seva: Lit. 'Serving the Cow'
Gayatri Mantra: Vedic Mantra
Godown: Warehouse
Gram Sabha: Village Council
Gram Vikas: Rural / Village Development
Guru: Teacher, Associated with Indian Religious Traditions
Gurukul: Hindu Educational Institution
Hitraksha: Lit. 'Interest Protection'
Jal: Lit. 'Surface Water'
Jati: Caste and Associated Traditions / Forms of Organising Hindu Society / Race
Jeevanvriti: Life Worker
Jnana Prabodhini: Awakener of the True Knowledge
Kartals: Musical Instrument, Wooden Hand Clappers
Kendra: Centre
Kirtan: Hymns Associated with Bhakti Traditions
Kurta: Loose Top
Lathi: Wooden Baton
Lungi: Lower Garment of Clothing
Math: Hindu Monastic Institution
Mandir: Hindu Temple
Mantra: Hindu Sacred Speech Act

Masjid: Mosque

Mela: Festival

Murti: Hindu Representation and Repository of the Divine

Nagarvasi: Lit. ‘Town Dweller’

Nirmalata: Lit. ‘Cleanliness’

Pradhan: Council Leader

Pandal: Structure to Facilitate Religious Rituals

Pantb: Path. Refers to Specific Indian Religious Traditions

Pracharak: Full Time RSS Worker

Panchayat: Decentralized Local Assembly

Panchayat Bhavan: Council Hall

Pranama: Ritualised Touching of Feet

Pranayama: Breathing Exercises Associated with Yoga

Prasad: Religious Offering

Pravachan: Religiously Themed Lecture

Pratah Smaran: Hindu Morning Prayer

Pitribhumi: Fatherland

Puja: Hindu Ritual Practice

Pukka: High-Quality

Punyabhumi: Holy Land

Raja: Ruler

Ram Rajya: Lit. ‘Rule of Ram’

Ramjanmabhumi: Lit. ‘Birthplace of Ram’

Rashtra: Nation

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS): National Volunteer Corps

Rashtra Seva: Service of the Nation

Ratiya Kanwar: Caste Group with Legal Rights Over Land

Sabha: Society

Sadhu: Hindu Ascetic

Saivite: Path within Hinduism Focused on Shiva

Samaj: Society

Samajik Samskar: Social Rejuvenation

Sampradaya: Hindu Tradition or Movement

Samskar: Character Traits / Qualities

Sant: Figure of Ethical Authority

Sanatana Dharma: Forms of Hinduism Constructed as ‘Orthodox’

Sangathan: The Organisation and Unity of Hindus

Sangh Parivar: Family of Associations Affiliated to the RSS

Sanskriti: Civilization/ Culture

Sannyasin: Hindu Ascetic

Saraswati Shishu Mandir: Saraswati’s Temples Of Learning

Sarvodaya: Universal Upliftment, Associated with Jayaprakash Narayan

Seva: Selfless Service

Sevak: Selfless Volunteer

Sevita: Recipient of Selfless Service

Seva Disha: Orientation to Service

Seva Vibhag: Selfless Service Wing

Shakha: Unit of the RSS

Sharirik: Physical Training

Shikshak: Education

Shuddhi: Purification Ritual

Shusruta Samhita: Vedic Text

Siddha: Medicinal Practices Sourced in Tamil Literature

Suchna: Lit. ‘Message’.

Swadhyay Varga: Study of Religious Texts

Swasthya Vigyan: Lit. Hygiene

Swayamsevak: Volunteer RSS Worker

Tilak: Hindu Mark Worn On Forehead

Topi: Hat

Tambla: Musical Instrument, Hand Drums

Vande Mataram: Lit. 'I Priase the Motherland'. National Song of India, Popularised by the Indian National Movement

Vanaprasthis: Retired Volunteer Workers

Vanavasi: Lit. 'Forest Inhabitant'

Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA): Forest Inhabitants Welfare Centre / Tribal Welfare Centre

Vanavasi Kalyan Kendra (VKK): Forest Inhabitants Welfare Centre / Tribal Welfare Centre. Jharkhandi Branch of the VKA

Varna: Form of Organising Hindu Society into Four-Fold Structures and Associated Duties and Responsibilities

Videshi: Foreigner

Vidya Bharati: Indian Knowledge, Hindu Nationalist Network of Educational Institutions

Vikas: Development

Vishva Dharma: Lit. 'Universal Truth'

Yajna: Vedic Ritual Offering

Yugadharma: Customs / Behavioural Sensibilities Open to Change Dependent upon Periods of Time

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*I dedicate this
thesis to the memory of my Grandad and the continued struggles of my Grandma. Love.*

Chapter One

Introduction: Fashioning My Approach

Introduction

On the 12th of July 2009 the *Prant Pracharak Baithak* (All India State Organisers of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, henceforth RSS) met in the northern Indian city of Meerut. Travelling from across the nation, the *pracharaks* had gathered for three days to discuss recent developments in Seva Vibhag, the loose collection of *seva* organisations claiming inspiration from India's leading Hindu nationalist association, the RSS. Central to the first day's proceedings was a report drawn out of *Seva Disha* (2009) (Orientation to Selfless Service), a recently published pamphlet designed with the purpose of documenting and highlighting the broader Hindu nationalist movement and its commitment to Hindu activist traditions of selfless service. The report centred upon outlining the vast expanse - in terms of numbers, focuses, and participants - of this orientation to service, noting that the number of projects had risen to approximately 157,776, stretching across practices of Education (*Shikshak*), Health (*Arogya*), Development (*Vikas*) and Social Rejuvenation (*Samajik Samskar*) (*Seva Disha* 2009, Karmat 2011). These categories themselves reveal how Hindu nationalist cultures of service permeate notions of active citizenship and inform approaches to an array of contemporary social questions: from constructed traditions of education based around *gurukuls*; rural medical camps offering alternative systems of health care such as *ayurveda*; yoga classes and *samskar kendras* in India's penal facilities; to rural centres which stress the importance of *gau seva* (serving the cow) to contemporary practices of development.

Hindu nationalist commitments to activist traditions of *seva*, illustrated by the discussions surrounding *Seva Disha*, work to raise a range of pertinent questions related to studies of Hindu nationalism and nationalist movements more widely, together with formative practices linked to questions of religious traditions of service, identity, citizenship, and the exercise of power. What are, for example, the histories and modalities by which Hindu nationalist actors have contributed to debates surrounding the practice of *seva*? To what extent can we identify the development of common

languages, themes, and spaces which draw into dialogue Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* with alternative activist traditions? Indeed, how are we to theorise these ‘spaces of service’, in terms of their internal consistency with regard to circulating practices of *seva* and citizenship? What is the relationship between practices of *seva* and ethical formations of the self? These series of questions offers the opportunity to rethink our constructions of both Hindu nationalism and *seva*.

This thesis explores the significance of Hindu activist traditions of *seva* to the development and circulation of Hindu nationalist identities. Through offering an exploration of historical and contemporary Hindu nationalist framings of *seva*, and with reference to both archival and field research, this thesis will problematize the existing dominant research paradigms which read discourses of Hindu nationalism and *seva*. These overriding frameworks outline instrumentalist deployments of Hindu activist traditions of service, an overarching focus upon the modern State and its political arenas, and then spectacular instances of communal violence. Instead, this thesis will offer an alternative reading of Hindu nationalism. This will be achieved through focusing upon Hindu nationalist discursive interventions into debates surrounding traditions of *seva*, and the manners by which these rearticulations of the practice are productive of alternative publics inside of which everyday subjectivities of the ethical Hindu self are performatively enacted and regulated. I am interested then in exploring what contemporary practices of associational cultures of service achieve, in terms of both producing alternative social arenas constructed around Hindu activist traditions of *seva*, and the patterns by which discourses of *seva* work to organise daily practices so as to invoke Hindu nationalist meanings. In this context this thesis will contribute to understanding the plural developments, locations and practices associated with Hindu nationalism, or what Reddy terms its “specific contexts, vocabularies, methods” and how these circulating systems provide logics for “daily practices and political contestations alike” (2011: 412). I am interested then in how Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* rework daily subjectivities so as to flag the nation in everyday locales (Billig 1995:6).

Before I begin this task it is important to situate this project within the existing literature surrounding both Hindu nationalism and *seva*. The next section of this chapter shall outline two overarching and commanding approaches to Hindu nationalism, what I term ‘Hindu nationalism as political statecraft’ and then ‘Hindu nationalism and the

politics of the spectacular'. Having outlined these approaches, the chapter will note the overriding themes which situate contemporary research regarding Hindu nationalism and *seva*. Following each approach I will highlight a range of concerns with regard to the construction of both Hindu nationalism and Hindu nationalist practices of *seva*. I will then outline the way in which this study follows on from research which increasingly approaches Hindu nationalism in alternative ways which draws attention to its local contexts and vocabularies. The second section will introduce this thesis's central methodological approaches and the ways in which its tools are developed both in response to overcoming the concerns identified, together with building upon the strengths of existing alternative frameworks. I shall then proceed to outline a range of contemporary issues and tensions with regard to undertaking field research, including themes related to knowledge, power and representation, questions of an 'insider'/'outsider' status, and field research inside nationalist movements. Finally, I will outline the trajectory of this thesis.

1. Approaching Hindu Nationalism

Briefly stated, the central concerns of Hindu nationalism relate to the dissemination of *hindutva* (lit. 'Hinduness') cultural practices throughout the broad arenas which structure Indian society. For clarity, Hindu nationalist ideologies are organised around three related ideological positions constructing national, cultural, and racial belonging. The first position relates to concepts of *pitribhumi* (fatherland) and *punyabhumi* (holy land). Here, loyalty to a nation state inscribed as Hindu is postulated as necessitating loyalty to the nation's essentially Hindu cultures. Indeed, culture, or *sanskriti*, can be considered to be the second organising element of the approach – in *hindutva* discourses India's legitimate cultures and histories are considered to be Hindu. The third position relates to *jati* (race). Here, Orientalist knowledges are reworked to produce Hindus as sharing a common racial origin (Jaffrelot 2011: 126-137). Hindu nationalism therefore postulates a description of India's Hindu population as linked through territory, culture, and race. The vast diversity of Hindu practices and cultures is positioned inside a somewhat all-encompassing ecumenical Hindu community, as too are India's Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain populations. Those positioned as Other by these discourses are primarily India's Muslim and Christian minorities, although at various periods Communists and 'Pseudo Secularists' have been charged as internal threats to the Hindu nation (Zavos 2005: 41-

43).¹ Bacchetta additionally notes that a continuing theme since the ideology's early organisational manifestations has been a focus on identifying and positioning queer sexualities as Other (1999: 143). Although this necessarily brief typology tilts heavily towards a Savarkarian (1923) 'ethnic' understanding of the tenets of the ideology it should however be sufficient to allow its forms to be used as a foundation for outlining and unpacking Hindu nationalist cultures and practices.²

1.1 Hindu Nationalism as Political Statecraft: Avenues and Limitations

One dominant approach to the analysis of Hindu nationalism is to read it as political statecraft. Here the primary emphasis relates to spheres of high politics and related organisational strategies. Works by Kanungo (2002), Anderson and Damle (1987), and Jayaprasad (1991) on the history of the RSS, Sharma's (2003) broader exploration of Hindu nationalism, Baxter's (1969), Graham's (1990) and Puri's (1980) tracing of the Jana Sangh, and Jaffrelot's (1999) masterful history of the political strategies of the RSS and its affiliates fall into this bracket of literature. Offering detailed historical accounts of major political formations of *hindutva* such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is one way which has been central to research which approaches Hindu nationalism as political statecraft, with the research of Kumar (2001) and Ralhan (2000) focusing upon the BJP's electoral campaigns, national alliances, and electoral performances. These works offer detailed and pertinent descriptions of themes related to Hindu nationalist organizations and their activities within the organized political sphere, and approach the field through highlighting its organizations' histories, its tactical prowess through its re-imagination of national and religious symbols, and the novel strategies and mobilizations surrounding electoral and wider national campaigns.

Inclusive to approaches which locate Hindu nationalism as a form of political statecraft, there is furthermore a wealth of literature which examines the premier Hindu nationalist political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, and its strategies and the political impacts of governmental policies during its two periods of national rule (1998-99, 1999-2004). Notable amongst these texts are Ghosh's (1999), Rao's (2001), and Hansen and

¹My use of the concept 'Other' and 'Othering' is largely derived from the methodological approach deployed by Said (1978) in his critique of Orientalist scholarship. Although neither transhistorical nor singular, Orientalist discourses centre on a will to know, represent, and manage and control colonized populations. Although Said's work deals primarily with the production of knowledge on the 'Arab world', his approach has been deployed more widely with regard to discursive formation and alternative spheres of 'the Orient' (Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993).

² For an extended discussion of Savarkar's contributions to the development of an ethnic Hindu nationalism see Jaffrelot (1999:25-33).

Jaffrelot's edited volume (1998), which offer accounts of the BJP in power and the various obstacles and limitations they continue to face due to the increasing regionalization, growth of caste and coalition based politics within India, and the various ways in which the historically upper caste and northern Indian BJP has attempted to overcome and incorporate these dynamics (Verma 1999, Singh 1998, Hansen 1998, Manor 1998, Roy 1996, Chaulia 2002, Mishra 1997). Similarly, a variety of theorists approach the support and organizational rise of Hindu nationalism as a reaction to the growth in democratic, caste, regional, and Dalit movements located in the post-Mandal period of Indian politics (Hansen 1999, Khilani 1997, Corbridge and Harriss 2000, Hansen 1999, Kohli 1990).

These texts are important for offering a macro-analysis of the impact of national political questions, and the ways in which these dynamics produced the context for the entrance of Hindu nationalist organizations and the reworking of their forms of statecraft into the spheres of explicit political life. Yet, while offering important ways of thinking through Hindu nationalism these approaches are concurrently limiting. The first problematic theme to approaching Hindu nationalism as a form of political statecraft relates to its positioning of Hindu nationalist practices. In approaches which focus upon Hindu nationalism as a practice of statecraft, *hindutva* and understandings of its rise are primarily situated inside the realm of 'high politics' - such as electoral and wider national campaigns and the tactics of preeminent organizational manifestations of Hindu nationalism. Moreover, the framework produces constructions of both a normative site of 'politics' and 'Hindu nationalism', and so constitutes where 'proper' politics and practices can be located. Of importance then are the fashions by which these approaches, through locating normative sites of 'the political', work to exclude serious engagement with a majority of the organisations of the Sangh Parivar. The information in Appendix One demonstrates that frameworks which locate Hindu nationalism in terms of practices of statecraft exclude an array of RSS-affiliated associations from exploration, as their operations occur outside of such spheres. Indeed, even a cursory glance at the associations collected together under the rubric of Seva Vibhag illustrates that they neither participate in elections nor are involved in debating national political agendas and strategies. And neither can they be easily situated in terms of the so-called shibboleths of Hindu nationalism - such as the construction of a *Ram Mandir* on the site of the historic *Babri Masjid*, a Uniform Civil Code, or the removal of Article 370 from the Indian constitution. And neither can they be seen to lobby for or

articulate distinct political programs or directly engage in campaigns of ethno-religious mobilisation. Indeed, approaches which present those Hindu nationalist practices of real significance as located in designs of political statecraft neglect the ways in which we can study the development and circulation of vernacularized Hindu nationalist practices in a diverse array of other locations. These include but are not limited to cooperative associations, organizations of artists, nurseries and educational projects, tribal welfare networks, urban regeneration campaigns, and rural development centres.

Opening up these spaces, I would suggest, allows us to explore the patterns by which Hindu nationalist meanings develop and circulate outside of issues of high politics. These arenas remain of key significance in what Michelutti argues is a process of Hindu nationalism becoming “embedded in particular cultural and social practices”, and “entrenched in the consciousness of ordinary people” (2007: 639), and so developing as a logic grafted onto everyday realities and practices. Indeed, the opening up for exploration of seemingly ‘non-political spheres’ of formative action and so resisting the ‘secularization’ of Hindu nationalism is stressed by Van de Veer in his appraisal of the relationship between changing forms of Hindu religious organizations and early Hindu nationalism. His research suggests “we need a shift in emphasis from the political scientist’s study of political parties and voting behaviour to the anthropologist’s study of religious movements and ritual action” (1994: 1). We need to take seriously, in other words, the importance of religious activist traditions which normative categories of political statecraft are unable to consider.

1.2 Hindu Nationalism and the Politics of the Spectacular: Avenues and Limitations

Research which focuses upon Hindu nationalist forms of political statecraft are complemented through frameworks which emphasise the relationship between key organizations of the Sangh Parivar, ideologies of fascism, and ‘spectacular’ forms of communal violence (Patnaik 1993, Raychaudhuri 2000, Vanaik 1997, Basu et al 1993). Internal to this framework a number of important themes have been brought to the forefront, in particular, the relationship between modernity and communalism (Fox 2006, Pandey 1990, Chatterjee 1986b, Nandy, 1995, 2002). Moving away from approaches which offer an analysis of the historical underpinnings of communal riots to ‘a why’ of communal violence, Brass’s (2003) seminal text *The Production of Hindu – Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* implicates Hindu nationalist organisations in producing what he defines as ‘an institutionalized riot system’. While Brass’s work offers

a system through which we can comprehend communal violence, there is additionally an expansive section of literature which focuses upon specific instances of communal rioting. Gopal sees the *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement and the subsequent destruction of the Babri Masjid as a vital point in understanding contemporary Hindu nationalism, while Engineer *et al* (2003) focus upon the four days of communal destruction which rocked the state of Gujarat in 2002. Notable contributions with regard to the 2002 Gujarat riots are furthermore contained in Shani's (2007) monograph which explores the relationship between caste conflict and the projection of a Muslim Other.

Spectacular instances of communal violence are of course significant to grasping the organisation, degree and nature of violence perpetrated against those positioned as Other to the Hindu nation. They further raise important and urgent questions surrounding India's approach to secularism, together with rightful interrogations of the role and response of the Indian state during communal outbursts. Furthermore, as Bacchetta notes, they help us understand the ways in which Hindu nationalist practices are inscribed with militarized constructs of masculinity (1999). Yet, frameworks which locate the practice of Hindu nationalist meanings in irregular and limited time frames and contexts give overriding emphasis to the exclamation marks of a period rather than its routinized grammar. Moreover, there is an overriding tendency to overlook what Billig calls 'banal nationalism'. By 'banal' Billig (1995) is not categorizing a benevolent form of nationalism in opposition to a harmful variety. Rather, he is drawing our attention to the daily citing of national identities, or as he notes "The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building" (1995: 6). Billig then is complicating the question of the location and circulation of nationalist identities, and in particular, how approaches developed by classical theorists of Nationalism (Giddens 1981, 1985, Gellner 1997, Rogowski 1985) are remarkably restrictive in terms of focusing upon 'the news worthy' in nationalism, or what Bilig describes as "catching exotic, rare, and often violent specimens" (1995: 44). Billig usefully notes with regard to the performance of American national identities that approaches frequently locate its forms in "passionately waved flags...conventionally considered to be exemplars of nationalism", while "routine flags –the flags of our environment- slip from the category of nationalism" (39:1995). Billig's overall focus is thus to develop a theory of nationalism which looks outside of the consciously 'waved flag' and inside the experiences of everyday life.

Approaches which order Hindu nationalist discourses in terms of a primacy of instances of ‘the spectacular’ (Billig’s “exotic, rare, and often violent specimens”) suggests that it is these episodes - the communal violence in Gujarat during 2002, in Kandhmal during 2008, or Muzaffarnagar in 2013 - which are somehow able to sustain a continually remembered Hindu nationalist identity throughout Indian society. Indeed, it is a method which not only constricts the circulation of Hindu nationalism and its practices, but also the social location of the political itself. It is through questioning these dominant frameworks that I am able to raise a series of admittedly uncomfortable yet related points concerning Liberal approaches to active citizenship and nationalist identities. The critique here relates to frameworks organised around Hindu nationalism as the politics of the spectacular work to situate these practices at the periphery of society. In this sense, Hindu nationalism represents the politics of extremism rather than familiarity. Hindu nationalist practices here are read as occurring on the margins of political life, as opposed to informing the practices of daily life. Indeed, its forms can be parked to one side as the sole property of demagogic politicians, a criminal underclass, or ‘religious fanatics’, all of whom stand opposed to the engaged, hardworking, and rational liberal self whose forms of civic practices and associations are free from ‘irrational’ and ‘sectoral’ interests. Through questioning the manners in which Hindu nationalism is positioned we are able then to open up alternative sites in which its discourses circulate, and explore the modes by which Hindu nationalism becomes – as Billig notes more widely with regard to nationalist identities – less of an “intermittent mood” and instead an “endemic condition” (1995: 6).

1.3 Hindu Nationalism and the Question of Seva: Avenues and Limitations

Considerable research on the relationship between Hindu nationalism and Hindu activist traditions of service already exists. In this section I challenge current forms of analysis before outlining differing ways of thinking Hindu nationalism and traditions of service in section 1.4. Existing approaches which explore articulations of *seva* place the practice firstly in its colonial historical context. These frameworks of approach provide contributions to bringing to the surface the differing ways in which modernity mediated through the colonial encounter impacted upon and gave impetus to patterns of religious reform, with actors using existing associational cultures and religious languages and traditions of *seva* in a project of transforming and producing constructs of a modern Hindu identity. This process created the potential for the development of spaces in

which notions of a modern Hindu identity and its associated practices and forms of community could be contested, with scholars arguing that these dynamics were central to development of early Hindu nationalism (Bayly 1998, Datta 1998, 1999, Zavos 1999, 2000, 2001, Bhatt 2001, Brekke 2002). These approaches outline in detail the methods by which the projects of the early Hindu religious reform and *seva* movements enabled the construction and imagination of new forms of Hindu representation (Watt 2005, Beckerlegge 1999, 2000, Jaffrelot 1993, Haynes 1987, Jones 1989, O'Toole 2003).

These approaches are of relevance for the links they suggest between discursive practices of *seva*, ambiguous notions of a Hindu community, and Hindu nationalism. Watt (2005, 2011) illustrates how religious traditions of service enabled the social construction of notions of Hindu and national identities, a process which occurred outside of the explicit nationalist political campaigns of the period and inside seemingly non-political associations such as religious reform and *seva* projects. Furthermore, Zavos (2001) illustrates the shared languages which brought into common associations a variety of differing actors, from those constructed as 'reformist', in terms of their approaches to religious reform, to 'orthodox' organisations, whose themes would proceed to shape early Hindu nationalist concerns and practices.

The relationship between Hindu activist traditions of service and how they intervene into questions of religious belonging has over the previous two decades been brought into the academic spotlight. For Sarkar (2006), key to understanding the development from the 1950s to the present day of Sangh-affiliated educational projects such as Vidya Bharati and the Saraswati Shishu Mandir is not the continued appeal of Hindu activist traditions such as *seva*, neither is it indicative of the continued intervention into activist debates by Hindu nationalist actors; rather it is understood as linked to secular logics. In particular, Sarkar's research offers a framework which approaches the development of Hindu nationalist *seva* projects as a tactical response to political isolation due to the popularity of Nehruvian approaches to post-colonial nation building, internal dissension, and widespread distrust in the wake of Gandhi's assassination (2006: 198). Indeed, "Founding a school", Sarkar argues, "was one of the ways it used to overcome the impasse and to stretch out in untried directions" (2006: 198), with the schools serving the same purpose as RSS-run *shakhas* (2006: 206).

This theme of situating the Sangh Parivar's *seva* associations as vehicles for political intervention is further developed in Thachil and Herring's research (2008). In

this approach, *seva* projects are deployed as a method of providing services to lower caste and *adivasi* actors. This is seen as leading to increased electoral dividends for the BJP. While continuing a focus upon the politically instrumentalist forms of Hindu nationalist *seva* projects, Nair (2009) and Nair and Bano (2007) reassess the relationship between the BJP and the Sangh Parivar's Vidya Bharati. For Nair, "Vidya Bharati's work is not linked to the political mobilization function of the BJP" (2009: 63), but rather, like Sarkar's (2006: 206) theorization of the common aims and agendas shared between Vidya Bharati's educational facilities and the RSS's *shakhas*, Nair suggests that practices of *seva* are a method of pursuing the RSS's central agenda of constructing a Hindu Rashtra through the "grooming [of] young minds" (2009: 62, 63). Likewise, Jaffrelot in his analysis of Seva Bharati accords primacy to an instrumentalist deployment of *seva* by Hindu nationalist activists, and while noting a historical tradition of *seva*, suggests that their social welfare strategy has a clear ideological purpose designed to "assimilate marginal populations which are naturally appreciative of charitable work, into a Hindu nation, the model and spearhead of which is the RSS" (2006: 212).

Indeed, this theme of outlining 'two strands' of *seva*, a 'political' and a 'religious', with the former deployed as part of a Hindu nationalist project, and the latter as part of a legitimate tradition of selfless service, is one which runs through existing literature on Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva*. Nair and Bano (2007), for example, argue for a framework which separates 'the non-sectarian' Hindu Aid from that of the Sangh Parivar's Sewa International. And although noting elements of shared concerns which brought together Vivekananda, a central figure associated with inscribing practices of *seva* at the heart of a modern Hindu identity, and Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, Beckerlegge (2004) too draws a distinction between the contemporary practices of *seva* associated with both the Ramakrishna Mission and Math and the RSS. Indeed, here the framework of approach stresses a religious practice of *seva* and a politicized 'co-opting of Vivekananda's message', with Beckerlegge suggesting that the Hindu nationalist deployment of Vivekananda's cultures of service represents "both misrepresentation and (illicit) appropriation" (2006: 133).

Existing theorisations of Hindu nationalism and *seva* then are organised around three points: instrumentalist deployments, the appropriation of traditions of *seva*, and finally, that the Hindu nationalist *seva* projects exist as 'politically bounded', homogenous, and separate from alternative 'religious' practices of *seva*. These

theorisations raise manifold concerns. Framing Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* as a politically instrumentalist strategy is symptomatic of a range of concerns which as I have noted run through dominating approaches to Hindutva and Hindu traditions of service. Yet, consider first that inscribing *seva* as instrumentally practised in the pursuit of electoral successes, violence, or even forms of political indoctrination works to secularise Hindu activist traditions. The central issue here then is that the approach is unable to explore or give due reckoning to the formative power of *seva*. In this sense, the motivational strengths of religious discourses are denied and ‘moved’ into their ‘correct’ location - the sphere of explicit political statecraft. This point is more widely seen to be representative of operations of power. Thus, not only are the voices of *sevakas* and the particular manners by which they transform activist traditions policed into the normative categories of ‘the political’, and so their agency denied, but concurrently scholarship then acts to ‘interpret’ the ‘real’ reasons surrounding actors’ participation in the projects. Moreover, this narrative tends towards a binary approach to subjectivity, in so far as the relationship of Hindu nationalism to practices of *seva* is organised around a cynical, instrumentalist elite, whose deployment of religious symbols and traditions moves the malleable almost automaton-like subaltern into voting for the BJP, taking on communal identities, or carrying out violence. Indeed, to revisit Jaffrelot’s quote and wider argument regarding the recipients of Hindu nationalist *seva* projects, “marginal populations...are naturally appreciative of charitable work” (2006: 212), ostensibly thereby making them more likely to support Hindu nationalist aims.

These approaches are reminiscent of the ways in which Mohanty argues colonial western Feminist discourses position ‘third world women’ as possessing “needs and problems”, but not “choices or the freedom to act” (1994: 206). By approaching Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* as a vehicle deployed by active elites to achieve secular aims through the medium of a passive marginalised population we are unable to explore the rich fields of human action which stretch beyond the reiteration of power. In short, instrumentalist approaches towards the relationship between *seva* and Hindu nationalism are unable to contribute to questions surrounding the creative agency of subaltern participants and the modes in which practices of *seva* work to vernacularize Hindu nationalism, or explain the continued formative power of religious traditions in the age of late modernity.

Critiques of existing frameworks can be extended to those approaches which articulate the relationship between *seva* and Hindu nationalism in terms of a binary separation between alternative ‘religious’ approaches to *seva* and those ‘sectarian’ forms practised by the Sangh Parivar, a point supposedly illustrative of the political ‘co-option’ of Hindu practices of service (Beckerlegge 2004: 133). Katju (2003) develops this theme to its logical conclusion through arguing that the VHP’s *seva* projects mark out its “pre-Hindutva phase” (2003: 26), noting further that the organisation can only be properly considered Hindu nationalist during its campaigns of mass ethno-religious mobilisation, during, for example, the *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement. These approaches to Hindu activist traditions as either ‘pure’ or ‘adulterated’ are unable to contribute to knowledge surrounding both the long histories of Hindu nationalist interventions into debates surrounding modern Hindu practices such as *seva*, and the degrees of dialogue and exchange which infuse both Hindu nationalist and alternative constructions of the practice. Moreover, a fundamental concern then is that through theorizing the discursive approaches to *seva* which structure the differing Hindu nationalist *seva* projects as externally bounded and internally homogenous, as divided into separate legitimate ‘religious’ and illegitimate ‘political’ practices, we are unable to bring to the forefront the processes by which these shared Hindu activist traditions and languages work to organise such arenas with porous borders, and so allow for the expansion of such spaces and the reinscription of the practice.

1.4 Thinking Hindu Nationalism Differently

Deepa Reddy notes researchers are increasingly beginning to turn to exploring Hindu nationalism outside of the frameworks associated with political statecraft and spectacular violence. Instead, Hindu nationalism is being thought differently in terms of addressing themes such as the particular processes by which its discourses are “mobilized, operationalized and made relatable to specific contexts” outside of forms of political statecraft and spectacular violence, through its development as a “mediating discourse in its own right” and a “diffused logic” of practices (2011: 412). It is in the context of such an academic reorientation that this thesis, which reassesses the relationship between Hindu nationalism and activist traditions of *seva*, is to be located.

Some studies have already begun to offer alternative explorations of the field, and they provide significant conceptual tools for rethinking Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* in this thesis. This scholarship insists upon the modes by which Hindu nationalist

practices and cultures circulate in “blurred” and “ambiguous zones of cultural and political transformations” (Berti 2011: 2). Explorations surrounding the ‘cultural entrenchment’ of “more daily and imperceptible infiltrations of a ‘soft’ Hindutva culture” (Berti 2011: 1) inside local and diverse spaces have been strongly developed in Berti *et al’s* edited collection with reference to three related dynamics. Firstly, the manners by which RSS members and affiliated mediators take the initiative in articulating ‘cultural heritage’ and ‘regional’ programmes in relation to specific local and contextual concerns are noted (Guillebaud 2011, Berti 2011, Kanungo 2011, Heuze 2011). Menon’s research contributes further to this theme noting how the expansionary power of Hindu nationalism is related to the grass roots vernacularization of its discourses, a point which brings its activists into dialogue with, and forcing its associational cultures to accommodate, a disparate range of actors and motivations (Menon 2012). Secondly, such research focuses upon the convergences in terms of common languages and concerns between Sangh Parivar and non-Hindu nationalist associations on concerns relating to *seva*, yoga, and religious proselytization (Cecile-Hoyez 2011, Toffin 2011, Pagani 2011). This research then locates the development of Hindu nationalism outside of its typically associated arenas. And thirdly, the paradoxical accommodation to and circulation of Hindu nationalist rhetoric in associations which purport to stand opposed to such norms is identified (Michelutti 2011, Jaoul 2011, Moliner 2011).

This research raises a further series of important points related to this thesis’s approach to Hindu nationalism and questions of associational space. Fuller (2004), for example, has noted the manner by which the Ganesh Chaturthi festival in contemporary Tamil Nadu has worked as a site in which Hindu nationalist discourses circulate and inscribe meaning to the festival’s practices. Kaur’s (2003) field research too points towards the ambiguous spaces constructed around the Ganapati festival in Maharashtra, where both overlapping Hindu nationalist discursive articulations and competing forms structure the site as riven with plurality. Both Benei’s (2011) and Froerer’s (2007) field research in government-run schools continues this theme of exploring the diffuse locations and forms of Hindu nationalism. Their scholarship notes how Hindu nationalist ideas regarding the nation and national cultures as linked to Hinduism are present in government-run schools, yet concurrently circulate as delinked from a communalist political identity.

This research, which approaches what Zavos labels the ‘wider shapes’ of Hindu nationalism (2007), points towards a rethinking of *seva* in a manner which is particularly relevant to this project. Specifically, the research points to questions related to associational space and the entrenchment of Hindu nationalist practices. Indeed, with the former, they suggest an approach which overcomes the binaries I noted earlier regarding the theorised separate ‘legitimate’ and then Hindu nationalist ‘instrumentalist’ and ‘bounded’ associations and practices of *seva*. Kanungo’s research for example offers an informative account of the shared languages and degrees of dialogue between Adi and Nyishi reform movements and the Sangh-affiliated Vivekananda Kendra in contemporary Arunachal Pradesh (2011). These theoretical insights point towards examining ‘uneasy’ spaces within which common languages allow for the construction of bridges of exchange between differing traditions, a point which I would suggest is important to understanding the wider rearticulation and entrenchment of Hindu nationalist practices of *seva*. Moreover, research which thinks Hindu nationalist associational space differently is particularly strong in terms of pointing towards an approach which considers how actors may draw upon common languages, yet inscribe differing meanings to their practices. Following on from such approaches then allows us to overcome a weakness I noted earlier with regard to contemporary studies of the relationship between Hindu nationalism and *seva* in terms of presenting such arenas as uniform and homogenous.

Besides contributing to opening up questions surrounding the associational spaces of Hindu nationalist *seva* projects, such research additionally provides resources to theorise the circulation of Hindu nationalist practices in arenas and events outside of political statecraft and instances of spectacular violence. It directly suggests then a diversification of Hindu nationalist cultures and practices. This point is important. Indeed, it points towards the investigation of an array of seemingly ‘non-political’ practices and cultures overlooked by the dominant frameworks yet which can be witnessed to invoke Hindu nationalist meanings. This is significant for this thesis’s own investigations surrounding the patterns by which such cultures become entrenched in ‘non-political’ practices, so enabling the (re)production of such identities in mundane time and space.

2. Theoretical Frameworks and Concepts

2.1 *Introducing the Approach*

This section will outline the methodologies and concepts which provide alternative ways of thinking about Hindu nationalism and *seva*, both building upon existing approaches and suggesting ways of addressing the limitations already noted with regard to frameworks of political statecraft and the politics of the spectacular. I approach the study of the relationship between Hindu nationalism and practices of *seva* through a combination of secondary material written by political scientists and historians, and key data is drawn from ethnographic fieldwork. The incorporation of this secondary material is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, through critically examining secondary historical and political works Chapters Two, Three and Four historicize Hindu Nationalist engagements with practices of *seva*. Secondly, and linked to the first point, secondary material offers my argument the opportunity to examine and challenge the previously accepted separation of Hindu nationalist practices of service from ‘legitimate’ traditions of service, a problematic approach which I noted in section 1.3. Indeed, a critical examination of secondary material will allow this thesis the opportunity to outline how central to Hindu nationalism has been a concern for intervening into debates surrounding service and Hindu society. Thirdly, through examining secondary material my approach is able to consider how the historical development of Hindu nationalist practices of service worked to shape the contemporary relationship between Hindu nationalism and *seva*, a focus which is the central task of my ethnographic chapters.

Indeed, the use of secondary material and this historicization is crucial to this work and its ethnographic examination of the relationship between Hindu nationalism and *seva* which form the central arguments of Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Crucial here are the ways in which ethnography constructs an overall approach which allows this work to critically examine how discourses of *seva* operate both on and through subjects. These contemporary discourses of *seva* draw upon ideas which are far from arbitrary, but rather are, as the historical chapters demonstrate, inherited and made legitimate. The chapters which deploy approaches associated with history and political science then work together with the ethnographic fieldwork as they accomplish the task of constructing an overall approach which can critically consider the non-arbitrary specificity of contemporary *seva*. Indeed, through deploying an approach which

‘historicizes’ the present of Hindu nationalist engagements with *seva*, political science, history and ethnography become an integral part of de-reifying the historical and contemporary practices of *seva*. For example, and this is a point I note in Chapter Two, an examination of secondary historical material demonstrates the relationship between *seva*, actors on Hinduism’s boundaries, and themes of hygiene, cleanliness and pollution, points which, as I illustrate in Chapter Six’s field research, continue to animate contemporary Hindu nationalist practices of *seva*. The historical chapters work with the ethnographic chapters then as they contribute to understanding how historical practices of *seva* set the potential for a definite set of contemporary actions of service and thus concurrently found the limits of their existence. Indeed, this approach is beneficial as it links Hindu religious traditions of *seva* into the study of what the noted anthropologist Talal Asad describes as the “movements, classes, institutions, ideologies” (1983: 252) which are foundational for the conditions of possibility of religious practices.

This discussion of my theoretical frameworks and concepts raises three further points. Firstly, if we are to comprehend how languages of *seva* work to produce projects inside of which reiterative and transgressive practices of *seva* are performed then there is the necessity of theorising associational space. Secondly, if we are to examine how discourses of *seva* relate to contesting constructs of a modern Hindu self, then this requires a theorisation of the formative power of the discursive practice. Both examinations require approaches linked to critical theory. And thirdly, if we are to embrace how Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* are productive of projects inside of which circulate performative acts, then this requires ethnographic fieldwork to examine how these practices are reiterated and transgressed in the process of daily acts of self-subjectification. I take these points in turn.

2.2 Practices of Seva, Theories of Associational Space: The Concept of Alternative Publics

Over the previous pages I outlined some of the strengths and limitations of the existing approaches to Hindu nationalist practices of *seva*. In particular, I noted the limitations of the deployment of a ‘politicised’ and ‘appropriated’ tradition of *seva*, and an account which theorised such associational spaces as internally homogenous and externally bounded in terms of the spaces relationship to alternative spheres. Such limitations then require a rethinking of social and associational space. Developing from critical engagements with Habermas’s (1981, 1987, 1989, 1992) approach to the public sphere and its theorisation of such a space as organised around rational and non-sectoral

discourses, and as a universal and horizontal arena from whose sites emanate a post-ideological public opinion, Fraser's (1990) concept of the 'counterpublic' suggests a re-theorisation of civil society and its associational spaces.

While Habermas goes on to note that the organisation of such a space undergoes a process of "refeudalization" (1989: 292) in terms of a move away from its supposed initial commitments to universal access, bracketing of sectoral interests, and post-ideological aims, his theorization remains ambiguous as to the location of subaltern discourses now structured outside of such a sphere. For Fraser, key to understanding the emergence and location of such spaces is the growth of what she terms 'counterpublics', which she notes developed in response to the degrees of exclusion which characterise bourgeois civil society (1990: 66-67). With the organisation of such a space in reality restrictive and exclusive, as opposed to Habermas's theorisation of a universal and horizontal sphere, Fraser notes that parallel discursive publics could be seen to develop in which counter-discursive claims and practices could be witnessed. These publics are composed of subaltern actors and their alternative associations, and are structured around a range of appeals to reason, sectoral interests, and non-rational logics, and which formulated "oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (1990: 67). Contrary to Habermas's appeal to a universal, non-sectoral, and rational singular public, Fraser argues for an approach which recognises the public sphere as organised around a multiple series of fractured publics, "including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics, and working class publics" (1990: 67). Crucially, such publics are the location of contending sectoral discursive claims linked to differing logics.³

Vital then to the concept of the subaltern counterpublic is the notion of discursive intervention with regard to the multitude of other publics. These are public contests which occur inside a civil society which is structured in a hierarchical fashion, in terms of the various publics' access to wealth and the means of discursive

³ Reading social spaces with reference to the tool of the 'counterpublic' is an approach undertaken by a variety of authors focusing upon a range of themes. See further Narayan's (2011) research surrounding the relationship between the *Nara-Marveshi* movement and the development of a Dalit counterpublic in Uttar Pradesh, Werbner's (2004) deployment of the concept to theorise South Asian diaspora spaces, and Dawson's charting of black counterpublics which developed out of systems of racial exclusion within the United States of America. Further research has additionally been undertaken on questions of the development of queer (Warner 1999, 2002), gendered (Ryan 1992) and class (Eley 1992) counterpublics, and the role of cassette sermons and the production of Islamic counterpublics in contemporary Egypt (Hirshkind 2006).

dissemination. As public contests they also ensure that the various publics enter into relation with one another and in this sense, publics should not be seen as enclosed into some distinctive sphere separate from everyday interactions. Rather it is more helpful to understand such internally circulating articulations as attempting to intervene into ever-widening areas (Kaviraj 1997: 67). This point is particularly useful to my project as it helps us approach Hindu nationalist *seva* projects as centres from where excluded discourses circulate and as the location from which actors attempt to expand the reach of their discursive framings.

In addition to the concept providing a framework for approaching civil society as composed of a range of fractured publics, Felski (1989:167) notes that publics should be approached not as possessing a set of all-encompassing and static theoretical discourses but rather as internally diverse. Publics then are contingent assemblages: as constantly constructed around a diverse set of circulating norms which draw upon and circulate reiterative, reinscribed and transgressive practices, what Felski labels their “partiality” (1989:167). To approach the associations of the Hindu nationalist *seva* projects as ‘fundamentalist’ or even purely ‘Hindu nationalist’ misconstrues then the diverse ways in which actors negotiate the circulating normative discourses of *seva*. This point adjusts our focus to understanding the publics as arenas in which multiple discourses circulate. Indeed a singular and homogenous approach – whether ‘fundamentalist’, ‘Hindu nationalist’, or otherwise – overlooks the variety of goals, meanings, focuses, all of which shape volunteers and their approaches to *seva*, and so binds us in terms of exploring how the practice is reinscribed with alternative meanings and transgressed by *sevakas*. The concept therefore provides a set of tools for exploring the rich fields of agency and action which stretch beyond binaries of replication or resistance. Moreover, understanding the Hindu nationalist associational spaces using the tools provided by the concept of the ‘public’ then draws upon a theoretical approach which analyses the circulating and alternative discourses of *seva* and practices of power as woven together.

Note that I ended the previous paragraph through describing the publics and their discursive practices as *alternative*, not counter. This is important, as it indicates a suggested reworking of Fraser’s concept of the counterpublic in the context of Hindu nationalist *seva* projects. Fraser argues that publics stand in a position of opposition and countenance “...in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where

members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (1990: 68). The focus, then, is on explicit opposition. Yet, in thinking through the projects produced through Hindu nationalist articulations of service, I would suggest that the term ‘counter’ calls too forcefully for a reading which approaches practices of *seva* and related associations as developed in response and explicit direct opposition to differing framings of, for example, practices of development. As will become apparent over the course of this thesis, Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* invoke differing degrees of alternative readings. To read discursive practices and publics as uniformly ‘counter’, I would suggest, offers a far too uniform account of the practice. These practices are frequently articulated less as counter to those meanings circulating in differing publics, and more as an alternative without a target. To recognise then the plural fashions by which discourses of *seva* position both differing subjects and publics I deploy a reworked construct of Fraser’s approach which is capable of capturing both counter and alternative practices.

2.3 Performative Acts and Subject Constitution: Seva and the Self

Continuing with this theme of exploring the productive power of Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva*, I will introduce a second methodological approach which has been deployed in this thesis. This approach is designed to investigate the relationship between discourses of *seva*, everyday performative acts, and the constitution of formations of the self. This approach is drawn from Butler’s theorisation of gender as a performative and ‘stylized reiterative’ series of acts, as opposed to the expression of a prior ontological self (1993, 2004, 2007). This approach opens pathways to illustrating the formative power of discourses of *seva* in relation to a range of differing constructs of the self.⁴

A key theme related to the concept of performativity is that formations of the self and associated subjectivities are, far from being internal realities, discursively constructed. Formations of identity then are far from acts of individual choice or representative of the practices of a rational subject, but rather such a subject is constructed as the object and target of discursive power. Indeed, as Butler notes, “Such acts, gestures, enactments...are performative in the sense that the essence or identity

⁴ A range of scholar have deployed notions of performative acts beyond constructs of gender. Boyarin and Boyarin (1993) for example deploy Butler’s concept of performativity in relation to the reiteration of religious notions of belonging in a Jewish context. For a series of wider articles which both use and interrogate Butler’s concept see Bell’s (1999) edited collection.

that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporal signs and other discursive means” (2007: 187). Discursive systems of signification then endow practices with symbolic meaning (2007: 3). To approach Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* as performative then is to shift our attention away from what such discourses of *seva* ‘are’ and focus rather upon what they ‘do’. Indeed, I am interested in how the discourses circulating in the projects structure everyday life in a fashion so as to contribute to debates surrounding the normative practices of a modern Hindu identity and produce the subject as displaying a series of related subjectivities. This is a point Butler is keen to stress; discursive practices are structured, regulated and disciplined through a variety of culturally informal and institutional means linked to systems of normativity. Yet, in displacing ontological cores of being, and instead focusing upon identity as located in signifying practices, Butler draws attention to the necessity of formations of the self as resting upon what she describes as a regulated compulsion towards a “stylized repetition of acts” to socially establish and sustain such disciplinary subject formations (2007: 191).

Through viewing the dynamics of subject formation as a “temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms” (1993: 10), this approach draws our attention to how discourse attempts to fix subjectivities outside of either explicit forms of political statecraft or the spectacular forms of identity assertion. Instead, writing here of categories of gender, Butler notes this process “must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (2007: 191). Butler’s approach then calls for a study upon what she further describes as the “mundane and ritualized” (2007: 191) in terms of its relation to invoking meaning. This focus upon performative acts and their formative power in relation to categories of the self emphasises the ways in which power is unable to exhaust what it constructs, with the necessity of repetition opening up critical questions of discourse and agency, and in particular, resistance to and reiteration of power.

The final three chapters of this work critically approach universal categories of agency which police acts inside binary constructions of either resistance or reiteration. These categories, frequently attached to a progressive and teleological activist or academic project, rely upon a construct of the human subject whose agency is viewed as either emancipatory or involved in the resignification of hegemonic systems of meaning.

Complementing my earlier discussion of theorising alternative publics as internally diverse and not as solely the domain of reiterative practices, I argue that discourse and human agency need to be detached from binary theorisations, and instead, understood as performed and lived in an assortment of ways. Indeed, we need to understand how acts not simply reiterate or resist power, but also in terms of their refocusing, rearticulation and transgression of normative meanings (Butler 1993: 10-11, 2007: 192-203, Mahmood 2012: 22-39). This is not to imply that these acts pre-exist fields of power. Indeed, issues of discourse and agency need still to be understood within the structures of power, and not outside them. Rather, this approach resists a teleology of action, subordination and emancipation, and instead approaches discursive acts as negotiated and contingent. These issues will be explored in depth in chapters five to seven of the thesis, when the argument draws substantially on my field research inside Hindu nationalist *seva* projects in Jharkhand.

3. Approaching Field Research

3.1 The Jharkhandi Context

Field research offers an approach by which we can explore how Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* are productive of alternative publics inside of which circulate performative acts, together with examining how the historical Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* regulate and make possible its contemporary forms. It is for this reason that chapters five, six and seven of this thesis are organised around six months of field research inside the *seva* projects of the Vanavasi Kalyan Kendra (VKK), an RSS-inspired *seva* organisation operating in the central Indian state of Jharkhand. During this period I located myself in the everyday workings of the VKK's *seva* projects, including scores of VKK-run educational facilities, medical camps, rural development centres, sporting events, fundraising and recruitment campaigns, and administration centres and training sessions. Here, I was able to observe both participants and *sevaks* as they reiterated, transgressed, and rearticulated practices of *seva*. Moreover, such field research offered opportunities to examine the degrees of dialogue and transgression which existed between Sangh-affiliated *seva* organisations such as the VKK and alternative associations including the Chinmaya Mission, The Lions, the Ramakrishna Mission and Math, university student societies, Dayanananda Anglo Vedic Schools, activists in Christian missionaries projects, NGO workers, and a multitude of organisations which

offered alternative developmental and medical practices articulated in Hindu activist traditions.

The associational cultures of Jharkhand are important for a number of significant reasons. Firstly, the State illustrates the most expansive network of both rural and urban Sangh Parivar-affiliated *seva* projects. The VKK alone operates in over 1387 locales, involving and reaching, according to organisational approximations, up to 80,000 participants. Moreover, such projects stretch across a variety of concerns – from questions of rural development (*gram vikas*), formal education (*shikshak*) and informal ‘one teacher’ schools (*ekal vidyalaya*), to health (*aroyga*) facilities which include a hospital specialising in optometry, and numerous medical distribution centres and rural camps. The VKK additionally runs sporting festivals, religious ‘homecoming’ (*wapas karna*) ceremonies linked to Jharkhand’s numerous tribal populations, and *Van Yatra* (Journey to Forests) programmes aimed at encouraging the State’s urban middle classes to visit and volunteer in rural areas. This range of activities offers the opportunity to explore how the VKK’s normative practices of *seva* have been productive of publics – the most expansive in terms of Seva Vibhag division -- which link together actors from urban financiers to rural teachers, from predominantly male doctors to the overwhelmingly female participants in the VKK’s Gram Vikas Kendras (Rural Development Centres). The Jharkhandi context also offers the opportunity to examine how Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* intervene in questions of active citizenship and Hindu community belonging, exploring the interaction between Hindu nationalist and tribal identities. This point gains greater significance when one considers analysing the participation of tribal actors in organisations which seemingly disempower such subjects.

Yet, while fieldwork inside the VKK’s *seva* projects provided opportunities to research the relationship between Hindu nationalism and practices of service, there were various problems associated with these extended ethnographic engagements. As a participant observer in the projects I undertook research in 13 VKK run informal and formal educational projects, 9 single teacher schools, 8 rural development centres, 3 medical camps, 4 medical dispensaries, 1 football tournament, 3 training sessions for rural development workers and 3 monthly meetings of full time *sevaks*. This is together with research undertaken at the VKK’s hospital in Gumla and their central offices in Ranchi, with my fieldwork further incorporating participants’ places of work and home, various *dabhas*, *chai* stands and modes of transport. I undertook both formal and semi-

formal interviews, as well as experiencing numerous casual encounters in training sessions and travelling to and from the projects. In terms of recording and ordering these interactions, I learned that a tape recorder in participant observer research can both offer potentials and limitations. While recordings offer the potential to effortlessly collect hours of audio interactions, each time I used a tape recorder the action served to restructure the research environment and formalise its patterns of communication, working then to produce dialogues which functioned as ‘official sound bites’. Instead, casual encounters, observations, discussions and multi-person conversations and debates recorded without the use of a tape recorder were instances when *sevak*s and participants spoke and acted in ways which reflected their everyday engagements with activist traditions of *seva*. I carefully transcribed these encounters either directly or as soon as feasible in English in my field notebooks, together with noting their dates and locations. These interactions drawn from my ethnographic research form the basis for the dialogues in chapters five, six and seven.⁵ I took advantage of time outside of the projects to write down in a separate notebook more general dynamics regarding the VKK, Hindu nationalism and *seva*, in addition to drawing up potential avenues of future interest and research questions.

Although a significant number of participants spoke both Modern Standard Hindi and a tribal language such as Munda or Santhali, activities in the projects were conducted in Modern Standard Hindi, a language in which I possess both spoken and written fluency. Promotional materials directed towards urban and middle class prospective volunteers and financial supporters were written in English. Documents such as the text books used in the VKK’s schools, handbooks distributed throughout medical camps and Gram Vikas Kendra materials such as posters were written in Hindi. In translation I was careful to pay attention to the particular contextual meanings that the activists were inflecting upon both their written and spoken languages of *seva* and understandings of Hindu nationalism and related themes. Moreover, through contextulization, I took care to avoid translating their meanings into new categories. For example, and this is a point I bring to the forefront in Chapter Seven, activists would frequently link practices of development to ‘*hamare sanskriti*’. Here, the activists were articulating *sanskriti* not as a consistent form of ‘refinement’ or ‘perfection’, but rather as a form of ‘Hindu civilization’ or ‘culture’. This is one example where contextulization contributed to the presentation of meanings.

⁵ For purposes of confidentiality I have used pseudonyms to anonymize the identities of all my informants.

The second issue with regard to my ethnographic fieldwork relates to questions of location and participation. The numerous *seva* projects of the VKK are located in multiple sites throughout Jharkhand. Ethnographic research outside of a single ‘space’ or ‘community’ and inside multiple sites raises a number of issues surrounding access. As a hierarchically organised series of service projects my initial access to the VKK’s sites and participants were closely mediated by the leadership cadre. However, due to the work commitments of this membership cadre and their growing familiarity with my presence, this somewhat ‘supervised research’ was gradually relaxed as I was encouraged to pursue contacts, visit projects and more widely research independently. Moreover, activists in the VKK were keen to promote their work, and so provided an expansive level of engagement, ranging from contact details to introductory letters to accommodation in the projects. This offered my research the opportunity to become an everyday presence in sites of my choosing, albeit taking into consideration the logistics of travel and the commitments of the *sevak*s. Moreover, the initial period of research offered me the opportunity to make contacts with the leadership of the movement, a point which facilitated these later largely independent stages.

Of course, activists were not simply keen to open access to the projects they were heavily committed to, but they were also interested in shaping the representation of their work. Indeed, both Blee (2002) in her ethnographic work on gender and racism in the United States and Robben (1995) with regard to ethnographic research on the Argentinian military have noted the importance of scholars being aware of the modes by which activists use research to promote their own agendas. In respect of this point a number of issues are brought to the forefront. Importantly, VKK activists and their attempts to further their own agendas were largely internally directed. Teachers for example were keen to put me into contact with other VKK affiliated educational projects. This was partly due to their existing and available networks of contacts. It was also an attempt to boost the so-called importance and superiority of their wing’s particular commitments in comparison to the organisation’s other sites of work. It was furthermore an opportunity of internal self-promotion in the hope that I would report their projects favourably amongst other activists. While recognising that research is intertwined with these issues, as part of my ethnographic approach I deployed a number of strategies to overcome any associated potential limitations. Firstly, and ironically, activist attempts to influence my research often worked to expand wider my contacts and sites of work – simply mentioning that I had been visiting VKK schools to *sevak*s

working in the health wing often ensured I was swiftly invited to an up-coming medical camp or wider *arogyga* project. And secondly, attempts to focus my research in a particular wing of the association could be overcome due to my early possession of a crib sheet detailing the names, contact details and sphere and location of work of almost seventy full and part-time *sevaks* covering every wing of the association. Approached with due respect, these *sevaks* acted as ‘gate-keepers’ to the array of VKK run *seva* projects, so overcoming local attempts to focus my research.

Related to overcoming the ethnographic limitations posed by activists attempting to shape the representation of their work, certain participants in the projects at times attempted to present a unified amalgamation of views as representative of the organisation as a whole on certain issues, and so silence differing voices (see Chapter Seven). This clearly has implications for a study committed to understanding contemporary Hindu nationalist practices of *seva*, and in particular, the diverse ways in which activists come to embed the tradition in wider practices and languages. For example, although the organisation did nominally have a wing – *Hitraksha* - committed to campaigning against corruption it was largely inactive, with independent agitation against related issues portrayed as divisive and largely pointless due to the intrinsically corrupt nature of politics, and certainly not an action which the VKK would sponsor. Yet, through taking the decision to organise my fieldwork in extended periods at certain sites, and then returning to these sites at differing points throughout my work, the ability of any activist to uniformly police the articulations of other members and so present a singular narrative was both futile and ineffective. Indeed, the manners in which *sevaks* embedded activist traditions of *seva* into wider practices and languages is fully explored in Chapter Seven.

Further issues should be raised while discussing my period of ethnographic fieldwork: that of access to alternative social services associations in Jharkhand, and secondly, questions of language. Inside Jharkhand a vast variety of social service associations operate in a range of spheres. As such, sections of my fieldwork were concerned with activists involved in both the VKK and alternative social service associations such as The Lions and the Chinmaya Mission. While access to differing associations was not limited, I took the decision to visit alternative organisations such as Christian social service institutions only in a limited manner during the later stages of my fieldwork. This point explains why there are few references to Christian projects in

Jharkhand. This was not due to any privileging of ‘legitimate’ or ‘illegitimate’ social service operations. Rather, two reasons account for this decision.

Firstly, my research indicates that Hindu nationalist constructions of a non-Hindu Christian Other play only a marginal role for VKK activists in explaining how and why they are engaged in *seva*. Secondly, there was a risk that open engagement with Christian run welfare projects could have jeopardised the main focus of my research on VKK sites, due to the influence of senior *sewaks* affiliated to the RSS. It is in this context that I took the decision to visit Christian service foundations such as the Xavier Institute during the later stages of my research. Although Christian service associations play only a marginal role in terms of explaining the approach VKK activists take to traditions of *seva*, visiting the Roman Catholic run educational college the Xavier Institute did provide context in terms of understanding the wider shared practices of service in the State in terms of an appeal to legitimacy. For example, as I note in Chapter Five, both VKK and Catholic medical projects presented their health care as derived from non-biomedical traditions, while the former described these ‘alternative’ practices of healthcare as ‘Hindu’ and ‘*Ayurvedic*’, and the latter as ‘local’ and ‘tribal’. Although limited, later visits to Christian projects then did provide the context for understanding shared concerns and practices between service associations. It is this framework of offering context – not one of seeking to marginalise potentially critical voices or differing identities – that explains this project’s engagement with Jharkhand’s contemporary Christian traditions of social service.

3.2 Knowledge, Power, Representation

When considering field research it is important to note that strategies of representing the Self-Other relationship have been brought under a critical lens in terms of being implicated in regimes of power (Clifford 1986: 10). Discussions surrounding themes of authority and representation have over the previous decades been developed in the context of the points raised by Spivak in her notable and influential essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988). Briefly, Spivak’s argument relates to the modes by which dominant discourses reveal and privilege the political claims of both colonial and comprador elites, with those positioned as subaltern by such hegemonic systems of meaning excluded from such arenas and vocabularies. This leaves their voices with little resource for articulation inside the overriding paradigms. Such themes raised by Spivak raise questions of epistemic violence and representation. Yet, following on from

Mahmood's (2012) suggestions regarding her field research amongst participants in the women's mosque movements in contemporary Egypt, I am concerned here that Spivak's wider approach tends to restrict our ability to be involved in engaging with those claims of the Other which are rendered unintelligible. Such a point is particularly pertinent when we consider the fashions by which participants in religious so-called 'fundamentalist' movements – such as those affiliated to the Sangh Parivar -- are outlined as representative of a final stand of religion in the age of late modernity. This thesis then approaches the theme of representation and authority with a desire not to speak for the Other or impose categories of understanding, but rather as a mode in which the formative power and everyday agency of that which has been banished can be, however problematically, brought into dialogue with hegemonic articulations.

3.3 Complicating Insider and Outsider Statuses

These themes point towards questions of field research and constructs of 'insider' and 'outsider', positionings which both structure research and whose fields of power are creatively negotiated. As noted by Merriam *et al* (2010), valorised constructs of field researchers as 'inside' or 'outside' the sphere of study have been deployed to provide potential contexts for understanding the relationship between the researcher and the object studied. In this reading, the closer approximation to the object of study that the researcher shares in terms of structures including class, gender, and race, the closer in approximation will be the research to existing reality. Complicating such an approach, I would note the importance of understanding such formal boundaries as contingent and negotiated. Three points are of importance here. Firstly, such positionings are necessarily shifting. Secondly, binary notions of 'inside' / 'outside' fail to reflect upon the fashions by which those researchers 'inside' are re-positioned by actors. And thirdly, through positing the privileged relationship between the 'insider researcher' and a pre-discursive construct of community, the approach overlooks how truth acts are claims to power, and so is unable to recognise how the organisation of 'truth' represents political articulations (2010: 411-413). It is through critical reflection upon binary approaches to 'inside' and 'outside' that I am able to bring to the forefront how these issues impact upon my own research. Throughout my experiences of fieldwork in Jharkhand I was aware of such positionings – at times approached as a member of a Hindu diaspora and so part of a transnational Hindu community, at other times as a *videshi* ('foreigner') academic whose level of comprehension of 'real India' was to be pitied, and at other

times an intriguing figure who had travelled over a great distance (and so possessed wealth and time) simply to, as one VKK member commented bemusingly, ‘hang out in a hut in some village watching people make chutney’. The point here relates to understanding that my field research is shaped through how I was perceived in terms of class, gender, and as being born and raised in the metropolitan North. I took the decision to take into consideration such negotiations through two focuses. Firstly, a heightened critical reflexivity with regard to understanding field research as generative of knowledge. And secondly, a decision to be located in the everyday workings of the VKK projects for an extensive period, allowing for a multiplicity of open-ended approaches to be deployed.

3.4 ‘Everyday’ Field Research and Nationalist Movements

Extended periods of research inside of everyday life and a focus upon locales in which nationalist identities circulate bring both this thesis’s approach and those deployed by Spencer (1990) into dialogue. Briefly, through situating himself inside the everyday contexts of a Sinhala village Spencer noted the fashions by which ‘non-political’ actors drew upon local symbolic resources and artefacts to inscribe the nation state of Sri Lanka with a primordial Sinhala cultural and racial identity. Following on from Spencer, situating this thesis’s field research in such everyday locales offers the opportunity to explore the development of nationalist identities outside of political statecraft and instances of the spectacular. This approach therefore requires a location within the everyday life of the *seva* projects – in locales including schools, medical camps, rural development centres, and *mandirs*. Through observing (with varying degrees of participation) and conversing (in both structured and everyday fashions) this thesis will be able to offer detailed renderings of a variety of ‘infra-ordinary’ voices, practices and routines, and the production and negotiations of Hindu nationalist meanings. This ‘everyday’ approach is of importance then as it illustrates how nationalist identities develop through quixotic lived experiences and as “a style or genre of the collective imagination” (Spencer 1990: 287).

4. The Trajectory of the Text

Chapter Two offers an alternative approach to the modes by which a modern Hindu identity and practices of *seva* were reimagined in the context of the colonial encounter. I will demonstrate how the attempted ‘ordering’ of philanthropy undertaken by the East

India Company and the early Colonial State, the circulation of Orientalist epistemologies, Christian missionary activity and the development of cultures of legal representation were creatively negotiated by Indian subjects to frame the development of new 'social imaginaries'. These ways of thinking and being, together with the practices of Hindu reform movements, generated particular concerns about division and decline in the imagining of 'the Hindu community'. These 'social imaginaries' represented Hinduism as deeply divided and in decline. It is in this context that practices *seva* were transformed to invoke related meanings of Hindu *sangathan* ('organisation'), social upliftment, and national rejuvenation. The final section of the chapter shall highlight how despite drawing on shared religious languages, practices of *seva* were productive of a range of porously structured publics in which the tradition was linked to a range of differing 'orthodox' and 'reformist' approaches to questions surrounding the subjectivities of a modern Hindu self.

Chapter Three will begin by examining how early Hindu nationalist associations such as the RSS developed their resources and concerns out of the existing 'orthodox' approaches to religious reform and *seva*. My analysis will then demonstrate that the RSS's organisational idioms allowed for the development of a pro-active engagement with relief operations for Hindu refugees during the events of Partition, allowing for Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* to be broadened in terms of their projects and constituencies. In the post-Independence period the alternative publics of Hindu nationalist *seva* projects expanded greatly. Social movements were significant here, and the chapter explores a particular case study in depth: the *sarvodaya* movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan.

Building on Chapter Three's examination of the expansion of publics in which Hindu activist traditions circulated, Chapter Four's focus relates the growth of a visibilized and public Hindu religiosity to changing Hindu nationalist practices of *seva*. The chapter analyses how *seva* developed as a resource which was inscribed with themes which helped to shape Hindu nationalist approaches to questions ranging from the sanskritization of *Adi* indigenous cultures in Arunachal Pradesh to forms of *puja* during the Vinayaka Chaturthi festival in Tamil Nadu. This line of argument demonstrates how, on a much broader scale than previously, Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* were productive of alternative publics in which everyday subjectivities associated with a modern Hindu self were formed and contested.

Chapter Five begins by introducing the field research undertaken inside the *seva* projects of the Vanavasi Kalyan Kendra, a Sangh Parivar- affiliated association. The first section examines the modes in which the VKK's practices of *seva* are productive of alternative publics inclusive of a variety of actors and practices associated with traditions of service. These practices of *seva* invoke vernacularized Hindu nationalist themes and are drawn upon and transformed by a range of participants. The chapter will explore how the projects of the VKK are spaces where Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* develop through drawing upon constructed Hindu traditions and appealing to alternative ways of thinking. I will further illustrate how instances of transgression are central to the production of alternative publics. I further relate the degrees to which transgressive practices come under disciplinary policing to the extent to which they allow actors from diverse arenas to work together to achieve their respective aims.

Chapter Six takes the reader inside the educational projects of the VKK in order to outline the particular modes by which circulating discourses of *seva* are formative of constructs of what I label the ethical Hindu self, a subject whose everyday patterns of thought and practice are linked to constructed Hindu traditions. In particular, and related to daily practices of hygiene, the singing of *bhajans*, and the chanting of *mantras* in morning assemblies, I outline the particular modes by which educational discourses of *seva* structure the everyday life of the schools so as to organise the participants' daily actions to invoke Hindu nationalist views on questions of cultural superiority, an integral relationship between Hinduism and order and discipline, and Hindu *sangathan*. However, concurrently I will show how such subject formations, in requiring daily reiteration, are open to negotiation and transgression, necessitating instances of disciplinary policing.

Chapter Seven continues this focus upon exploring the formative power of Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva*. In particular, this chapter explores the VKK's approach to questions of rural development and empowerment. This chapter shows how constructs of development are located as a series of everyday acts which are brought into line with constructs of the ethical Hindu self through reiterative practices in both the projects and wider social arenas. I will then move to explore how actors use, yet rearticulate, the VKK's circulating approaches to constructs of an ethical Hindu self as a mode of critiquing both existing rural class and gendered hierarchies. Through arguing that such discursive rearticulations represent the subject stepping outside

existing subordinate subject positions yet into new fields of power, such a theorisation will both complicate the relationship between Hindu nationalism and categories of oppression, and at the same time offer an opportunity to raise questions of agency and negotiation.

In the conclusion to the thesis I firstly bring together the key themes which run throughout the chapters of this work, in particular noting how Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* have since their early development contributed to questions surrounding the normative practices of a modern Hindu identity. These practices of *seva* have produced broad publics whose borders are porously structured and are the location of reiterative, rearticulated, and transgressive articulations of Hindu activist traditions of service. These seemingly ‘non-political’ publics are of importance for comprehending the circulation and formative power of vernacularized Hindu nationalist discourses in the late modern period. The conclusion then draws our attention to further avenues of research surrounding the diverse shapes of Hindu nationalism. The significance of Hindu activist traditions of *seva* is such that their meanings have a rich history of contestation and debate. The following chapter, Chapter Two, shall focus upon such dialogues and tensions as they developed during the late colonial period as traditions of service and their related associational cultures came under significant duress and transformation.

Chapter Two

The Colonial Encounter and Reworking Practice

Introduction

The question as to the relationship between Hindu nationalism and *seva* necessarily draws our attention to the plural modes by which such traditions of service have undergone degrees of change. Indeed, as I will go on to illustrate, Hindu activist practices such as *seva* remain no more tethered, static and fixed than the cultures of service which stress varyingly 'secular' forms of citizenship and circulate in differing contexts. This brings to the forefront the processes by which, following on from Hobsbawm and Ranger (2007), we can witness the 'invention of tradition'. Or, as they comment, how traditions which "appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin" (2007: 1), and so how any serious study of such practices requires shedding light upon the contributions of how both patterns of modernity and living cultural practices are accommodated by actors in the transformation of such traditions. I am calling attention here (and this point regarding the relationship between the 'invention of tradition' and nationalist ideologies has been made forcefully by Anderson (2006)) to the necessity of approaching practices such as *seva* as circulating in open systems of meaning - as discursive practices then which avoid a universal typological classification and invoke dynamic and variously alternative approaches to questions stretching from national and religious belonging to everyday ethical sensibilities.

In approaching Hindu activist traditions of service in this framework I am drawn to the late colonial period of the British Raj. This is due to the rich vein of scholarship dealing with practices of giving during this period, together with the period's central importance in being the location of the inscription of practices of *seva* as a central aspect of a modern Hindu identity. This chapter will demonstrate how the colonial encounter situated the patterns in which actors redeveloped traditions of *seva* through the use of existing religious languages and cultures of volunteerism. In bringing to the forefront the significance of the late colonial period to the redevelopment of practices of *seva* and its inscription at the heart of debates surrounding the associated practices of a modern Hindu identity, this chapter will firstly outline the attempts of the

East India Company's and then from 1858 the Colonial Administration's attempts to 'order' and 'modernise' existing cultures of giving. I will then examine the impact of these actions upon the early modern transmutation of practices of *seva* in the context of the activities of existing religious reforming associations. The argument will then demonstrate how increasingly actors encountered and negotiated developing patterns of colonial rule and how such a creative dynamic situated the articulation of transformed notions of religious community. The significance of re-theorising a marginalised Hindu identity inside these newly developing languages of belonging and its associated implications of duty will be considered with regard to its impact upon redesigning the organisational vehicle and object of *seva*. The chapter will then continue to outline how actors engaged with both Orientalist critiques and Christian missionary projects, with practices of *seva* and their alternative publics developing as a tradition and site in which seemingly divided Indian and Hindu identity develop as co-implicated systems of being and knowing.

Having examined the transformation of *seva*, the chapter's argument will move on to approaching how the production of *seva* as a central aspect of being a modern Hindu allowed for the development of alternative practices of the tradition to develop. This is most notably clear with regard to a consolidated practice of *seva* and *shuddhi* and its approaches to traditions of *jati* and *varna*, contestations which bring into dialogue varying constructed 'reformist' and 'orthodox' approaches to the formations of a modern Hindu self and organisation of Hindu representation. These approaches, I will demonstrate, animate Hindu activist publics and concerns, a point which allows Chapter Three to follow on this line of argument through noting that early Hindu nationalist articulations of the practice find their traces in 'orthodox' approaches, and are engaged in formulating answers to common questions surrounding Hindu society using these newly developed and shared Hindu activist traditions of service.

1. Ordering Philanthropy

1.1 Utility, Direction, 'Moral Development' and Associational Life

Philanthropic practices of *dana* ('giving'), *dayaa* ('compassion') and *seva* ('service') have been imagined in differing fashions throughout the history of the Indian subcontinent. Indeed, a diverse array of monastic traditions can be placed in a timeline of social action organised around the activities of both *faqirs* and *sadhus*, with Vaishnavite *bhakti*

(‘devotional’) traditions additionally linked to forms of service (Watt 2005: 3, Warriar 2003). “*Seva*”, as Warriar notes, “in its broadest sense simply means service” (2003: 264). Prior to projects undertaken to organise and order its endeavours inside newly developing associational and disciplinary norms the practice was infused with meanings which saw it as operating in local sites and directed towards prominent religious figures (Patel 2007: 45). Interweaving with such inscriptions of service forms of philanthropy emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth century which were increasingly mediated through mercantile elites and organised around the patronage of temples, festivals, and other institutions (Watt 2005: 67). In his study of gift-giving in colonial Surat, Haynes notes that such acts were frequently linked to lubricating the wheels of business and exchange – whether as declarations of trust, providing a receipt of good will, or less subtle forms of clientelism (1987: 341-353).¹

While both Metcalf (1996) and Low (1973) note the absence of any singular ideology of rule during the colonial period, as part of its claims to a ‘civilising mission’ both the East India Company and the Colonial State deployed a variety of arguments which purported to critique existing approaches to philanthropic endeavours, including practices of *seva*. Such Othering discourses focused upon the supposed private, ritualistic and wasteful forms of Indian charity, evidenced most notably in Hindu traditions of service, in contrast to the public, efficient and utilitarian forms ostensibly typified by British practices of charity (Haynes 1987: 349, Watt 2011: 276). I am interested here in examining the fashions by which such discourses informed both the Company and the State’s decision to ‘order’ Indian traditions of service, and importantly, the impact that such interventions into associational life had upon reinscribing practices of *seva*. The East India Company’s drive to reorganise Indian philanthropic acts emphasised a number of central points concerning questions of utility, public functionality, and its uniformity. Such acts were seen as necessitating public associations whose internal structures were organised around fixed committees, new fundraising techniques, a division of labour, membership lists, and references to concepts of social and economic rationalities. Indeed, and although succeeding Company rule by just two years, the Societies Registration Act of 1860 is illustrative of such attempts to order and

¹ Such a synopsis is necessarily brief as the central focus of this section is designed to avoid summarising a history of the varied forms of philanthropy and gift giving and instead is concerned with the particular modes by which institutional and associational actors sought to ‘order’ and ‘civilise’ existing traditions. For an excellent and detailed summary of the complex, subtle, and overlapping social and political articulations of philanthropy during the period see Sharma (2001) and Dirks (1993).

institutionalise philanthropy. Such significant interventions into associational life offered philanthropic organisations State recognition and legitimacy. Moreover, such reorderings of existing traditions of giving and service was heavily infused with racial ideologies of ‘nation building’, with Watt (2011: 277) noting that “modern philanthropic institutions on the British model were supposed to ‘enable’ more growth in the ‘moral and material progress’ of India”, and were moreover linked to aims of producing a domesticated and ‘industrious’ population fit for the economic and social needs of the developing State. With such an emphasis upon ‘national development’ the Company itself had attempted the ordering of philanthropic work into spheres of ‘public utility’ such as the construction of wells, roads, and jails, which would encourage – it was theorised -- the ‘moral development of the deserving poor’ (Watt 2011: 277-279, Haynes 1987).

While such a reordering of philanthropy worked – as with many discursive appeals to science, rationality, and progress – to position a binary Self-Other relation in fields of power, its over-determining impact upon the existing practices of philanthropy can be seen to be somewhat more complex and nuanced. Indeed, in a similar manner to how Bhabha (1997: 85-92) notes that Macaulay’s ‘Minute’ resulted in forms of mimicry which invoked meanings of risk rather than direct similarity, so too can we problematize the over-determining power of the Company’s interventions into practices of giving (Haynes 1987, Watt 2005: 65-96). Indeed, note firstly that existing forms of philanthropy not only continued but – perhaps ironically – were partially consolidated by the Colonial State’s ‘great durbars’ of 1877, 1902-03, and 1911-1912 (Cohn 2007). Such complications are further evident through bringing to the forefront the famine relief programs of the Swaminarayan movement in Gujarat between 1813-1814, projects which as Beckerlegge notes anticipate much of the EIC’s own stresses on utility, a ‘deserving poor’, and ‘rational’ planning and fundraising (1999), with an interest in such practices traced to Vaishnavite pre-colonial traditions (1999). The organisational drives of the Company and the State are more helpfully then understood as negotiated, with actors practising both forms in differing social arenas. This moreover illustrates the early degrees of porosity in terms of differing publics organised around alternative approaches to service. Indeed, the importance of these negotiations is evident through noting that actors built upon existing traditions of service and translated attempts to order the tradition and so began a process of transforming practices of *seva* as hybrid

forms which thus re-legitimated – not removed – existing cultures of giving (Watt 2011: 279). It is to this last point that I now turn.

2. Reimagining Community

2.1 Orientalist Scholarship and the Primacy of Religious Belonging

If early attempts to reorder acts of philanthropy brought these practices into dialogue with questions of utility, direction, ‘moral development’, and associational life, then additional dynamics associated with the colonial encounter worked to further create the context for the reinscription of practices of *seva* and the production of these hybrid arenas of service. Such a line of approach is evidenced through noting how colonial policy drawn from Orientalist epistemologies worked to produce new theorizations of religious community. Orientalist scholarship, then, “...is not just a way of thinking. It is a way of conceptualizing the landscape of the colonial world which makes it susceptible to certain kinds of management” (Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993: 6). Taken together, both processes of ‘reordering’ and ‘reimagining’ allowed for creation of a context where Hindu practices of *seva* could be reinscribed in terms of being organised around newly developing associational cultures, together with a new approach to questions of a religious duty towards ‘a Hindu marginalised’. A central part of such an argument requires an examination of how the subject category ‘Hindu’ was given primacy in colonial India, and of fashions by which Orientalist epistemologies were translated into practices of service to provide new ways of imagining questions of marginalisation.

The secularizing project of colonial modernity, although articulated in ‘secular’ discourses of ‘progress’, ‘evolution’, and ‘development’, had a significant effect on creating the context for the reworked public assertion of new religious identities (Van der Veer 2002: 179). Indeed, as scholars have frequently noted, Orientalist writings on Indian society “gave religion a privileged status as the foremost site of essentialized difference between the religious East and the secular West” (Van der Veer 2002: 173), with ethnographic accounts, colonial histories, and policies of rule all aiding in the reworked production of the primacy of religious belonging and division (Appadurai 1981, Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993). One such widely researched policy in terms of exploring the formative efficacy of colonial discourse relates to the decennial censuses introduced from 1871 onwards. This ‘representational’ information demanded

a public definition of the self organised around a singular formation of religious belonging, and so characterized Indian society as primarily constructed around religious difference with the primacy of these supposed homogenous categories. These Orientalist-infused policies had a profound impact upon how subjects related to both one another and the State, with statistics related to religious numerical communities – and so ‘forming’ and ‘representing’ Indian society -- deployed to demand forms of communal political representation (Bose and Jalal 2004: 87, Sundar 2000: 113, Zavos 1999: 68). Religious boundaries then were hardened and given new public meanings, with their constructed practices given primacy to understandings of the self and community.

Two further points are of interest here. Firstly, census listings worked to produce – most notably in India’s north-western state of Punjab – an upper caste Hindu identity inscribed with profound anxieties regarding their own minority status, a point I will later link to the reinscription of traditions of *seva* to issues concerning reorganising Hindu society and social upliftment. Secondly, colonial judicial legislation such as the Uniform Secular Laws passed after the declaration of the British Raj additionally reworked constructs of religious belonging. In particular, such policy further enabled the imagination of the primacy of a homogenous and distinct Hindu religious community to India’s histories and contemporary social organisation, a notion which created the context for the organisation of the diverse traditions associated with Hinduism into constructs of a singular category (Jones 1976: 23, Thapar 1996: 3-4).

2.2 *Of Hindu Disorganisation*

In addition to intervening into formations of identity in a manner which brought to the forefront reworked religious constructs of belonging, Orientalist scholarship represented the histories and subjectivities of these categories of religious belonging as trans-historical and subordinate to Western forms of ‘rationality’ and associated ‘modern’ identities. These discourses of the Self and Other worked to influence the tools within which constructs of a Hindu community and the Hindu marginalized were imagined by actors engaged in projects of social and religious reform, with such meanings going on to contribute to the reinscription of practices of *seva* (Patel 2007). As early Orientalist imaginations developed alongside Enlightenment traditions, such constructs of knowledge and representation developed in accommodation with practices of modernity, citizenship, and rationality. India, in approaches disseminated in and

through print materials to colonial educational institutions, came to represent “...the eclipse and suppression of the ‘natural light’ [of the Enlightenment] through superstition and ritualism” (Halbfass 1988: 60), with such a ‘fallen’ historical period representing the decline of a once dynamic and resilient ‘primordialist’ golden Vedic civilisation, now weak and ravaged through centuries of foreign occupation, a view which converged with the Brahminical periodization of the *kalīyuga* (Bhatt 2001: 10-12, Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993: 7, Zavos 2000: 30-34).² Moreover, themes of decline and degeneration were frequently articulated in Spencerist and other social Darwinist appeals to questions of an ‘organic nation’ and its ‘social health and hygiene’ (Bhatt 2001: 12, Watt 2005: 44). India and its population then became a site of ‘Otherness’ – of ‘idol worshippers’ and ‘blind ritualism’ in opposition to science and rationality, of Brahmin privilege and guile mediated through transhistorical caste structures versus ‘the age of reason and the breaking of fetters’, of women’s oppression, child marriage and *sati* in opposition to the values of Western Civilisation, of standing outside of history to those who represented its culmination (Cohn 2007: 165-167, Jaffrelot 1993: 517).

I have already noted the problematics associated with assuming that such Orientalist discourses uniformly produced both replica ‘brown sahibs’ and stable relations of a colonial Self and colonized Other organised in fields of power and subordination. Indeed, such approaches far simplify interplays between the varied indigenous and Orientalist practices and discourses and then processes of subject formation (Sarkar 1996: 279).³ Yet, I would suggest that its discursive framings offered a social imaginary within which elite actors began to conceive of both concerns and solutions to Orientalist predicaments (Bose and Jalal 89: 2000, Jaffrelot 1993, Bose and Jalal 2004).⁴ In particular, I am interested here in illustrating how these concerns and solutions provided ways of theorising questions firstly of ‘Hindu (dis)organisation’, secondly of ‘social upliftment’, and thirdly, the ‘rejuvenation’ of a nation whose meanings were derived from Hindu traditions and new modernist theories which linked questions of territory, race, and culture. These three themes would be central to the

² For further discussions of the convergences and exchanges between pre-colonial Brahminical discourse and Orientalist traditions see Pollock’s (1993) research on the production of racial knowledges surrounding ‘Aryans’, ‘non-Aryans’, and Jews.

³ See further Bhabha’s chapter “Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse,” in *The Location of Culture*, pp.85-92. (1994).

⁴ A wealth of research examines the relationship between colonial epistemological critique and the reordering of Indian society. In particular, notable work has been undertaken on the relationship between such criticisms and Indian reform movements. See Bose and Jalal (2004), Brekke (2002), Jodhka (2009), Jones (1989), Thapar (1989), Van der Veer (1994), Watt (2005, 2011), Zavos (2001, 2003, 2010).

reinscription of practices of *seva*. Before I outline such reinscriptions and the manners in which such reworked practices of *seva* invoke such meanings, it is important to outline how in addition to attempts to ‘order’ philanthropy and the critiques of Orientalist epistemologies, Christian missionary activity too is important in understanding the reimagination of constructs of belonging and the development of a modern Hindu identity inscribed with meanings of service towards the marginalised. Moreover, and as will become apparent, ‘Christianity’ increasingly became a concern which underlined practices of reorganising the Hindu community and questions of social upliftment.

2.3 The Question of Christian Missionaries

I noted earlier how census returns detailing religious demographics in Punjab worked to develop an upper caste Hindu Punjabi identity inscribed with profound concerns surrounding their minority status. Punjab was the unchallenged centre of missionary activity in colonial India, with the province the location of a multitude of preaching halls, missionary schools, publication and distribution centres, and a network of rural centres dedicated to varying approaches to reform and service (Jones 1976). And although Christian converts remained a relatively small section of the population, the colonial census’s focus upon demanding a public definition of the self linked to religious belonging worked to bring to the forefront religious difference. In 1891 the census report recorded a 410% increase in the indigenous Christian population of Punjab, with data between the 1891 census and then reports from 1901 recording a growth additionally in Muslim demographics. ‘Knowing’ and governing India along the lines of religious demographics gained further political meaning when in 1910 the census commissioner, Edward Gait, issued a circular proposing that the ‘Depressed Classes’ be reclassified in the census, with notions of communal division, decline, and political power further heightened through the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909.

Religious reform and *seva* associations such as the Arya Samaj linked ‘demographic decline’ to the perceived ‘aggressive’ conversion campaigns led by the missionaries, and in particular, the role of Christian social service associations such as the Salvation Army in targeting those situated either outside or at the lower edges of Hinduism’s boundaries. These groups, it was argued, were more susceptible to conversion through service projects due to their increased vulnerability in the aftermath

of famines and plagues (Watt 2005: 43, Zavos 2001: 116).⁵ Missionary activity then together with the organisation of census information into discourses of ‘Hindu decline’ and ‘division’ worked to produce imaginations of a Hindu community in dire need of reorganisation.

2.4 Colonial Public Space and the Legal-Representative-Culture

Two further points related to questions of ‘Hindu division’, ‘vulnerability’, and organisation are of importance. Firstly, these themes were given historical dimensions through a supposed ‘degeneration of Hinduism’ from its ‘Vedic glory’ and the corruption of Brahmins and their neglect of the lower castes. These dynamics were seen as resulting in the apparent decline and weakening of the Hindu race. Zavos argues that these concerns raised questions surrounding the role of Hindu activist traditions in answering such ‘Hindu disorganization’, ‘passivity’ and ‘oppression’ (2001: 116). And secondly, questions of organization were brought to the forefront due to the development of modes of organising rule through a “legal-representative culture” (2001: 112) in the colonial public sphere. With Orientalist epistemologies essentializing Indian society around questions of religious belonging, the representation of such communal categories was seen as a *vita* aspect of colonial governance.

Organisation then, as Zavos suggests, “was key to this culture: formally constituted Societies, *Sabbas* and *Samajes* with registered members and acknowledged modes of practice provided an appropriate platform for addressing the state on issues of what was increasingly declared to be ‘public interest’” (Zavos 2001: 112). Issues surrounding the sale of beef and cow protection led by the Nagpur Gaurakshini Sabha, the concerns of the Tadiya Samaj in establishing a doctrinal standard of Hindu practices in monotheistic *bhakti* traditions and the growing Dharma Sabhas dedicated to improving the ‘moral standards’ of Hindus, all were key issues and associations through which Hindus ‘becoming organised’ could ‘represent community interests’. This is together with countering perceived intra-community divisions and the heterogeneity of Hinduism, and so answer concerns associated with the aforementioned Orientalist epistemologies and colonial predicaments (2001: 112-115). The State’s “legal-representative culture” then - in addition to the Company’s attempts at ordering philanthropy, Orientalist critiques, and Christian Missionary activity - worked to provide

⁵ For a broad account of the Salvation Army in India see Van der Veer’s *Imperial Encounters* (2001: 151-157).

redeveloped social imaginaries which focused upon the primacy of religious constructs of belonging, its margins and 'Hindu concerns', ordered forms of organisation and activist traditions of *seva*.

3. Reinscribing *Seva*

It is in this context we can locate the rise of an organised 'Missionary Hinduism' (Brekke 1999: 203, 2002, Jaffrelot 1993). Jaffrelot largely situates these developments inside the context of Christian missionary activity and the overall context of later Hindu nationalist concerns of both stigmatising the religious Other yet emulating its forms, so accommodating its own ideological shapes through 'strategic syncretism'. "Syncretic," Jaffrelot argues, "because it has been culled from cultural values of groups perceived as being antagonistic to the Hindu community" and yet also "strategic" because "it underlies an ideology that seeks to dominate the 'others' in terms of prestige as well as on a concrete socio-political plane" (1993: 517). These developments for example are seen in the Arya Samaj's practices of *shuddhi* as a tool of 'reconversion' to Hinduism and the production of the *Vedas* as counter literature to the Bible. For Jaffrelot, the construction of such new religious practices mediated through cultural borrowings then develops as a method by which the "imitation of the missionaries' techniques" (1993: 519) could be deployed to resist the Other more effectively. It is the development of this 'strategic syncretism' as a mode of "dominat[ing] the others" (1993: 517) which Jaffrelot argues underlines an upper caste elite 'discovery' and turn towards marginalised Hindus, and in particular, the lower castes.

Jaffrelot's argument can be seen to be strong in so far as it notes a derivative relationship between the practices associated with Hindu religious reform and Christian Missionary projects and critiques.⁶ Yet, following Brekke (2002) and Van der Veer (2002: 189, 1994), I suggest that Jaffrelot's account of explaining the 'turn to the margins' fails to give due significance to developments outside of stigmatising and emulating the Other. Indeed - while certainly taking into account aspects of upper caste unease over missionary interventions - it is more helpful to understand this dynamic as part of an overall process of rethinking constructs of religious community, belonging and duty, using the social imaginaries developed in the context of the previously

⁶ A similar approach which draws direct and uniform causal links between Christian missionary practices, the activities of Hindu religious reform associations such as the Arya Samaj, and then Hindu nationalism can be found in Gold's *Organized Hinduisms: From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation* (1994).

discussed aspects of the colonial encounter. It is in the context of such social imaginaries that Hindu activists began to transform *seva* as a way to think about and work upon questions of Hindu (dis)organisation, social upliftment, and national rejuvenation, questions which brought to the forefront constructs and practices of community, duty, and marginal positions. It remains these dynamics which provide languages to reformulate the subjectivities of a modern Hindu self which emphasised a turn towards ‘the downtrodden’.

Indeed, these social imaginaries provided the framework within which practices of *seva* became linked to questions of social upliftment, national rejuvenation, and Hindu community consolidation. Here, practices of *seva* directed towards ‘suffering Hindus’ were linked to reforming Hindu activist traditions in which ordered, organised service directed towards marginal sections of this constructed ‘divided’ yet primordial Hindu community was a central way in which Hindus could serve the divine. Indeed, members of religious reforming and newly established *seva* associations such as the Servants of India Society (1905), the Ramakrishna Mission and Math (1897), and the Arya Samaj (1875) increasingly travelled to depressed areas to establish *seva* projects (Beckerlegge 2000, Brekke 2000, Jones 1976, Watt 2005).

The Arya Samaj’s transformation of *seva* to relate to issues surrounding religious community, organisation, and a duty towards social upliftment can be witnessed most notably in their foundation of a network of educational institutions throughout North West India, including a Girls’ School and a boarding college for female students in 1895, and the management of institutions to house and aid widows in 1914 (Jones 1976: 221). Moreover, the activities of the Arya Samaj’s ‘Paropkarini Sabhas’ (‘Philanthropic Societies’) illustrate how new social imaginaries contributed to the reworking of practices of *seva* in a number of respects.

Established in the 1880s, the Societies drew upon the sixth and ninth principles of the Arya Samaj which noted that ‘the prime object of the Arya Samaj – Vedic Church – is to do *Upkar* [help, beneficence] to the world’, and that a member should ‘look for his own good in promoting the good of all’. We have here then themes of social service and a wider community to be acted upon through the practices of reworked religious traditions. The forms of service articulated by the Samaj’s Paropkarini Sabhas were organised in an ordered fashion and linked to rational and planned associational norms, with membership lists (by 1931 there were approximately 100,00 Samajists), recruitment

strategies, formalised international and national networks of raising finances (for example, the South African Indian Relief Fund), annual fundraising tours, and planned cooperation between branches.

Furthermore, these ordered practices of *seva* were linked with notions of both social upliftment and its relationship to reconstructing a Hindu community divided due to centuries of 'orthodox corruption', a point which was linked to national rejuvenation. Indeed, this is evident in their relief work during famines, instances of plague and disasters such as earthquakes and flooding, and the establishment of orphanages, schools, colleges and medical dispensaries for marginalised sections of the Hindu community (Watt 2005: 220-225, Jones 1976, 1989). Furthermore, this is also evident in the local annual anniversary celebrations of the organisation and the yearly celebration at their Kangri Gurukul, which were used as an opportunity to both encourage donations from and bring into common associations Hindus of all castes and classes. And, as Fischer-Tiné has shown, reconstructed educational traditions such as Gurukuls were the location of both internalized Orientalist knowledge surrounding questions of 'civilization', yet concurrently, were locales in which such knowledge - most notably on questions of 'manliness' and 'character building' - were seen as sites in which Indians themselves could engage in moral reform and so contest notions of colonial superiority (2004: 229-248). We have evidence here of the particular ways in which the development of new social imaginaries which I explored earlier provided the context for linking *seva* with meanings of social upliftment, Hindu community organisation, and national rejuvenation.

Alongside such discursive reinscriptions of *seva* can be witnessed a transformation in Hindu traditions associated with the *sannyasin*. Building upon the religious reform activities of the Swaminarayan and Radhasoami movements of the early 19th century, associations such as the Arya Samaj and the Servants of India Society began to circulate notions of the *sannyasin* as a social servant who was encouraged to engage in selfless acts such as the building of water tanks, repairing wells and roads, constructing *mandirs* and residencies, and during famines the organisation of food distribution centres and kitchens which were to make no distinction by caste (Beckerlegge 1999: 189, Watt 2005: 105, Williams 1984: 17-18, Srivastan 2006). This approach of transforming 'the *sannyasin*' as 'a *sevak*' and anchoring these newly developing constructs of Hindu activist traditions of *seva* were particularly evident in the

Arya Samaj's Kangri Gurukul. Here, graduates were trained to enrich national life through *seva* which was offered disinterestedly in the project of building India, with the very ritual of taking *sannyas* becoming transformed into actions of selfless service. The Servants of India Society and the Ramakrishna Mission and Math too placed a similar emphasis upon the relationship between *sannyasi* activity, selfless service, and nation building, with the former's members undertaking vows of poverty and a commitment to act as 'national missionaries' and the latter's leader Swami Vivekananda, calling upon those who ran the Mission's projects to 'live as the lowest' in the service of the nation (Watt 2005: 105-106, 2011: 286).

These transformations in Hindu practices of service were additionally linked to newly developing meanings of duty and active citizenship. Key focuses of these concerns were values such as discipline and efficiency. As Watt notes, these transformations were both "intended to mobilize Indians for the patriotic service of society..." and "...meant to educate Indians about proper 'civilized' behaviour and public comportment" (2011: 282). This point can be observed in two ways. Firstly, *seva* organisations were themselves part of the dramatic expansion and institutionalization of associational cultures in late colonial India. Co-operatives, journals, educational institutions, philanthropic and mutual aid societies, service projects, social and religious reforming organisations and conferences, all provided vehicles through which increasing numbers of actors participated in public life. And as Watt points out (2005: 171-192), such organisational networks and cultures provided the ground for the redevelopment of constructs of belonging and active citizenship. These practices such as volunteering and civic action created associations independent of the Colonial State in which claims of public representation could be debated and advanced. They were associations then in which – although degrees of collaboration existed between participants and State officials – colonial rule was slowly being displaced. Moreover, social service leagues were increasingly critical of colonial disregard on a range of issues, including acting upon cultures of legal-cultural representation and practically providing relief during periods of social distress (Watt 1997, 2005: 172-177, 2011). Practices of *seva* then were seen as necessarily contributing to and productive of a Spencerian themed organisational society of modular citizens whose active citizenship related to the building of an 'efficient', 'healthy', and 'energized' national life. As Lalla Ralla Ram notes in his popular exposition of the activities of the Arya Samaj:

To alleviate human sufferings, it has established orphanages, hospitals, rescue-houses and other institutions...being itself an organized body, it has imparted a practical lesson on organisation to the people...in this manner, the Arya Samaj has directly been helpful in creating public spirit; in developing a taste for cooperation and in diffusing ideas of sacrifice for a public or altruistic cause in Northern India (ND: 25).

Indeed, *seva* was inscribed with meanings with which the civilizational 'backwardness' of Hindu cultures could be contested in modernist terms, and as a Hindu activist tradition which produced actors and associations which could be seen to both displace and question the continued relevance of colonial rule due to the existence of such (re)constructed traditions of service. Moreover, in this reading a modern Hindu identity was linked to an active commitment of selfless service to a perceived naturally existing Hindu community, and so as Patel notes, "*seva, sangathans, and gurus...*became the means through which the Hindu community mobilized" (2007: 45).

Continuing this theme of illustrating how transformations in practices of *seva* worked to begin to articulate Hindu and proto-nationalist concerns as mapped together, it is of importance now to examine how the 'organization' and 'mobilization' of Hindus became linked to questions of ethical reform, and so how *seva* developed as a discourse which brought daily practices into dialogue with national questions. Towards the end of the 19th and the early 20th century a key concern which animated the forms of *seva* practised by associations such as Arya Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission and Math, and the Servants of India Society related to questions of Indian – and often specifically Hindu – 'racial decline'. Drawing upon existing Hindu concepts of an organically organised society constructed around mutually interlocking *varnas* and *jatis*, and relating the then supposed 'disorganisation' of such a body to Spencerist themes regarding the decline of 'nations and races', activist traditions of *seva* were produced as a key practice whereby the social upliftment of 'weaker and less productive' sections of the Hindu community was seen as a key element in its organisation and 'rejuvenation' (Jaffrelot 2011: 123-126, Kidambi 2011: 2011, Watt 1997, 2011: 281-283).

Wider research has documented the deployment of series of disciplinary techniques aimed at regulating and channelling the subjectivities of subaltern actors, with figures such as Gandhi central to this task of 'disciplining' practices so as to 'mobilize' subalterns into the Indian National Congress during the final three decades of colonial rule (Guha 2003). 'Self-discipline' and 'self-control' were then linked to

strategies of 'self-rule'. These themes are further evident in how 'disciplined' and 'civilized Hindu behaviour' was seen as necessary for the patriotic service of society. These behaviours were further seen as ideal roles inside of which the actions of the Hindu marginalized needed to be regulated. These disciplined practices were linked to supposed standards of 'modern' and 'civilized' compartments of behaviour. These points were stressed as vital for the overall rejuvenation and improvement of both Indian society and the Hindu race in the overall rankings of nations and races (Watt 2011: 282-286).

Coercive and disciplinary themes and their links to *seva* are evident in a number of points. As I have already noted, religious reform and *seva* associations such as the Ramakrishna Mission and Math, the Seva Samiti, the various Social Service Leagues, the Servants of India Society and the Arya Samaj increasingly turned to providing services in areas such as health care, emergency relief, maintaining order at religious festivals, the foundation of orphanages, the running of residencies and employment facilities for widows, together with general efforts to uplift marginalised sections of society. Education too formed as key concern. By 1910 the Arya Samaj had approximately two hundred schools and colleges stretching across north India, together with a range of reading rooms, night schools, schools for the 'depressed classes' and women, together with providing education in its orphanages. The Theosophical Society too ran a range of service orientated Leagues for National Education, and established a network of formal schools, girls' educational centres, and the training of female educators. The Allahabad Seva Samiti and the Servants of India Society likewise established both schools and colleges for women and the 'backward classes'. These focuses also stressed the promotion of a cooperative movement in order to educate marginalised sections of society regarding the principles of mutual aid (Watt 2005: 132-138).

These educational projects incorporated pedagogical practices which stressed a relationship between social upliftment, a hierarchy of ethical sensibilities and public conducts and their role in national rejuvenation (Fischer- Tiné 2004, Kidambi 2011, Watt 2011). This is particularly evident with regard to questions of cleanliness. While constructs of pollution and purity have a history in imaginations of caste hierarchy, these theorisations were reworked as part of linking *seva* to a project of 'uplifting' the unhygienic 'backward classes' and 'dirty' villagers (Watt 2011: 283-282). For example, Kidambi (2011: 221) notes how the formal and informal educational centres of the

Bombay-based Depressed Classes Mission (1903) distributed combs, brushes, towels, soap and mirrors to its students to promote the development of habits of self-control, with students elected to 'self-government' positions internal to the school to organise problems related to sanitation. Practices of *seva* then in quixotic locales related the regulation and development of clean and ordered *samskars* to questions of nation building. Indeed, as Kidambi suggests regarding the newly developing practices of selfless service, "...in attempting to 'reclaim' the 'depressed classes', Hindu 'nation-builders' sought to purge these communities of all those practices they regarded as 'unclean' and antithetical to the tenets of a 'universalizing puritanical Hinduism'" (2011: 223). Hindu activist traditions of social service and upliftment then increasingly became linked with reorganised caste hierarchies and their associated Brahminical norms of purity and impurity, moral propriety and impropriety, and referenced in and legitimated by modernist racial languages.

4. Spaces of Difference

The argument of this chapter so far has examined and developed a number of points regarding the colonial encounter, the transformation of *seva* and the production of a modern Hindu identity. In the first two sections I illustrated how dynamics associated with the colonial encounter together with existing reforming approaches to Hindu activist traditions worked to construct a social imaginary through which colonial society could be both theorised and worked upon. I showed how these social imaginaries provided the framework for linking Hindu activist traditions of service with themes of Hindu organisation, social upliftment, and rejuvenation. Importantly, I drew attention to the point that these transformations were contributing to wider questions surrounding the normative subjectivities of a modern Hindu self. Watt (2005: 202-206) notes that by the early decades of the twentieth century an array of *seva* associations were confidently active in public life. Yet, and this final section of the chapter will examine this point, I should like to nuance these alternative publics through interrogating the continuing differences and debates over *seva* which brought these publics into dialogue.

4.1 *Complicating 'Orthodoxy' and 'Reform'*

Histories of 19th century India would be largely incomplete without reference to the rise of the various *sabhas* linked to a defence of a so-called *sanatana dharma*. Translated from the Sanskrit as "ancient and continuing guideline" (Lipner 1994: 221),

“eternal religion” (Klostermaier 1989: 31), or “unshakeable venerable order” (Halbfass 1988: 344), the term has frequently signified those associations and individuals involved in a ‘defence’ of Hindu orthodoxy in reaction to the reforming agendas of organisations such as the Arya Samaj (Zavos 2001: 109-111). In this reading, Sanatana Dharma *sabhas* are projected as defending an old, beleaguered and ‘orthodox’ series of traditions in the face of dynamic religious reformers (Farquhar 1967, Jones 1976: 27, 36). Yet, alternative research has powerfully complicated such an approach, with Dalmia noting that “the spokesmen [of the *sabhas*] in the very name of orthodoxy, of tradition itself, were in fact accommodating and articulating wide-reaching changes” (2010: 2), and so, “it would be a mistake to imagine that these institutions came into being only to conserve inherited practice. As always one of their vital functions was also to sanction change however minimal it might have appeared at first sight” (2010: 2). Indeed, these points contra to a ‘Sanatana Dharma as reactionary approach’ can be witnessed in their production, defence, and circulation of so-called ‘pan-Hindu traditions’, together with their use of modern associational norms (Zavos 2001: 111-112). Breaking down this binary essentialized ‘orthodoxy’ versus a modern ‘reforming project’, of ‘old’ versus ‘new’, allows me to illustrate the porosity which structured the borders between these seemingly conflicting Hindu movements.

Firstly, through drawing upon shared religious languages these ‘orthodox’ and ‘reformist’ associations operated in porous associational space in terms of their membership, common organisations, and concerns. For example, noticeable in both the Arya Samaj and the *sabhas* associated with the Sanatana Dharma are degrees of overlap in terms of networks and themes, to the extent that Jones (1976: 111) in his history of religious reform movements concludes by noting the relative absence of competing networks. Indeed, the well-known Sanatanist, Pandit Shraddha Ram, and early Arya societies such as the Amritsar Samaj shared a common approach to *shuddhi* in terms of an emphasis upon focusing upon individual converts who could then be rehabilitated into their former *jati*. Furthermore, this evidence of common approaches, mutual influences and shared spaces can further be witnessed when examining the ways in which so-called ‘orthodox’ and ‘reformist’ positions developed together during late nineteenth century Punjab. ‘Orthodox’ associations such as the Hindu Dharm Prakashik Sabh and reformist figures and associations such as Kanhya Lal Alakhdari and the Niti Prakash Sabha recruited from the same constituency of literate communities such as Brahmans, Khattris, Aroras, and Banias. The membership further collaborated on a

range of campaigns, including ‘purifying practice’ and reforming expenditure on religious rituals, a shared emphasis on cow protection towards the end of the century, together with a consensus on promoting Hindi and Sanskrit and a focus on ‘reclaiming’ Muslim and Christian converts through *shuddhi* (Zavos 2001: 115-117).

The second relevant point is that far from refusing to engage in the reinscription of religious traditions ‘orthodox’ members of the *Sanatana Sabhas*, like Arya activists, did inscribe new meanings – in the name of ‘defence’ – to practices of *seva*, and questions of Hindu organisation, social upliftment, and national rejuvenation. Yet, these practices while drawing on shared traditions invoked alternative approaches to questions of Hindu organisation, social upliftment, and national rejuvenation. It is to these differences and their implications that I now turn.

4.2 ‘Reform’: Reorganisation, *Jati* and *Seva*

Increasingly towards the end of the 1880s *shuddhi* was increasingly given new meanings. Whereas before the ceremony was directed at individual converts to Islam or Christianity, this was successively replaced with a move towards mass purifications of lower caste and Dalits. So too was the ceremony stripped of its ritualism (Ghai 1990: 56, Zavos 1999: 68-69). Furthermore, *shuddhi* became organised into a series of practices aimed at broad questions of social upliftment related to ‘purifying’ Hindu traditions through “improving the predicament of groups nominally associated with Hinduism by investing them with full (twice-born) caste status” (Zavos 2001: 117). These transformations and wider organisations are of key importance in our examination of how differing practices of *seva* were linked to ideas of Hindu organisation.

Importantly, transformed practices of *seva* and *shuddhi* should be approached as related Hindu traditions contributing to common questions surrounding Hindu representation and themes of social upliftment and rejuvenation. *Shuddhi* ceremonies marked the beginning of an answer to such questions, rather than its culmination, and are helpfully understood through placing the practice into the context of the Arya Samaj’s drive to refocus religious authority on texts as opposed to *jati*. Such approaches necessarily bring us back to the fashions by which Samajists stressed a relationship between *seva* and education, a point I noted in section three of this chapter. The question arises then: how did practices of *shuddhi* contribute to discourses circulating in the *seva*-inspired educational projects of the Arya Samaj? In what ways then can *seva* and

shuddhi be approached as consolidated, as invoking common meanings and contributing to a common project? This exploration is central to understanding how discourses of *seva*, which circulated inside the arenas of the Samaj through the reinscription of *shuddhi*, moved into alternative positions to those associated with the various Sanatana Dharma *sabhas*.

The Arya Samaj was sufficiently diverse as to incorporate a variety of approaches related to the reorganisation of Hindu society. However, influential Samajists such as Swami Shraddhanand increasingly ordered practices of *seva* and *shuddhi* into Dayanananda's (the founder of the society and a key inspiration) overall project of reorganising Hindu practices and notions of community into constructed Vedic traditions (Dayanananda 1976). At its heart, this project had a number of important ideas which influenced the *seva*-organised educational centres of the Arya Samaj (Fischer- Tiné 2004). Firstly, an emphasis upon the *Vedas* as the central text of Hinduism. Secondly, and here such a point was outlined by the third principle of the Samaj, a call upon members to instruct others in the *Vedas*, hear them read, and read them to others. Thirdly, a rejection of existing *jati* traditions in favour of reworked structures of merit based *varnas*, with *shuddhi* ceremonies the principal mode of accommodation into such categories (Zavos 1999: 63-73, 2001: 117-118).

While taking care to avoid exaggerating the implications of this reworking, I would note following on from Zavos the transformative *potential* of these reconstructed traditions. Indeed, this potential can be witnessed through highlighting how such articulations of *shuddhi* - increasingly now focused upon mass conversions of the lower castes and Dalits - work to shift power away from the caste-*sampradaya* nexus and towards the regulation of subjectivities via constructed *Vedic* norms. Put simply, Brahmins may stay as the mediators of religious truth - but due to their practices being brought into a relationship with texts, not birth. This examination illustrates then that it is this movement from birth to *Vedic* text, from *jati* to merit based *varna*, with *shuddhi* as the central mediator in this transformation which thus envisaged the potential vertical reorganisation of Hinduism (Zavos 1999: 63-73). This analysis has illustrated then that to varying degrees the educational projects of the Arya Samaj were the location of practices of *seva* which, through shifting authority from *jati* to the text and encouraging the social disembedding of the *Vedas*, were linked to vertically reorganised constructs of Hindu community through appealing to a reconstructed merit-based *varna* system.

4.3 'Orthodoxy': Reorganisation, Jati and Seva

In section 4.1 brought to the forefront how the shared linguistic approaches to practices of *shuddhi* and 'moral reform' structured the alternative publics of the 'reforming' Arya Samaj and the 'orthodox' Sanatana Dharma *sabhas* in a porous manner. For example, I noted how both associations located *shuddhi* as a ceremony targeted towards converts to Islam and Christianity, with the individual then becoming reincorporated into previous *jati* positions. While continuing to note the degrees of dialogue and exchange which structured such associations, I should like to now outline how the radical Arya's animation of *seva* with a reworked approach to *shuddhi* acted to produce practices of selfless service as a site in which Sanatanist activists contested such inscriptions. It is in the context of such contestations that we can witness the development of an 'orthodox' reworking of *seva*, one which – like its 'reformist' counterparts – is concerned with questions of Hindu organisation, social upliftment and rejuvenation, and articulated in shared languages of Hindu activist traditions.

The radical Arya's attempts to reinscribe *seva* as a practice with an emphasis on reorganising Hinduism in line with a merit-based *varna* system and the social disembedding of Vedic knowledges was resisted by Sanatanist activists. Indeed, while *shuddhi* as a practice could be accommodated by Sanatanist activists such as Shradha Ram in so far as it reincorporated Muslim or Christian converts into their previous *jati* positions, and further could be seen to 'resist' the intrusion of 'foreign proselytizing' faiths, this newly inscribed approach associated with radical Aryas was presented as a direct attack on established Hinduism (Zavos 1999: 69, 2001: 118). *Seva* thus was contested in terms of its particular approaches to the boundaries of Hindu society. This shift in emphasis resulted in both organised physical attacks (by enraged Sanatanists) on Samajists who continued to participate in this project, and attempts to outcaste such Arya activists (1999: 70).

Moreover, and this offers an example of Dalmia's (2010: 2) point regarding the creative aspects of those positioned as 'defenders of orthodoxy', Sanatanist *sabhas* should not be approached as simply abstaining from or rejecting debates surrounding the transformation of Hindu activist practices such as *seva*. On the contrary, these modernist associations were the location of alternatively reinscribed articulations of *seva*. Yet, while those Aryas of a more radical persuasion to the question such as Shradhanand practised the previously discussed consolidated approaches to *seva* and

shuddhi which invoked meanings related to the reorganisation of Hinduism, Sanatanist discourses inscribed *seva* as practice which imagined no such alteration to the *jati* tradition (Zavos 1999: 69).

In these ‘orthodox’ readings, *shuddhi* was detached from the social disembedding of Vedic knowledge in *seva*-inspired educational projects and so delinked from a merit-based *varna* system and the attainment of twice-born status by lower castes and Dalits. Instead, such practices were to be best epitomized by the joint Shraddhanand and Sanatani led 1923 Malkana campaign which targeted Hindu Rajput converts to Islam and their reincorporation into their previous *jati* structures (2011: 118). Furthermore, these approaches to the reorganisation of Hinduism can be further witnessed in the first Hindu Conference held in 1909 and then the 1923 session of the Hindu Mahasabha. In the former, the influential Samajist, Lal Chand, approached the question as one of *jati*-amelioration, of ‘neglect’, of certain sections of the ‘sacred body’ of Hindus who had not received their share of ‘nourishment’, ‘education’, and ‘enlightenment’. Hinduism as organised around *jati* traditions was thus legitimated and the radical Samajists approach repudiated, with *seva* thus relegated to a softening of the conditions of the lower castes and Dalits with no change in status entertained (Zavos 1999:70-71, 1999b: 2274).

Conclusion

I should like to now outline what we have learnt from this chapter’s examination of the ways in which practices of *seva* during the late colonial period underwent transformation, together with noting how this analysis leads into the arguments of Chapter Three. In section one I began through noting that philanthropic traditions were focused as a target of intervention by the East India Company and the early Colonial State. In particular, the interventions related to what I described as a discursive ‘ordering’ of these traditions through stressing questions of public functionality, utility, and its uniformity. These acts were seen as necessitating public associations whose internal structures were linked to modernist associational norms. Yet, despite the articulation of such normative categories, I nuanced the degree to which such discourses resulted in mimetic philanthropic practices. I brought to the forefront how these orderings were both translated into existing traditions and articulated in the languages of Hindu reform movements which had largely anticipated many of the themes raised by Colonial interventions and orderings. Far from displacing existing philanthropic traditions then, these dynamics worked to draw attention to the reinscription of such practices.

Continuing this theme, section two examined the efficacy of Orientalist discourse and interrelated colonial policy in offering primacy to religious constructs of belonging and disseminating notions of a Vedic ‘golden age’ and subsequent decline. Together with the activities of Christian missionary societies and the State’s organisation of formal relations through a legal-representative culture, I examined in section three how this process worked to circulate a social imaginary which provided the framework for (re)inscribing practices of service to work against perceived Hindu (dis)organisation, social upliftment, and rejuvenation. I drew attention to the point that these reinscriptions were brought into dialogue with questions surrounding the normative subjectivities of a modern Hindu self.

Through examining and complicating both ‘orthodox’ and ‘reformist’ articulations of *seva*, section four with examples from the Arya Samaj and the Sanatana Dharma *sabhas* examined how such reinscribed traditions of service worked to produce alternative publics inside of which circulated divergent practices and meanings to questions surrounding social upliftment and the (re)organisation of Hinduism. In particular, both ‘reformist’ and ‘orthodox’ practices of *seva* became linked with alternative approaches to Hinduism’s boundaries. These differences, however, did not result in the construction of bounded publics - rather, through addressing common concerns through shared religious languages these publics operated in degrees of dialogue in terms of debating Hindu activist traditions of *seva*. It was the approaches constructed as orthodox and their linked practices of *seva* which, during the 1920s, increasingly came to contest and set the framework within which traditions of *seva* were imagined inside their related associations. The narration of these contestations, and an examination of how orthodox practices influenced the initial themes of early Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* will be the primary focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Seva, Sangathan and Alternative Spaces

Introduction

The previous chapter examined how dynamics associated with the colonial encounter worked to construct a social imaginary which Hindu activists used to reinscribe traditions of *seva*. These transformations, I illustrated, were productive of alternative publics within which practices of *seva* were linked to themes of Hindu (dis)organisation, social upliftment, and rejuvenation. Furthermore, I brought to the forefront how these reinscriptions should be contextualised as interventions into questions surrounding the formations of a modern Hindu self. Through analysing the differing imaginations of *seva* articulated by sections of the Arya Samaj and the *sabhas* associated with the Sanatana Dharma movement, and in particular their contending practices with regard to reorganising Hinduism's boundaries, I showed how these contentions brought to the forefront varyingly 'orthodox' and 'radical' approaches to activist traditions of service. Yet, while differing approaches circulated, I insisted upon noting that through drawing upon and reinscribing common linguistic traditions 'radical' and 'orthodox' associated publics should be understood as structured with porous borders.

Following on from this examination, this chapter will begin by analysing how in the context of rising communal conflagrations in northern India during the 1920s those articulations of *seva* which emphasised the reworking of *jati* traditions became marginalised in favour of those approaches which stressed amelioration, not reorganisation. This consolidation will be explained as responsive to calls for a 'united front' in the face of perceived Hindu disorganisation in a time of crisis. The chapter will then move on to illustrate how the themes associated with early Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva*, evident in the differing practices of both the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Hindu Mahasabha, developed the previously discussed orthodox imaginations of service. *Seva* here then is developed as and organised into discourses of a disciplined Hindu self and the wider project of *sangathan*, and with the RSS, articulated with an exemplary and didactic focus upon organisation and the *sevak*. *Sangathan* here refers to late-colonial Hindu activist discourses which

sought to organise and unify Hindu society and so overcome perceived ‘weaknesses’. Scholarship has noted the Hindu Mahasabha’s 1920’s northern Hindu self-assertion campaigns as an example of a *sangathanist* project (Bapu 2013: 47). *Sevak* refers to those volunteers performing Hindu activist traditions of *seva* (Patel 2010: 104). It will become clear that Hindu nationalist *sangathanist* practices of *seva* were productive of alternative publics which were narrow in terms of scope. Indeed, and continuing with a focus upon the RSS, it is only the traumatic events associated with Partition in 1947 where there is the development of a pro-active, sustained, and organised approach to providing relief related to *seva*.

Systems of meaning which achieved hegemony and circulated in the varying elite associations which had access to post-colonial State power stressed the detachment of religious community from nation-building. In these ‘Nehruvian’ readings, voluntary associations and their practices of *seva* and ‘social upliftment’ were to be surpassed by State-organised focuses on ‘social welfare’ and ‘national planning’. Yet importantly, I will show that, far from vanishing, it is during this early post-colonial period that we can witness the RSS’s ongoing interventions into questions surrounding the category of the modern Hindu self, with these interventions circulating in newly founded Hindu nationalist-affiliated *seva* projects such as the Saraswati Shishu Mandir (‘Saraswati’s Temple of Learning’), the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (‘Tribal Welfare Ashram’), the Vivekananda Kendra, and Dnyana Pradodhini (‘Awakener of True Knowledge’).¹ These projects developed as alternative and marginal to, for example, arenas associated with hegemonic Nehruvian articulations. This line of argument then implicitly critiques the existing literature which locates the RSS’s turn to practices of *seva* as provoked through instrumentalist considerations.

The third section of this chapter locates the rise and reworking of contemporary Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* in their activists’ participation in associations constructed around shared religious language. This participation allowed interventions into debates surrounding the relevance of Hindu activist traditions to thinking through and working on perceived social questions. Associations within which practices of *seva* were contested brought Hindu nationalist articulations of the practice into dialogue with alternative approaches. This dynamic is best illustrated through exploring the post-1970s

¹ For the detailed discussion of the relationship between Dnyana Pradodhini and gender see Dyahadroy’s *Exploring Hindutva, Gender and Seva* (2009). I have taken the spelling of the association’s name from Dyahadroy’s scholarship.

sarvodaya ('universal upliftment') movement. The examination of this movement continues then the previous chapter's focus on approaching the shared languages and practices of *seva* as productive of broad alternative publics inside of which its meanings are differently understood and practised by a range of actors. Through focusing upon internal discursive engagement inside such associations this analysis will allow me to highlight how by the late 1970s and early 1980s actors inside existing Hindu nationalist *seva* associations reinscribed *seva* as linked to wider diverse and vernacularized practices with regard to regulating the subjectivities of the Hindu self; stretching from alternative spheres of Education ('*Shikshak*') and Health ('*Arogya*') to Development ('*Vikas*') and Social Rejuvenation ('*Samajik Samskar*'). These transformations worked to construct wider associational networks, allowing for the expanded circulation of Hindu nationalist ideas.

1. Of *Seva* and *Sangathan*

1.1 *Jati, Seva and Hindu Reform during the 1920s: The Triumph of Orthodoxy*

Histories dealing with early twentieth century Hindu religious reform, Hindu nationalism, and the late colonial period more generally note the significance of a series of unprecedented communal riots which swept north India during the 1920s. In the United Provinces alone, riots occurred in Saharanpur, Etawah, Mainpuri, Agra, Fatehgarh, Shahjahanpur in 1923; Meerut, Lucknow, and Muzaffarnagar in 1924; and then Aligarh in 1925. Of particular salience were issues of cow slaughter and restrictions on the playing of music outside *masjid* compounds (Bapu 2013: 47, Pandey 1990: 233-235, 1993: 244, Freitag 1989: 220-248, Zavos 1999: 73, 2000: 143). Furthermore, of related importance was the concurrent rise of lower caste assertion movements which questioned the legitimacy of *jati* traditions. The Ad Dharm movement in Punjab, for example, argued for an understanding of both a religious and political identity which located *chamars* as a distinct indigenous community whose decline originated as a result of a historical Aryan invasion. Significantly, both the Ad Dharm and the Dalit Adi Hindu movement of the United Provinces linked census enumerations to questions of separate political, educational, and employment-based representation (Gooptu 2001: 157-162, Juergensmeyer 2000: 221-237). Within the context of the western cities of Poona, Bombay and Nagpur - cities whose diverse Hindu reforming associations and related concerns are of significance to understanding early Hindu nationalism - we can also witness the development of Non-Brahmin movements during a concurrent period.

Indeed, Ambedkar's own conference held in Nagpur during 1920 and the wider influence of ideas associated with Jyotirao Phule succeeded in challenging Brahmin power within state legislatures (Bhatt 2011: 116-117). I bring these movements and identities into this chapter as they are central to understanding the increasing marginalisation of approaches to *seva* which emphasis the disturbance of *jati* traditions, in favour of a practice of *seva* which stresses an organic and all-encompassing Hindu community, a practice then which became increasingly associated with early Hindu nationalist projects of Hindu *sangathan*.

Indeed, in the context of both lower caste and Dalit assertion together with the previously noted outbreaks of communal rioting, those Samajists inclined towards a practice of *seva* linked to the dissemination of *Vedic* knowledge in educational projects, and a reworked merit-based Varna system of organisations mediated through mass *shuddhi* ceremonies directed at lower caste and Dalits increasingly compromised their own divergent positions in order to represent a unified Hindu community (Zavos 2011: 119). The 'intra-community' divisions brought to the forefront as a result of the rise of lower caste assertion movements and the perceived 'disorganisation' of Hindus in the face of a ostensive 'organized Muslim danger' worked to produce a Hindu politics during the 1920s which stressed consolidation over discord (Zavos 1999: 73). Indeed, the 1924 Allahabad session of the Hindu Mahasabha illustrates this point well, with *shuddhi* incorporated into the organisation's constitution yet detached from mass ceremonies directed towards Dalits and the dissemination of *Vedic* knowledge (Bapu 2013: 52-5, Zavos 2000: 176, 2011: 119). Instead, broad cultural signifiers of Hindu unity came to replace potentially radical reorganisations of *jati* traditions. *Seva* is thus contested and transformed as a practice which implies acts of amelioration towards lower castes and Dalits, service to widows, the promotion of Hindi, Sanskrit, and the Devanagari script, and *gau seva* as important aspects of 'Hindu culture' (Zavos 1999: 73).

1.2 *Seva, Sangathan, and the Hindu Mahasabha*

The term *sangathan* develops from a Sanskrit compound word and connotes, in its broader Hindi usage, both the 'formation of' and more generally the 'system of' an organised society. Its articulation within Hindu politics is relatively recent and can be traced to the rise of the Hindu Mahasabha within late colonial Hindu politics. In particular, the context previously discussed surrounding the side-lining of approaches which aimed at the reorganisation of Hinduism's boundaries in favour of stressing a

horizontal and broad unity linked to re-constructed common symbols (Zavos 2000: 16, 168-177).

Hindu nationalism and Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* and their development out of 'orthodox' approaches to the reorganisation of Hinduism is evident in the Hindu Mahasabha's Gaya session of 1922, occurring in the wake of the recent 'Moplah/Mapilla revolt' in Malabar by an overwhelmingly Muslim peasantry against Hindu landowners. In his presidential speech, Malaviya contextualised this in an Orientalist framework, and in particular, framed the revolt as a result of contemporary Hindu 'weaknesses' and 'degeneracy'. In response, he emphasised the necessity of Hindu unity, strength, and discipline. Moreover, as part of this overall project of reorganisation he called for finance-raising projects and the establishment of an All India Relief Fund to provide amelioration for those Hindu victims of the riots, with these forms of service to be organised partly through the foundation of Hindu *sabbas* at local village levels (Bapu 2013: 49-50, Jones 2005: 248). *Seva* then was linked to themes of amelioration and unity in the face of a religious Other. These themes can further be seen in *seva* practices associated with Hindu Sabhas throughout the United Provinces during the 1920s. Here, and relying primarily upon local elites, local branches raised approximately five *lakh* rupees to contribute towards the building of separate wells and educational facilities for those positioned as lower caste and Dalit. These projects were related to offering 'untouchable' upliftment campaigns which focused upon offering *diksha* (initiation) and *samskar* (purification) ceremonies, with participants expected to abstain from their previous 'ritually polluting' customs which marked them as untouchable.

Here then, *seva* is developed as an approach towards Hinduism's boundaries which stresses the consolidation of a theorised organic *Varnashrama Dharma* hierarchy through wealthy Hindu benefactors supporting marginalised Hindus. This is done through ameliorative policies which envisage a two-fold approach to traditions such as untouchability and then Hindu reorganisation. Firstly, through the establishment of *separate* resources through service work these projects consolidated constructs of pollution and hierarchy, albeit in somewhat amended conditions. Secondly, the *seva* 'upliftment' campaigns continued these focuses, yet with an appeal to the disciplining of perceived impure subjectivities inside privileged Brahminical constructs of ritual pollution (Bapu 2013: 60-61). These practices of *seva* then relate to a *sangathanist* project

as they stress upliftment through unity, amelioration and the maintenance of the vertical organisation of Hinduism.

This approach and its relationship to the disciplining of ‘corrupt’ and ‘ritually polluting’ practices is evident in the integration and articulation of cow protection campaigns as central to activist traditions of service. Freitag (1989: 148-176) notes that towards the end of the 19th century the symbol of the cow increasingly became constructed as a broad culturally unifying force around which Hindus could organise. For example, *shuddhi* campaigns were linked to trips to Hardwar, where after bathing actors would participate in rituals which involved water and cow products (Zavos 2001: 117). At its 1918 Delhi session the Hindu Mahasabha passed a motion against cow slaughter, arguing that *gau seva* was both a duty linked to ‘defending’ Hindu traditions from the religious Other, and, just as importantly, was a central focus of *sangathan*. Traditions of *seva* then were reworked as signifying the construction of a ritually pure and culturally cohesive Hindu community. Indeed, note firstly these practices of service stress positions of an internal Other, whose everyday behavioural patterns are to be regulated inside Brahminical constructs of purity, pollution, temperance and vegetarianism. *Gau Seva* then alludes to working for social improvements of the lower castes and Dalits as linked with the construction of an ordered, ‘ritually pure’, and culturally cohesive Hindu community. Moreover, *gau seva* here is linked to the building of a healthy and so strong, and importantly, *masculine* Hindu community - with practices of *seva* thus mapping over both perceived declines in morality and the physical bodies of Hindus. Hence *seva* operates as a discourse which links broad symbols of Hindu unity (the cow) into a mode of ‘manly’ community organisation (*sangathan*) (Bapu 2013: 142-146).

Increasingly, these approaches to organisation provided the themes around which central Hindu nationalist concerns were articulated, a point most notably evident in the arguments outlined by V.D Savarkar, a leading member of the Hindu Mahasabha, and the author of *Hindutva/Who is a Hindu?* (2003) [orig.1923]. However, in outlining the centrality of such *sangathanist* approaches to *seva* to the development of Hindu nationalism I would, following on from Zavos (2000: 177-178), note three important points. Firstly, there does not appear to be a single moment in which we can distinguish between these *sangathanist* inscriptions with regard to *seva* and then a ‘pure’ or ‘crystallised’ Hindu nationalism. I should like to stress then a viewpoint which

approaches what come to be seen as Hindu nationalist themes as a gradual development, with these very concerns related to Hindu organisation present throughout the breadth of Hindu politics during the late colonial period. Secondly, these *sangathanist* approaches to *seva* were translated and reinscribed in alternative fashions in the differing publics associated with Hindu nationalism, a point evident in the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS. Thirdly, and continuing this point with regard to exploring the diverse and differing manners by which *sangathanist* approaches to *seva* come to inflect upon early Hindu nationalist meanings, we would do well to recognise the discourse's contingent nature. In this sense, Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* do not statically 'exist' in, for example, Savarkar's text, but rather they are constantly in a process of circulation and transformation.

A clear example of the relationship between the previously described practices of *seva* and early Hindu nationalism is evident in shared preoccupations with regard to questions of Hindu (dis)organisation and its boundaries. Within Savarkar's approach, this theme is most noticeable with regard to the notion of the '*Hindu rashtra*', or Hindu nation. Indeed, Savarkar's contribution here is articulating constructs of a strong and cohesive Hindu community through modernist knowledge, and so maps solidarities of *sanskriti* ('culture') and race (*jati*) onto constituencies of *rashtra* (nation) and *pitribhumi* ('fatherland'). This focus upon articulating Hindu *sangathan* develops themes of Hindu horizontal solidarity in new modernist languages of national cultural and racial unity. Yet, and here I can begin to tease out the differing manners in which *sangathanist* approaches to *seva* were alternatively transformed and circulated in parallel arenas, Savarkar envisaged little - beyond a stress on symbolic unity - in terms of bringing this organized nation into existence (Zavos 2000: 177-183). For such contributions we must turn to the RSS, and in particular, their restructuring of the relationship between practices of *seva*, *sangathan*, and questions of associational cultures.

1.3 Seva, Sangathan, and the Development of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

Established in 1925 by Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, a Deshastha Brahmin, the RSS's first public act and then its subsequent form of association illustrate well the organisation's early practices of *seva* and relationship to questions of Hindu organisation. This is evident in the forms of *seva* carried out by the RSS at the April 1926 Ram Navami festival in Ramtek. Here, *swayamsevak*s of the fledging association intervened into the *mela* through attempting to order and discipline its activities. This involved a

focus on regulating the public representation of the festival through ordering queues, distributing water, and attempting to stop perceived financially corrupt activities associated with forms of worship at the festival (Anderson and Damle 1987: 35). We can witness here the linking of *sangathanist* meanings onto practices of *seva* which is concerned with answering a series of perceived problems associated with Hindu society, in particular, ethical conduct. It is helpful here to note that in the previous chapter I illustrated how Samaj activists such as Shraddhananda sought to reorganise Hindu society through relating redefined ethical conduct to reorganised *varna* traditions. The RSS's interventions also address perceived problems of ethical conduct. However, the context of the RSS's *seva* work as developing out of the framework of 'orthodox' approaches to *seva*, *sangathan* and reform is evident through the deployment of ethical reform and symbolic representations of Hindu unity, as opposed to a programme of ethical reform and related reorganisation of Hindu society. For example, the construction of an organized and cohesive festival, and so the public presentation of a Hindu community that was disciplined and culturally unified, without a corresponding focus on the reorganisation of Hinduism.

Importantly, these focuses upon ordering both ethical sensibilities and organising constructs of community are further evident in the Sangh's most prominent localized form of public representation – the *shakha*. These units of organisation were focused upon the generation of 'masculine Hindu' sensibilities. Activities included physical games, marching, and training with *lathis* (wooden batons) (Jaffrelot 1999: 64-66). These activities performed ideas of an alternative 'manly Hindu' to a perceived Gandhian-inflected *ahimsa* and passive, or as Nandy argues, 'feminine' construct (1980: 78). Furthermore, a focus upon 'order' can be seen in the specific timings of the *shakha* which were synchronized and held at regular times from unit to unit. The second *Sarsanghchalak* (Supreme Leader) of the RSS, Madhavrao Sadashivrao Golwalkar, highlighted the importance that such timings had with regard to relating the *shakhas'* regularity to the organisation of Hindu consciousness, noting that "It is a common experience that if a particular idea is repeated at a fixed hour regularly it goes deep into our being and becomes an inseparable part of our character. Hence the untiring stress on regularity and punctuality in the Sangh" (Golwalker 1966: 347-348).

Golwalker's comments are illustrative of practices of *sangathan* and *seva* which focus upon idioms of order and the necessity of organisation, points which are seen as

realizable through practical interventions into public life evidenced by the Ram Navami festival. These are also indicative of one further meaning linked to the Sangh's early development of *seva*. I am referring here to its culturally 'awakening' qualities and manners in which their activities purport to 'uncover' what they can be seen to produce. This point is best reflected through examining how the Sangh's practices of *seva* were interested in producing Hinduism's boundaries through 'uncovering' the true "cultural roots" of Hindus, overcoming the "present perversions and misconceptions", and so allowing Hindus as a nation and unified culture to "sprout forth once again in all their pristine purity and grandeur" (Golwalker 1966: 29). This project is theorized as realizable through constructing both the Sangh and the *sevak* as didactic examples of such unifying signifiers and sensibilities of order. As Zavos notes (2000: 195), these meanings stress a non-confrontational approach to the question of the reorganisation of Hinduism. *Seva* is envisaged then as a Hindu activist tradition linked to social upliftment through a focus not upon disturbing *jati* structures, but through the reordering and unifying of a perceived culturally ecumenical and primordial community through interpersonal relations. As Golwalker notes regarding *seva*, "...the central point of all these activities should be the appeal to the heart, the emphasis on the unifying and ennobling factors, and ignoring of differences" (1966: 358). A clear example of this early approach to *seva* and upliftment can be witnessed in an RSS camp held during 1934 in Wardha, contemporary Maharashtra. Although the inter-personal relations which partly structured the organisation of the camp have been woven into the RSS's own hagiographic account of itself, most likely due to Gandhi's visit and apparent glowing description at the absence of practices of 'untouchability', a number of points should be brought to the forefront as they strikingly illustrate the early themes which influenced Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* and their concerns with questions of Hindu organisation (Golwalker 1966: 358-359).

Firstly, the camp at Wardha, as in wider RSS projects and *shakhas*, had no institutionalized caste distinctions. Indeed, *swayamsevak*s ate, organised their work, and slept in the same residencies (Jaffrelot 1999: 45). Organisation and questions of 'untouchability' then are imagined as linked to the regulation of sensibilities along the lines of a cohesive Hindu cultural unity. Thus, cow *seva* and vegetarianism is stressed, and the Sangh abstains from recording the number of Dalit participants as this is seen as simply irrelevant. Indeed, all Hindus are brought together in the Sangh through participation in constructed 'essential' Hindu practices which forms the basis for an all-

encompassing horizontal imagination of Hindu society. Secondly, this approach then avoids issues of reorganisation and brackets questions regarding access to power and *jati* traditions. Instead, a symbolic unity found in an overarching cultural Hindu identity is stressed – “If you are Hindu” comments Golwalker, “it is sufficient for us. We don’t care for anything else. Hindu is the only consideration that counts for us; no caste, no sect, nothing, nothing counts for us” (1966: 359). Thirdly, then, caste identity is seen as being exchanged with previously examined broad Hindu activist identity, with symbolic notions of Hindu cultural unity framed in the language of a singular national and cultural identity. In this sense, Hinduism can be consolidated without disturbing caste. Fourthly, the RSS as an organisation is depicted as representative of this new Hindu identity (Zavos 2000:195-196).

Importantly, and here lies a fissure in practices of *seva* which distinguishes the Sangh’s approach, these imaginations of Hindu *sangathan* are encapsulated in the organisation of the RSS itself. The Wardha camp is thus circulated as an ideal representation of Hindu *sangathan*, with the Sangh itself as an organisation illustrating didactic meanings of cultural cohesion. This RSS’s didactic approach to questions of *seva* and *sangathan* are further evident in the figure of the *sevak*. This point also brings to the forefront the early porosity which structured the alternative publics of the Sangh, most notably with regard to the notion of the volunteer. A number of influences account for the importance of the symbol of the RSS *sevak* (volunteers) and *pracharaks* (full time workers). There are, of course, degrees of shared signification with regard to the *sevak* evident in both the Ramakrishna Mission and Math and the RSS. In both accounts, volunteers exemplify ‘pure’, ‘noble’, and ‘discerning’ figures who have risen above material concerns to serve. So too can be witnessed a common emphasis on physical and mental strength, stretching to practices of *brahmacharya* (Patel 2010: 108-109). Indeed, Hedgewar during 1920 was brought into contact with such models through supervising the work of volunteers at a Congress event. Notably, the uniform worn by the volunteers was replicated in the RSS’s *seva* activities at the Ram Navami *mela* (Anderson and Damle 1987: 31). Importantly, and bringing such points into dialogue with my early argument surrounding the didactic nature of the RSS’s *sangathanist* approaches to *seva*, this disciplined volunteering strikingly articulates the RSS’s presentation of itself and its *sevaks* as the encapsulation of an exemplary presentation of the relationship between *seva* and social upliftment, with the wholly committed, disciplined, and masculine *sevak* the epitome of a strong, organised, and cohesive Hindu

community. These forms of disciplined and coordinated activities are moreover illustrative of the RSS rearticulating themes of symbolic cultural unity through its organisational idioms, while alternative Hindu nationalist approaches remained largely wedded to the Hindu Mahasabha's previously discussed deployment of symbols of cultural unity - such as the promotion of Hindi - without a corresponding didactic organisational focus (Zavos 2000: 191).

Indeed, the early Hindu nationalist approaches to *seva* practised by the RSS emphasised *sangathanist* constructs of order, discipline, internal Hindu cohesion and ethical conduct, with the RSS seen to 'teach' and 'represent' such meanings through its practical organisation and its *sevakas*. I call these interventions into the Ram Navami festival and the running of their camps didactic as they are concerned with using the Sangh's organisational idioms and public presentation to present a pedagogical example of an organic Hindu society. In this sense, the Sangh as an organisation and its work 'represents' Hindu society. These didactic practices were productive of limited alternative publics. Indeed, recruitment was largely organised through informal and personal relationships, with a focus upon lower and middle class, and upper caste Brahmin youth. We gain a sense of how the RSS's 'exemplary' and disciplinary practices of *seva* worked to produce narrow alternative publics within which its discourses could circulate when we compare its forms to those practised by those of the Arya Samaj, examined in section three of Chapter Two. Indeed, unlike Samajist practices of *seva*, the RSS's early 'orderly' and didactic approach to *seva* envisaged little in terms of national – let alone international -- fundraising networks, annual fundraising tours and subscriptions, nor the membership and developed organisational spheres necessary for *seva* projects related to relief work during famines, instances of disasters such as outbreaks of plague, earthquakes and flooding, and the wider establishment of schools, orphanages, colleges and medical dispensaries (Watt 2005: 220-225, Jones 1976, 1989).

Indeed, the Sangh's approach led to their publics being largely devoid of fundraising networks, widely circulated publications, subscription drives, and an absence of extensive and permanent *seva* projects and associated extensively coordinated rationales and plans. Their approaches to *seva* constructed networks which largely relied upon local notables, including merchants, and a limited constituency of middle class and often upper caste Brahmins from Maharashtra and its surrounding areas (Jaffrelot 2011: 281-287). Indeed, instead of a focus on developing a wide network of service, Zavos

(2000: 187-188) highlights how noticeable inside the RSS were narrower focuses upon collecting and centralising – in the figure of the *sarsanghchalak* – information related to the profile of *shakhas* and *swayamsevaks*, the religious demographics of local areas, and more widely information surrounding the external environment in which the RSS operated. These early *sangathanist* approaches to *seva* were productive then of limited alternative publics.

2. Imagining the Post-Colonial Nation

2.1 *The RSS and Partition: Seva, Sangathan, and Initial Inscriptions of a Pro-Active Approach*

Importantly, I would note that it was not until the onset and subsequent experience of Partition in 1947 that we can witness initial changes in the RSS's approach to *seva*. These initial transformations can be highlighted and further examined in the context of partition Delhi.² In 1947 approximately 450,000 refugees, mainly from west Punjab, settled in Delhi. Composing around one-third of the urban population of the city, large sections of the refugees had both lost their property and wealth, and had experienced the trauma surrounding the violence of partition (Datta 1993: 288). The Hindu Mahasabha opened their *bhawan* to the refugees and further established a relief camp close to the railway station. However, and tentatively suggesting the impact of these articulations of *seva* in terms of constructing limited alternative publics, the *sabha's* early reliance on notables and a lack of experience in the coordination and long term organisation of such expansive *seva* work led to the *sabha's* quickly running short of funds and limiting its relief work to circulating job applicants amongst local businessmen (Bapu 2013: 27-33, Jaffrelot 2011: 287-288).

Yet, and this is of importance, the previously examined alternative organisational idioms articulated by the RSS allowed for a wider engagement in relief work mediated through activist traditions of *seva*. Indeed, perceived questions raised by Partition such as the 'disorganisation' and 'weakness' of the Hindu community, together with the RSS's inscription of itself and its *sevaks* as representative of *sangathanist* meanings, brought to the forefront questions surrounding the role of such an exemplary association in terms of addressing the crisis of partition. It is this contextual field which situates the initial transformations towards pro-active practices of *seva* with regard to the RSS. In April

² Importantly, Jaffrelot notes the activities of RSS *sevaks* during this period stretched in terms of both providing relief to refugees and forming the membership of Hindu militias involved in Delhi's September 1947 anti-Muslim riots (1999: 75-76).

1947 the Sangh took the initiative in establishing the Hindu Sahayata Samiti (Hindu Relief Committee). Capable of mobilising its already disciplined and ‘exemplary’ *sevak* and *pracharak* membership, RSS volunteers working inside the Samiti concerned themselves with distributing clothes and blankets and enrolling internally displaced children into educational facilities run by the association (Jaffrelot 2009: 75-76, 2011: 287-290). These practices organised the RSS’s approach to *seva* in forms which slightly changed their previous forms. Note firstly that while maintaining a tradition of reliance upon Hindu notables for patronage and support, in this instance the steel tycoon and future mayor of Delhi, Hans Bilal Raja, the Samiti in order to maintain such *seva* projects was forced to dramatically expand in a short period its fundraising networks. To this end, the association raised approximately five million rupees. Concurrently, while activists in the Sangh had histories of engagement in relief work in alternative associations, the organisation itself had – as has been illustrated – largely approached *seva* as a practice imbued with meanings of discipline, order and mediated through the circulation of the Sangh as emblematic of Hindu *sangathan*.³ Yet in the Sangh’s Partition relief work we have both the continued practice of such meanings, together with practices such as fundraising, the running of relief camps and educational facilities, and the distribution of clothes and blankets. Such practices stress both the didactic meanings associated with previously examined practices of *seva*, and a pro-active approach, with the latter productive of wider networks because of the need to expand coordination, planning, and fundraising related to the running of the Samiti’s *seva* projects (Jaffrelot 2009: 75-76, 2011: 287-290, Seshdari 2001: 91-97).

Moreover, I would further draw attention to the fashions by which the RSS’s engagement in Partition relief drew the Sangh into potential dialogue and exchange with alternative organisational approaches to *seva*. Indeed, interventions into festivals such as the previously analysed Ram Navami *mela* and then Partition relief not only raised differing meanings with regard to *seva*, but concurrently organised *sevaks* and practices of *seva* into new differing organisations. For example, and continuing here with the context of Delhi, the Samiti’s projects were coordinated in relief projects alongside the *seva* projects of the Arya Pradeshi Pratinidhi Sabha, the Sadgu Vaswani Mission, and the Harijan Sevak Sangh (Menon 2003). These pro-active approaches to *seva* produced through the Sangh’s engagement in Partition relief constructed both wider networks

³ Beckerlegge (2003: 41-49) refers for example to the participation of the RSS’s second Sarsanghchalak, M.S Golwalker, in the Ramakrishna Mission and Math’s Bengal campaigns.

within which its discourses could circulate, and concurrently brought RSS volunteers as an organisation into engagements with those associations constructed around common activist traditions such as *seva*. This point is illustrative of how the RSS through changing its practices of *seva* in the context of Partition brought both differing actors and ideas of service into dialogue and exchange. This is particularly relevant with regard to examining how discourses of *seva* circulating inside the alternative publics of the Sangh undergo further degrees of pro-active development, noticeable in their post-Partition relief projects.

2.2 Seva as Alternative: The Post-Colonial State and Narratives of Nation Building

Between 1947 and 1950 the Indian government passed legislation designed to address a wide range of aspects with regard to refugee rehabilitation and resettlement. For the newly independent government its ownership of the crisis resulting from partition was a crucial test of its legitimacy as a body capable of nation building inside what would later be described as Nehruvian categories of secular citizenship, State intervention, expertise, and economic plans linked to rational and scientific knowledges (Corbridge and Harriss 2000: 43-67). Moreover, such an approach here illustrates the government's move to gain practical hegemony in fields previously considered as concerns of religious and social reform associations. For example, rehabilitation here encompassed an approach to providing support and reintegration for 'unattached women', and thus dealt with attempts to rearticulate perceptions of widowhood. Approaching these issues with meanings which map over the project of secular nation building with practices previously organised by *seva* organisations was well articulated by Nehru, who directly drew a comparison between the two in stating that "you will notice that we call it the rehabilitation and development board – meaning that we are combining the two functions, or rather looking at the two problems – rehabilitation and development – together" (cited in Menon 2003: 153). Importantly, while Indian reformers had previously pressured the colonial state to intervene in issues surrounding reform such as widow inheritance, never before had the State proclaimed hegemony in such arenas and linked such interventions to questions of nation building articulated in the languages of secular citizenship (Nair 1996). Importantly, State-led interventions and secular linguistic frameworks worked to construct the RSS's and wider articulations of *seva* as alternative, both in terms of the practice's meanings and associated publics. To illustrate this point I

should like to continue examining the State's interventions into questions of gender and reform.

In 1947 the Relief and Rehabilitation Ministry established a 'Women's Section' designed, amongst other aims, to specifically intervene in questions pertaining to the status of widows. One of the first projects planned by the state was the construction of specially organised 'Women's Homes', to which fledgling State governments were required to provide land and construction materials. In such homes widows would be taught various organised skills in order to access levels of economic independence. Significantly, these skills were to be organised around what was to be considered productive in terms of national reconstruction. This point is illustrative then of the Nehruvian State's approach to questions of gendered marginalisation, and in particular, how such arenas of reform were to be State-led and importantly, how providing relief and rehabilitation for widows was linked into the State's wider nation building project. Furthermore, the government itself hoped that such homes would in the future be expanded to include not simply widows, but all 'destitute women' (Menon 2003).

Importantly, practices of *seva* circulating in the RSS and then the State-organised projects were linked to alternative approaches to questions of gendered rehabilitation, citizenship, and rights and duties. Approaches towards gendered upliftment led by the State had a contradictory impact and dynamic upon the ways in which subjects were to perceive instances of relief provision during times of crisis. Whereas the wider discourses which circulated inside the *seva* projects framed relief and upliftment in languages of Hindu activist traditions of duty, with such discourses positioning subjects inside constructs of a wider Hindu community, the State through claiming its position as the sole representative and benefactor of the nation's inhabitants helped foster discourses of relief to be provided as a matter of right due to secular notions of citizenship. Yet, this approach to questions of social upliftment did face barriers in so far as that there was no legal regime that recognised the civil rights of citizens, and more widely here, no legislation supporting the individual's rights to housing, food, clothing, and employment. In nuancing the State's early approach I would suggest here that such discourses did not so much simply frame relief as a matter of rights, but rather notions of rights would be suspended while discourses of relief and rehabilitation would be framed through a more authoritarian approach. Here then, upliftment is detached from questions surrounding the reorganisation of Hinduism, but rather the State is envisaged

as the instrument of secular-national-modern upliftment, organised as Menon notes, with linked to “a responsibility that had to be shouldered and discharged in its role as *parens patriae* and guardian of its citizens” (Menon 175: 2003).

Despite my previous demonstration in the previous chapter of the critical divergences in terms of the development of Hindu nationalist and wider articulations of *seva*, I would note that these systems of meaning are positioned as alternative by those Nehruvian discourses which circulated inside elite associational arenas with access to State power. Indeed, practices of *seva* linked the production of new forms of the Hindu self and the reorganisation of the Hindu community as a key and parallel process to the imagination of a varyingly ‘rejuvenated’, ‘cohesive’, and ‘strong’ national identity. By contrast the State-led articulations separated practices of religious reform and *seva* from an approach to development; with ‘social service’, ‘upliftment’, and ‘constructive work’ being replaced by terms such as ‘social welfare’ and ‘national planning’. These new discourses thus approached the question of post-colonial reconstruction differently from those approaches evident circulating in diverse *seva* associations, and encompassed new agents (the social scientist, the professional bureaucrat), new aims (national development and integration), new structures (Ministries and the Economic Plan), and new methods of theorising social and economic marginalisation (‘state socialism’, democracy, and rationalism). Moreover, as I examined in Chapter Two, in similar fashions to the modes by which the East India Company attempted to order existing Indian philanthropic traditions, so too the post-colonial Indian State justified its approach as linked to the rationalities of the Plan and superior organisation of the State (Watt 2011: 293-297).

However, while the initial post-colonial government linked practices of ‘nation building’ to claimed superior secular-modernist and rational discourses, this did not imply a total abstention from civil society. Rather, the State was increasingly concerned with organising and ordering these arenas towards certain aims. To this end, the first Five Year Plan and then the Central Welfare Board provided financial provisions for voluntary associations. Most significantly, indications of the State’s attempts to manage practices of *seva* can be witnessed with the foundation of the Bharat Sevak Samaj (BSS) in 1952. Nominally independent, and yet established by the government’s National Development Agency and promoted by the Planning Commission, the organisation articulated an approach to *seva* which organised its practices inside the parameters of the

first Five Year Plan. Here then, *seva* was managed into constructs of a modernist Nehruvian approach to national development which stood as alternative to those associated with Hindu activist traditions of service. This point is best evidenced in the Arya Samaj's inscription of *seva* with alternative meanings related to the construction of public Arya Mandirs as part of an overall project examined earlier of reorganising Hinduism's boundaries and reconstructing a 'vibrant Vedic Hindu community', while the volunteers of the BSS were centrally involved in the construction of the Kosi river dam in 1954, one of Nehru's 'temples of modern India' (Watt 2011: 296-297). The State's discourses of post-colonial nation building attempted then to regulate activist traditions of *seva* into state building concerns, or position these traditions as subordinate and alternative to such an overall project.

While following on from Watt (2011), Hellman (1993), and Mathur (2008) it would be tempting to conclude that during this period activist traditions of *seva* - and in particular Hindu nationalist articulations of practice - fade from the map of associational cultures, only to be written again decades later with the launching of various RSS-inspired *seva* organisations during the 1980s. However, there are, I argue, no 'lost decades' with regard to Hindu nationalism and *seva*. If Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* then during the early post-colonial period are cast as alternative to secular modernist approaches to nation building, it is to these alternative publics we must now turn in order to continue our examination of Hindu nationalist traditions of service and the transmutation of their meanings.

2.3 The Sangh, Seva, and the Self: Pro-Active Inscriptions and Widening Alternative Publics

The context of the assassination of Gandhi and the subsequent brief illegality and stigma associated with the RSS has largely formed the framework for exploring the Sangh's *seva* work during the early decades of the post-colonial period. These approaches, as I noted in this thesis's introduction, position the RSS's articulation of *seva* as politically appropriated, instrumentally deployed, and spatially bounded (Beckerlegge 2004 2006, Hansen 1999: 96, Jaffrelot 1996, Mathur 2008, Nair 2009, Nair and Bano 2007). Contrary to this approach, over previous pages I have shown how the Sangh's *sangathanist* articulations of the practice are central to understanding both the early themes of the organised expressions of Hindu nationalism, and the approaches to *seva* circulating inside such organisations. Noting then the entwined relationship between discourses of *seva*, 'orthodox' and 'radical' publics of Hindu reform, Hindu nationalism

and more widely the contributions of these dialogues to the category of the modern Hindu self, I would argue that the early post-colonial practices of *seva* associated with the RSS should be located as part of an overall history of interventions to transform Hindu activist traditions.

Further indications of the post-colonial practices of *seva* organised by the Sangh can be seen in their related inscription of the *sevak* and approach to the spheres of the explicitly political realm. While the RSS did take a leading role in the formation of the Jana Sangh in 1951, its *sevaks* - unlike the membership of the Hindu Mahasabha which had a history of electoral participation dating to the 1920s - remained largely sceptical of the explicitly political world and self-transforming projects (Gordon 1975, Jaffrelot 1999: 73). Golwalker himself placed RSS *sevaks* inside a constructed tradition of Hindu *gurus* and *sants* who had “risen above the mundane temptations of self and power and had dedicated themselves wholly for establishing a happy, virtuous integrated state of society” (1966: 93). This quote highlights how the project of Hindu *sangathan* for the RSS was primarily located in a broad Hindu cultural field. Moreover, it relates strikingly well to contextualising the RSS’s growing pro-active approach to *seva* noted previously in their Partition relief, and visible in the foundation of educational projects such as the Saraswati Shishu Mandir (1952) in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, which itself grew out of the Sangh’s experiences of running both school projects in Delhi during Partition and its Gita school (1946) in Kurukshetra, contemporary Harayana (Sarkar 1996: 197-198).

Moreover, the impact of Partition in linking the Sangh’s approach to *seva* with pro-active practices and so bringing its networks into dialogue with alternative service associations and activists can be witnessed in the role of RSS *sevaks* in the Bastuhara Sahayata Samiti, an organisation which provided crisis relief and ran fifteen relief camps in Bengal and eleven in Assam during the east Bengal refugee crisis of 1950. My earlier argument regarding how an increasingly pro-active *sangathanist* approach to *seva* evident in the Sangh’s relief work during Partition brought their networks into dialogue with other associations and actors is further reinforced in the foundation of the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA) (Tribal Welfare Centre) in 1952, in Jashpur, contemporary Chhattisgarh. The VKA’s *seva* projects encompassed educational and hostel facilities for rural and most notably *Adivasi* children, illustrating permanent engagements and so an extended degree of coordination and organisation stretching from the construction of

the buildings, recruitment of students, and the everyday running of the facility (Deshpande 2012, Seshdari 2011: 201-206).

These pro-active engagements do not represent a qualitative break with previous *sangathanist* approaches to *seva*. They continue to be broadly situated inside an approach which stresses the amelioration of social conditions and the incorporation of tribal identities into *sangathanist* constructs of a cohesive Hindu community. Furthermore, this continues a theme of Hindu representation which encompasses all sections of Hindu society linked through common practices. Thus, while tribal communities are organised and positioned inside an all-encompassing Hindu community, practices of *seva* continued themes of social upliftment within discourses which stress broad cultural signifiers of Hindu unity. For example, VKA *sevak*s constructed and renovated Hanuman temples, popularised *yajnas*, *yagas*, and the Ramayana. This was together with further stresses on signifying Hindu unity such as the establishment of a range of Samskar Kendras to regulate perceived transgressive non-Hindu practices such as gambling and the consumption of beef and alcohol (Deshpande 2012, Seshdari 2011: 201-206). The crucial point here relates to the implications of such *sangathanist* approaches to *seva*, their mediation through pro-active organisational idioms, and then their impact upon constructing expanded alternative publics. This is evident in the relief provided during the 1966 famine in Orissa, where the association selected and deployed *sevak*s to sink wells and developed fundraising networks which collected approximately twenty million rupees to provide relief for 35,000 people. Moreover, these changes in *seva* - in comparison, for example, to temporary interventions which stress order and discipline - worked to introduce the networks of the VKA into a porous relation with differing associations. Indeed, initiative for the organisation was originally developed by Ramakant Keshav Deshpande, an RSS *sevak*, and Thakkar Bappa, a non-RSS member yet participant in the *seva* projects run by the Servants of India Society (Deshpande 2012, Seshdari 2011: 201-206).

This move towards a pro-active approach to *seva* and its implications in bringing RSS-affiliated *seva* projects into dialogue with differing service associations is further evident with the projects of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Founded in 1966, and today more popularly constructed as a vehicle for spectacular ethno-religious mobilisations, the VHP is particularly indicative of the manners in which *sangathanist* and increasingly pro-active practices of *seva* worked to draw into dialogue a range of figures

inside common organisations. Claiming to represent a diverse array of *maths*, *panths*, and *sampradayas*, and including Dattamurti of the Masurasram whose origins trace to the Arya Samaj's *sangathan* campaigns of the 1920s, and Sant Tukroji and Swami Chinmayananda of the reformist Bharat Sadhu Samaj and the Chinmaya Mission respectively, the associational arenas of the organisation -- while internally diverse -- were the location of circulating *sangathanist* and pro-active approaches to *seva*, evident in both its official fourteen point vision and its early projects (Hellman 1993: 71-72). Indeed, Point One illustrates *sangathanist* concerns, "It is the VHP's mission to organise all those people, whether residing in India or abroad, who adhere to the *sampradayas* that originated in India". Point Six and Seven illustrate a pro-active approach to *seva*, stating that its aims and objectives shall be "To establish, maintain, take over, or render assistance to libraries, schools and colleges, technological institutes and medical and other relief centres", and "Found, maintain, take over, manage or render assistance to orphanages, rescue homes; and homes for widows and old and infirm persons" (Hellman 1993: 71-82, Katju 2003: 6-7). This is indicative of the ways in which *sangathanist* and pro-active practices of *seva* worked to draw together into expanded alternative publics a diverse array of actors to address issues surrounding what J.C Wadayer, the first President of the VHP, described as "the many social religious problems in Hindu society" which could only be solved with "The concept of Dharma which is the central character of Hindu culture, and its implementation", which he argued "will be the most useful contribution to Hindu society as also a unifying force amongst its differing sects" (cited in Katju 2003: 13-14).

This concern raised an issue at the centre of Hindu nationalist and wider approaches to *seva* – untouchability. Indeed, untouchability was seen as dividing the Hindu *Samaj*, with a programme launched of VHP-led cow protection campaigns and a description of the Hindu community as in the image of the Banyan tree (the VHP logo) intended to build 'untouchables' into Hindu society through a focus on reworking their ethical practices along the lines of broad signifiers of Hindu unity (Beckerlegge 2004: 124). The VHP further articulated this *sangathanist* and pro-active approach to *seva* through calling for 'a respectful attitude' to be taken towards Dalits and *mandirs* to be open to all Hindus, together with stressing the necessity of what Wadayer described as "the cultivation of ethical and spiritual qualities" amongst Hindus (Katju 2003: 7-8, 14). Here then we find echoes of Golwalker's approach to *seva* as a practise linked to a 'change in heart', but no consideration of a change in the organisation of Hinduism.

Indeed, these disconcerting questions are left to one side, and instead a focus is placed upon pro-active ameliorative practices of service. Notions of pollution, purity and social exclusion are therefore envisaged as contrary to Hindu *sangathan*, but not in a way which points towards issues of structure. Instead, *seva* is linked to the amelioration of social conditions, with the VHP taking the lead in establishing schools, orphanages and famine relief centres for marginalised Hindus. It is further regulated to the regulation ethical sensibilities, such as abstaining from ritual pollution such as consuming beef so as to be treated as an 'equal Hindu'. *Seva* thus works to regulate daily practices into an upper-caste associated morality.

I noted in section 1.3 the modes by which the RSS's articulation of *seva* both presented the organisation and the *sevak* as representative of Hindu *sangathan*. *Pracharaks*, for example, were expected to be disciplined, 'ritually pure' in terms of diet, physically strong and mentally alert, and take vows of *brahmacharya*. And as I highlighted, such a didactic focus could be seen to circulate in the Sangh's early practices of *seva*. Importantly however, the development of practices of *seva* with a pro-active approach allowed for the expansion of regulatory mechanisms beyond the *sevak* and those who came under the disciplinary practices of the RSS's previously temporary forms of public engagement. Here then, the organisations of RSS-affiliated service projects became the location of discourses of *seva* which exercised formative power over wider subjectivities. Examining such practices takes us inside the RSS affiliated Dnyana Pradodhini (Awakener of True Knowledge).

Founded in 1962 in Pune by Appa Pendse, an RSS *sevak* claiming influence from Vivekananda, Shradhanand, and Aurobindo, Dnyana Pradodhini's reconceptualization of a *sangathanist* approach to *seva* as linked to the regulation of ethical sensibilities is best evident in their educational projects. In terms of dress, students at the school were obliged to wear a uniform of *churidars*, *kurtas*, and Gandhi *topis*. Sports practised included 'indigenous' exercises which focused upon the development of masculine dispositions. Extracurricular activities involved practices of *seva* such as volunteering at Ganapati Chaturthi, participating in relief work during famines, and *van yatras* (journeys to rural areas) designed to build Hindu solidarity. This organisation's pro-active approach to *seva* opened up further arenas of intervention, most notably linked to articulating constructs of a modern Hindu femininity. In addition to its educational projects, the organisation also established three women's volunteer associations: Prachiti for young women,

Jijamata Dal for mothers, and Samvadini for women whose children had left home, together with *Samatol*, a monthly magazine distributed to a subscribed membership. Broadly then we have an approach to service which produces Hindu femininity in three stages – as daughter, and as wife and mother. Yet here, and again citing *sangathanist* and in particular disciplinary approaches to *seva*, these arenas were the location of martial arts training, the coordination of outdoor games, and organising its members to participate in the male-dominated *palkhi* processions of the Warkari Vaishnavite *sampradaya* (Dyahadroy 2009).

Here then, pro-active articulations of *seva* worked to construct a permanent association which emphasised a relationship between social upliftment and education, the regulation of everyday acts to invoke ethical and cultural Hindu norms, and Hindu organisation and discipline. The Sangh's pro-active practices of *seva* and *sangathan* are thus increasingly diversified in terms of being linked to bodily dispositions and ethical subjectivities of actors beyond RSS *sevaks*. Indeed, service now implies the organisation of, and permanent intervention into, wider and diverse arenas such as education and 'women's upliftment'. Pro-active practices of *seva* thus allow for its traditions to become linked to themes related to the relevance of 'Hindu cultures' to education and Hindu *Stree Shakti* ('Women's Empowerment').

3. Shared Languages and Porous Arenas

3.1 *Sarvodaya and Seva*

This examination of the *sangathanist* and pro-active articulations of *seva* in Sangh-affiliated *seva* projects brings to the forefront two questions. Firstly, questions surrounding how shared traditions of service situated the Sangh-affiliated *seva* projects as well as alternative approaches. And secondly, the extent to which shared traditions brought such associations into dialogue, allowing for further contestations, transformations, and expanded circulations with regard to Hindu nationalist articulations of the practice. In answering these pertinent questions we are drawn again to associations in which practices of *seva* are debated and rearticulated as activist traditions in dealing with perceived concerns. In particular, the *sarvodaya* discourses associated with the Sarva Seva Sangh, an association whose normative approaches to nation building developed from Gandhi's 'social constructivist' Lok Seva Sabha.

The context for the expanded circulation of the *sarvodaya* ('universal upliftment') discourses associated with the Sarva Seva Sangh (SSS) (Service For All) organisation relate to its interventions in the Bihar movement of 1974. Moreover, the broad economic and social context of the northern Indian state of Bihar hints at an understanding of the particular modes by which both the SSS's and the Sangh's articulation of service in shared Hindu activist languages allowed for the development of degrees of dialogue and translation between the two associations. Shah (1977: 606-608) notes that while Nehruvian approaches to post-colonial development may have established hegemony within spheres whose access to governmental machinery could be assured, its wider hegemony in differing publics and moreover its successes can be questioned.

Indeed, in the northern Indian state of Bihar, almost three decades after Independence three quarters of the population continued to subsist below the poverty line. Infant mortality remained one of the highest in the country, with the State's health care system largely unable to respond to an outbreak of small pox in 1974 in which 22,000 people died. Degrees of land concentration in the State represented one of India's highest, with 33% of agricultural land owned by 5.4% of the population. And while 82% of the population worked in agriculture, 40% of these were landless labourers. In urban centres, the number of workers employed in industrial production had declined over the previous decade. These apparent failures in the Nehruvian post-colonial nation building project had led to the growth of movements which challenged the Nehruvian Consensus, with urban agitations in the early 1970s spreading throughout both rural and urban locales. These challenges were indicative not simply of dissatisfaction with the existing local policies of governance, but also a wider disillusionment with existing and wider imaginations of the Nehruvian project (Shah 1977: 608-610). It was in this context that alternative meanings surrounding issues of social service and welfare, community and upliftment, and the role of voluntary associations and the State in national reconstruction began to circulate on an expanded scale to provide differing readings and practices.

One such influential alternative approach relates to *sarvodaya* discourses. In 1974 Jayaprakash Narayan, a key figure in the Sarva Seva Sangh (SSS), called upon students at Patna University to found *seva* projects in rural locales as a mode of ameliorating the social conditions produced by the perceived failures of the Nehruvian project (Shah

1977: 605-614). Of importance here is the location of such calls in languages associated within broad Hindu activist idioms, and in particular, the ways by which *sarvodaya* discourses of the SSS rearticulated Gandhi's critiques of secular-modernist projects of nation building. These 'social constructionist' discourses approached nation building as linked to the construction of an 'alternative modernity', and were heavily critical of the perceived internalization of Western universalisms.⁴ Here, and perhaps ironically influenced by the Orientalist knowledge developed by Henry Maine, both Gandhian and *sarvodaya* discourses imagined the reconstruction of an Indian past of socially cohesive village republics, with social upliftment linked to practices of 'moral reform' and voluntary service. Such approaches were often conceptualised through the use of Hindu activist language and resources, most notably *Ram Rajya*, *yugadharma*, *gau seva*, and *seva* (Gandhi 1997, Guha 2003, Parekh 1999: 15-40, 89, Watt 2011: 287-292).

Indeed, the Sarva Seva Sangh advocated that *seva* and wider voluntary organisations should have a key role in nation building, with the nation, as such, imagined through ideas of politically decentralised local communities, much like Gandhi's 'village republics'. Voluntary associations were ascribed the tasks which the government had largely claimed for itself during the early decades of post-colonial period - for example, in regard to gender and social upliftment (Shah 1977: 642-655). Importantly, such projects were envisaged largely as non-legislative and based around languages of moral persuasion, a point which finds degrees of similarity in both Golwalker's and Gandhi's own visions of ending practices of untouchability through creating a sense of responsibility and altering the everyday behaviours of upper castes. Moreover, and again similar to Gandhi's conception of political action as being an extension of religious obligations and values, the *sarvodaya* movement conceived the regulation of moral sensibilities throughout society as a means through which negative practices such as government corruption - itself a key target of the Bihar movement - could be removed (Jaffrelot 1996: 258-266).

3.2 The Sangh, Sarvodaya, and Seva: Shared Languages and Spaces of Contestation

In the last section I indicated certain shared approaches to questions of the organisation of Hinduism and *jati* traditions between Gandhian approaches and the Sarva Seva

⁴ The phrase 'alternative modernity' is drawn from Hardiman's use of the concept in his analysis of Gandhi's advocacy of alternative patterns of modernity to those presented as normative categories and located in Western experiences (2004: 66-93).

Sangh's *sarvodaya* discourses. I will now outline the importance of such common frameworks with regard to understanding the expansion of alternative publics within which RSS-affiliated associations could articulate their discourses in arenas -- such as the *sarvodaya* movement -- constructed around shared Hindu activist traditions.

Key to understanding the development of shared organisational spaces of the Bihar movement were the networks associated with the Bihar Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti (BCSS) (Bihar Student Struggle Committee). This network drew together *sarvodaya* volunteers, members of the Gandhian Shanti Sena (Army of Peace), and activists from the Hindu nationalist Jana Sangh, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and the RSS. Although the membership had little in the way of a uniform approach to Hindu activist traditions, what drew together the activists were shared claims on *sarvodaya* traditions. This diverse membership worked together in shared office space, and produced an irregular weekly newspaper and press notes. ABVP and RSS members, alongside other BCSS activists, also undertook common processions and petition campaigns. In 1974 they jointly organised Sadachar Week (Week of Moral Conduct), where activists persuaded the families of allegedly corrupt government officials to fast in order to influence personal moral reform. This was in addition to campaigning for the voluntary redistribution of land and visiting villages to undertake vaccination drives and flood relief work. The activists also carried out anti-dowry work and launched a movement to persuade young upper-caste males to give up the sacred thread (Shah 1977: 642-643, 647-651).

While arguing for the significance of such common reformist frameworks in 'legitimizing' the Jana Sangh, Jaffrelot in his exploration of the RSS's interventions into the Bihar movement approaches the development of shared associational spaces and linguistic frameworks as an instance largely of Realpolitik, allowing for the RSS to be associated with a prominent political leader and popular movement (Jaffrelot 1999: 257). Yet, following Fox (1987), I would detach the resulting development of associations constructed around languages of *seva* and structured in degrees of porosity from either an instrumentalist deployment of Hindu activist languages or the *sarvodaya* movement's supposed surreptitious Hindu nationalism. Instead, I would emphasise what Fox calls the development of "a real conjunction...in terms of certain common cultural convictions and political practice" (1987: 238). Note, for example, the '*sampoorna kranti*' ('total revolution') discourse articulated by *sarvodaya* movement. Here, the discourse was

presented as an indigenous philosophy which was an alternative to both ‘Western capitalism’ and ‘Soviet socialism’. Indeed, this self-styled indigenous philosophy linked constructs of ‘*sanskriti*’ and ‘*rashtra*’, and shared linguistic territory with the Sangh’s philosophy of ‘Integral Humanism’, developed as an approach which located itself as a *Bharatiya sanskriti* derived third way between ‘western individualism’ and its ‘money hungry man’, and Marxism and its ‘blood thirsty man’ (Upadhyaya 1967). Importantly then, both the Sangh’s ‘Integral Humanism’ and the *sarvodaya* movement’s philosophy shared positions which critiqued ideas surrounding the linked relationship between a secular-modernity and nationhood from a perspective that such processes were seemingly foreign to Indian soil. Instead, they articulated a common language which focused upon notions of alternative traditions based upon village *panchayats*, *seva*, local cottage industries such as *khadi*, and finally, the primacy of organic societal relations derived from a vague and blurred porous cultural space which linked ideas of Indian national and Hindu cultural belonging and civilization.

These similarities however go beyond the so-called ‘indigenous’ location of their philosophies. Importantly, they also stressed the primacy of reform and relief work to be undertaken by voluntary associations. Indeed, Narayan himself had during 1967 participated alongside the RSS in drought relief projects in the state of Bihar (Jaffrelot 1999: 261). This shared approach to social upliftment and reform, whose methods had more in common with Gandhi’s often ambiguous call for an internal, moral revolution in the individual than in either disturbing *jati* traditions or using political power as a vehicle for social change, does not seem to have been lost on Narayan. Indeed, he noted while speaking at an RSS training camp in 1975 that the

“Bihar movement and RSS’s work are fundamentally the same. [...] Both are aimed at complete change in the entire society through a process of evolution of thoughts and actions of the people for the betterment of the whole nation” (cited in Jaffrelot 1996:255).

A common emphasis then lies in a focus upon constructs of world transformation through the regulation of sensibilities and through amelioration through practices of *seva*. Both the *sarvodaya* articulation of *seva* and the RSS adopt common frameworks in terms of approaching such ideas as an alternative to ‘divisive’ policies such as special privileges for non-Hindu minorities or scheduled castes and tribes. They articulate an approach to *seva* which is linked to varying shared constructs of ethical reform, the horizontal organisation of Hinduism and nation building.

It is these “common cultural convictions and political practices” (Fox 1987: 238) which draw together, into the Bihar movement, activists of the *sarvodaya* movement and volunteers inspired by the pro-active approaches to *seva* circulating in the previously examined Sangh-affiliated *seva* projects. Such activist dialogues, translations, and contestations constructed around shared languages of indigeneity, Hindu organisation, and associational voluntary reform and *seva* continue the ways in which Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* and their wider concerns developed in shared alternative publics and in dialogue with alternative practices of service. Moreover, the development of common alternative publics between those motivated by these similar languages helps us understand how *sevaks* of the Sangh were able to operate inside the Bihar movement in a non-instrumentalist fashion, collaborate in the production of wide associational networks and circulate their particular approaches to *seva* amongst those inspired by Gandhian and *sarvodaya* constructs of ethical reform and *seva*.

Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter’s examination of the relationship between Hindu nationalism and activist traditions of *seva* I have brought to the forefront a number of significant points. In section one I analysed the *sangathanist* approaches to *seva* which were central to the development of the themes associated with early Hindu nationalism. I further noted the importance of the Sangh’s reworking of these approaches as linked to alternative meanings with regard to idioms of organisation and volunteering. In section two, I examined how the Sangh’s approach allowed for the development of initial pro-active approaches to *seva*, most notably during Partition. Such pro-active practices brought the Sangh-affiliated *seva* associations into dialogue with associations in which shared religious languages circulated. Importantly, while such points of shared linguistic frameworks and common contestations were noted in Chapter Two, the pro-active practices now evident allowed for the potential of Sangh-affiliated projects to be brought into dialogue with associations beyond wider Hindu nationalist contexts and into networks which employed similar pro-active traditions.

While developing an alternative to the Nehruvian project of post-colonial nation building, Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* - while continuing to focus on *sangathanist* practices - increasingly developed as pro-active practices, a point evident in the Sangh-led interventions into crisis relief and the *seva* projects of the RSS-affiliated VKA, VHP, and Dnyana Prabodhini. Moreover, transformations in *seva* worked to reinscribe the

tradition with formative power in relation to regulating daily subjectivities in line with constructs of a modern Hindu self, and served to construct expanded alternative publics concerned with a variety of perceived social concerns.

In section three I brought to the forefront and examined the modes by which the previously analysed pro-active approaches to *seva* evident in the Sangh-affiliated projects allowed for the construction of common networks and dialogue. In particular, I outlined the approaches to *seva* associated with the *sarvodaya* movement which allowed both *sarvodaya* activists and Sangh *sevaks* to be brought into common associations linked with the Bihar movement. This examination points towards the growth and expanded circulation of Hindu activist traditions and forms of public religiosity in enabling the construction of wide alternative publics in which pro-active Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* could be both circulated, and, just as importantly, could continue to be transformed and contribute to debates surrounding the formation of the modern Hindu self. This line of exploration will be a central focus of Chapter Four.

Chapter Four

'Visibilized' Spaces

Introduction

The previous two chapters brought to the forefront the ways in which Hindu activists have intervened into debates surrounding the meanings of *seva*. Importantly, I examined how transformations in the practice contributed to outlining and regulating the normative subjectivities of a modern Hindu self. In Chapter One, through analysing and complicating both 'reformist' and 'orthodox' articulations of *seva* linked to the Arya Samaj and the Sanatana Dharma *sabhas*, I illustrated how such transformed practices of service worked to produce organisations inside of which circulated divergent meanings with regard to approaching Hinduism's boundaries. Importantly, I noted how the transformation of these shared activist traditions were productive of alternative publics structured with porous borders, a point most notably evident in the degrees of discursive exchange and contestation inside the Hindu Mahasabha.

In Chapter Two, I examined how early Hindu nationalist articulations developed linked to orthodox *sangathanist* concerns which gained hegemony within northern Indian Hindu reform and politics. Yet significantly, in Chapter Three I noted how the RSS's organisational idioms worked to link its practices of *seva* with pro-active meanings. These pro-active practices worked to bring the Sangh's networks into dialogue with associations which stressed similar pro-active traditions, evident during Partition, early post-colonial relief work, and the establishment of RSS affiliated *seva* associations such as the VKA, the VHP, and JP. Moreover, I examined how such pro-active inscriptions and shared linguistic frameworks allowed both activists of the *sarvodaya* movement and the Sangh to be brought into dialogue inside the Bihar movement. By the end of the 1970s then, *sangathanist* Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* were productive of, and could be witnessed circulating in, wider alternative publics.

By 2009, RSS-affiliated *seva* associations had, in terms of organisations, projects and participants, expanded dramatically. Indeed, as I noted in the Introduction, the number of projects had risen to approximately 157,776. These stretched across practices

of Education (*Shikshak*) (54,948 facilities), Health (*Arogya*) (38,582 facilities), Development (*Vikas*) (17,392 centres), and Social Rejuvenation (*Samajik Samskar*) (42,304 projects) (*Sewa Disha* 2009). This chapter will examine how pro-active and *sangathanist*-inflected Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* have come to be productive of expansive alternative publics. This analysis will continue to stress the importance of understanding these wider productions and circulations of *seva* as again responsive to degrees of dialogue and contestation within alternative publics constructed through shared Hindu activist languages.

Section one of this chapter will illustrate the growth of a popular Hindu religiosity and linked visibilized publics within Indian civil society, such as those associated with the Vinayaka Chaturthi festival.¹ Within these publics questions were raised surrounding the representation and so the organisation of Hinduism. It is my premise that the porous borders which structured the relationship between growing popular and visibilized publics of religiosity and the organisations associated with Hindu nationalist *seva* projects contributed to the development of a range of significant points with regard to Hindu nationalist practices of *seva*. Firstly, developing associations of popular religiosity contributed to allowing discourses of *seva* to be both introduced to and circulate on an expanded scale. And secondly, Hindu nationalist ideas themselves can be seen to contribute to the foundation of such associations. Both points here illustrate then how shared activist languages and traditions continually work to bring differing associations into degrees of overlap, allowing for, in this instance, discourses of *seva* to exercise formative power over a developing array of practices and concerns circulating in these alternative and expanding publics.

Section two will begin by noting that spaces of popular and public Hinduism operated - in a related fashion to those I noted in Chapter Three with the *sarvodaya* movement - as publics which raised issues of the relevance of Hindu activist traditions in approaching questions of Hindu representation and organisation. Using evidence from the Sangh-affiliated Vivekananda Kendra, I will examine how the assertion of visibilized publics constructed around the importance of Vivekananda to a public Hindu

¹ Briefly, the concept 'popular religiosity' here refers to the contextual interaction and engagements between 'received traditions' and 'innovations'. See Sinha (2009) for an extended discussion of the concept 'Hindu religiosity'. Visibilization refers to the growing prominence of varying claims, identities and associated alternative publics (Al-Rashid 1996, Werbner 2004, Zavos 2008). See pages 102-104 for a more detailed account of the concepts.

identity, and then to tribal reform movements in Arunachal Pradesh, worked to bring to the forefront the construction of Hinduism in specific spaces. It will be noted that the Kendra's discourses of *seva* invoked a specific ecumenical Hindu nationalism and Hindu identity. It is the growth of, and Hindu nationalist contestation inside, publics of popular religiosity that will be explained as central to the expansion of the RSS-affiliated *seva* projects. While these spaces offered wider constituencies within which Hindu nationalist traditions of *seva* could be circulated, my premise relates to how *sangathanist* and pro-active approaches became inscribed with vernacularized meanings as a result of interventions into and contributing towards local themes which concern the diverse associations linked to popular Hindu religiosity. It is this dynamic, what Reddy calls the development of a discourse "that mediates practices of all sorts, without always or necessarily being driven by its ideological core" (2011: 413), which contributes to the transformation and expansion of Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva*. This transformation and expansion occurs in the context of *seva* exercising formative power over a greater range of ethical sensibilities.

1. Visibilized Spaces of 'Popular' Hindu Religiosity

1.1 Complicating 'Great' and 'Little' Traditions and 'Popular' and 'Official' Hinduism

In noting the visibilization of a public and popular Hinduism during the final decades of the twentieth century I am drawn to a reworked understanding of Vertovec's notions of 'Official' and 'Popular' religion. Here, 'Official' religion is understood as a set of prescriptions and institutional frameworks which construct orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and, I would add, thus attempt the exercise of power in terms of regulating and categorising such religious formations. 'Popular' religion is understood as relating to practices which may develop outside of 'official' auspices, and may relate to an unorthodox focus (Vertovec 2000: 28, 41-42). While noting that 'Official' and 'Popular' practices are found in many religions, Vertovec argues that Hinduism, whether in India or in Hindu diasporas, is particularly reflective of popular practices, "largely because it is without a single founding prophet, single sacred text, single geographical focal point or unitary institutionalized priesthood" (2001: 42).

I would suggest two broad adjustments to this framework in approaching visibilized spaces of public and ‘popular’ Hinduism. Firstly, and a point which Vertovec hints at and has been a key argument of Chapters Two and Three, from the colonial to the post-colonial period discourses of *seva* associated with organisations from the Arya Samaj to the Sanatana Dharma *sabhas*, and from the RSS to the VHP have engaged in the attempted reorganisation of Hinduism. In doing so, they attempted to rework Hindu practices along the lines of Vertovec’s ‘Official’ orthodox categories. This brings to the forefront a second revision. In order to trace the relationship between Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* and the articulation of a ‘popular’ Hindu religiosity, together with a related representation of Hinduism, we need to outline the visibilized publics within which these discourses circulate. In this sense, ‘Official’ and ‘Popular’ Hindu religiosity share blurred boundaries and cohabit common spaces and practices. In this reading, and as I will illustrate in the proceeding sections, spaces of ‘popular’ Hindu religiosity then are best approached as visibilized publics which are both structured in degrees of relation to Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva*, and are the location within which these approaches compete to inscribe meaning upon religious traditions and cultural practices. Moreover, these alternative publics, as I will illustrate in section two, are of vital importance to understanding the expansion and vernacularized transformation of Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva*. Before I move into such an examination I will first outline the spaces associated with this visibilized and popular Hinduism.

1.2 Spaces of Public and Popular Hinduism: The Construction of ‘Mega Murtis’, Seva and Sangathan

A conceptual tool with which we can think through the rise of a popular Hinduism relates to the ‘visibilization’ of its forms. Initially developed in the context of theorising the emergence of diaspora Hindu and Muslim constructs of belonging, the concept draws attention to the processes by which “subterranean” group identities become visible within a variety of public spaces due to State policy, wider political events, developments within group identities, or combinations of these factors (Al-Rashid 1996, Werbner 2004, Zavos 2008: 328). Importantly, the growing visibilization of such identities is mediated around a range of discursive practices which both produce and circulate inside these newly visibilized publics.

The climate of a rise in public and popular Hinduism is demonstrated in a range of visibilized publics. Perhaps most extravagantly, and related here to approaches to *seva* which echo both Shraddhanand's and Moonje's earlier call for the construction of 'National' *mandirs* to signify Hindu *sangathan*, was the building of 'mega *murtis*' throughout India's urban centres from the mid to late 1970s and 1980s onwards (Bapu 2013: 48). These forms of service enabled the production of centres organised around these forms of popular religiosity, evident in the 1970s construction of a large Hanuman *murti* in Bengaluru. These actions therefore continue Shraddhanand's and Moonje's theme of linking service with organising Hindus around Hindu practices and cultures. In building the *murti* the organising committee continued to engage in practices such as fundraising which, as I previously demonstrated in Chapter Two, were key aspects of the late-colonial transformations in practices of *seva*. For example, the committee successfully raised finances of over Rs20,000 to enable the carving of the *murti* into a prominent rock face overlooking a wealthy suburb of the city, and the site was also the location of numerous further shrines, yoga centres, a park, and India's sole motorized scaffold for *abhiseka* ceremonies, where devotees could either themselves practise worship or could commission the ritual from a distance for a fee (Lutgendorf 1994: 213). While the Hanuman *murti* could claim for a brief period to be the largest in India, it was soon eclipsed by a project in Himachal Pradesh. Led by devotees of the Chinmaya Mission, a *Vedanta* reform association whose founder also aided in the establishment of the VHP, the forty-five foot *murti* weighing approximately 1,300 tonnes is part of a complex which supports a Sanskrit college, an *Ayurvedic* medical dispensary, and a training school for Hindu priests. This trend continued, and in 1990 an estimated 500,000 devotees of Sathya Sai Baba gathered at his ashram in Andhra Pradesh to receive *darshan* upon the backdrop of a seventy foot *murti* of Hanuman grasping in one hand the Drona Mountain, and in the other his mace (Lutgendorf 1994).

The importance of 'mega' *murti* building campaigns is evident firstly of an assertion of a public and popular display of Hindu religiosity. Secondly, these forms of religiosity draw together in common associations a range of actors including doctors, teachers, members of fundraising and organising committees, priests and present and absent devotees. This enables the circulation of varying representations of Hinduism inside these publics. Indeed, Raj notes regarding the formation of diaspora identities in London, space has been central to the production of a Hindu Punjabi community. She

notes how “there is no Hindu Punjabi ‘community’” naturally existing, only “moments when community occurs, when people gather as a whole, because of a certain criterion of religious identification” (2003: 93). I would note that such an approach is useful in terms of examining the relationship between a visibilized popular Hinduism and constructs of Hindu community. Note, for example, the focus on constructing giant and public *murtis* of Hanuman inscribed with martial vigour which confidently dominate the city scape. Moreover, this figure is displayed without sectarian affiliation, as a symbol which is brought to signify Hindu unity. These visibilized publics of public and popular Hinduism can be further seen to represent an ostensive culturally cohesive Hindu community organised around broad cultural signifiers of Hindu cultural unity.

This extravagance should not, however, distract our attention from the dramatic expansion of seemingly banal and reserved *mandirs* and *murtis* constructed with less prominence. Indeed, and linked to Kalpagam’s (2006) research on the expanded construction of road-side *mandirs* in Chennai, these modest sites are, like their mega counterparts, the location of varying forms of religiosity. In particular, the growth in Chennai’s Mariamman road-side temples have allowed the expansion of a Dravidian Dalit representation of Hinduism located in an accessible Hindu ‘omnipraxy’ in which both Vertovec’s ‘Popular’ and ‘Official’ Hinduism can be located. Indeed, the growth in a popular and public Hinduism associated with both the ‘mega’ *murtis* and the road-side temples then allows subjects to both produce and derive meanings of Hindu organisation through participation in these spheres. Importantly, the growth of such popular religiosity illustrated by the ‘mega’ *murtis* and road-side temples allow for the circulation of both an ecumenical and divergent representations of Hinduism in terms of *sampradaya*, *jati*, and *sangathan*. Indeed, as I will illustrate, they are publics in which contested representations of Hinduism circulate.

1.3 Spaces of Public and Popular Hinduism: Festivals, Seva and Sangathan

These spaces can be seen to be the location of plural and contending approaches to Hindu organisation. This is important as it contextualises the modes by which *sangathanist* Hindu nationalist approaches to *seva* circulated in these expanding associations, with Kanungo and Joshi specifically drawing our attention to the relationship between popular religiosity, Hindu festivals, and Hindu nationalism (2009).

A clear example of this point is evident in both the Ganesh Chaturthi festival in contemporary Mumbai and the Vinayaka Chaturthi festival in contemporary Tamil Nadu. While the histories of the festival in Mumbai since the late nineteenth century are replete with public processions, performances and its organisation into forms of anti-colonial mobilisations, a clear indication of the festival's relation to the growing public and popular Hinduism is demonstrated in the dramatic expansion of the festival's organising committees associated with the event, which, by the year 2000, had risen to over 7,400 (Fuller 2004: 264, Kaur 2002).

Moreover, the festival is the site of a vast array of omni-praxic forms of worship, from plays to poetry to processions. Importantly, while shared religious languages associated with the festival work to bring together a diverse array of participants, internal to its arenas we can witness a variety of alternative and contested meanings circulating with regard to constructs of Hindu representation and the celebrated deity Ganesh. This point is evident in the divergent images of Ganesh which are carried in the festival's processions and then later ritually immersed. The images draw upon a vast range of themes, including Ganesh presented as a cricketer, a movie star, and importantly, as a figure representative of an organised and unified Hindu community (Kaur 2002: 82-83). This emphasis upon the importance of the rise in a public and popular Hindu religiosity in creating expansive visibilized publics in which representations of Hinduism could circulate, be contested, and organised is further evident in the Vinayaka Chaturthi festival in contemporary Tamil Nadu.

While originally a derivative development from Ganesh Chaturthi, Vinayaka - as Ganesh is known in Tamil Nadu - Chaturthi was, until 1983, celebrated through rituals in private residencies and Vinayaka *mandirs*. As part of the developing assertion of a public and popular Hinduism, in 1983 activists of the Hindu Munnai, a Tamilean Hindu nationalist association, began a process of reconstructing the festival as both productive and representative of Hindu *sangathan*. The festival was brought into public arenas in both urban and rural locales through the construction of *pandals*, the dissemination of Vinayaka *murtis* to be displayed outside of houses, shops, *mandirs*, business, and parks, the organisation of public assembly points (numbering eighteen in Chennai by the year 2000), undertaking single processions and then ritual immersions. By the 1990s, the event had expanded into one of Tamil Nadu's most popular and celebrated festivals, to

the extent that the Hindu Munnai's president in 1995 could both confidently and plausibly claim that the practices of immersion associated with festival were occurring in almost every *panchayat* in the State (Fuller 2001: 1606-1611, Harriss 2002: 101).

The publics and forms of public religiosity associated with the festival should not, however, be viewed as exclusively constructed around Hindu nationalist discourses. Indeed, they are constructed through drawing upon a range of interpreted religious traditions. But the important point remains here that publics associated with the festival are wide and diverse sites in which Hindu nationalist discourses can circulate in expanded forms and compete to give meaning. For example, inscribing meaning with regard to the image of Vinayaka, the processions and related chanting, the activities undertaken by the organising *samitis*, the forms of activist traditions of *seva* undertaken at the festival, the ordering and policing of the event, and of course, the spaces associated with such large Hindu assemblies and constructs of community.

Importantly, these constituencies reach actors and associations beyond those affiliated with the Hindu Munnai. For example, Fuller's research illustrates that the Hindu Munnai exercises little in the way of hegemony over the organising committees. Indeed, and most notably in northern areas of the State, festival responsibilities are undertaken by local residents, shop keepers, businessmen, alternative voluntary organisations linked to Vinayaka *mandirs*, and caste associations. Even in Chennai itself, *Maramari* business leaders commission the manufacture of the *murtis* and finance their distribution. In Triplicane, committees independent of the Munnai organise singing, dancing and fancy dress competitions for children, together with practices of *seva* linked to blood donation projects. These alternative inscriptions are evident in a number of points. Note firstly that the Vinayaka *murtis* disseminated in public spaces, carried in the processions and later immersed bring to the forefront differing constructs of Hinduism, with the deity represented as a swan, as Sai Baba, as a hybrid of both Hanuman and Vinayaka, and on occasions the deity has been replaced by Venkateswara, a form of Vishnu. Moreover, such popular and hybrid local traditions are further evident in the involvement in Tuticorin of Catholic fisherman in participating in the immersion of the *murtis* (Fuller 2001: 1611). I am not arguing here that such practices are devoid of meaning and circulate as 'innocent' in contrast to the Munnai's so-called 'instrumentalist' appropriation, but rather this is illustrative of how popular and public

festivals operate as visibilized publics in which alternative and Hindu nationalist discourses can develop and circulate amongst expanded actors and associations and ascribe meaning to the festival's practices and cultures (Fuller 2001: 1612-1613).

Yet concurrent with alternative practices, *sangathanist* and pro-active Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* are additionally evident in both constructing and circulating inside the festival's associated activities. For example, large assertive *murtis* of Vinayaka with his steed switched from a mouse to a lion are commissioned and distributed by the Munnai and are present in Tuticorin's *pandals* and processions, as are 'Kargil *murtis*', where Vinayaka is constructed as riding a field gun and tank (Fuller 2001: 1608). The spaces of the festival too are linked to themes regarding the representation of Hinduism, a point raised more widely by Freitag in her analysis of public arenas, collective action and the production of community in colonial north India (1989: 6). Indeed, activists of the Sangh and the Munnai engaging in the disciplining of the procession through policing alcohol consumption and subsequent intra-Hindu aggression, together with constructing normative practices with regard to the ritual immersions (Fuller 2001: 1613-1615). Practices of *seva* continue therefore to be linked to *sangathanist* approaches reminiscent of the RSS's interventions into the Ram Navami festival examined in Chapter Three. They engage, for example, in the ordering of so-called undisciplined and 'rowdy' practices associated with collective Hindu public action such as festivals. These practices of *seva* then link the Vinayaka Chaturthi festival with order and discipline.

These constructs of *seva*, space and *sangathan* associated with the festival are further evident with regard to questions surrounding the processions, *jati* traditions, and gender. Here, festival *samitis* linked to the Munnai and the organisation's more widely dispersed activists attempt to organise unified processions which are concerned with representing a cohesive and ordered Hindu community. To this end, a key focus is placed on Hinduism's boundaries, a point evident in the association's commission and dissemination of Vinayaka *murtis* to Dalit localities and committees in preparation for the festival (Anandi 1995: 58-59). The dissemination of Vinayaka *murtis* is of course itself a vernacularized attempt at organising Hindu unity for the diverse and conflictual range of positions within Hinduism in Tamil Nadu. Vaishnava Tamil Brahmins who were hesitant to worship Shiva are able to celebrate his son; Hindu Tamil regionalists become open to popularisation of the festival due to its lack of association with

northern Hindu deities; and, as described above, practices of *seva* are linked to the distribution of Vinayaka images in Dalit localities. Moreover, such concerns regarding the representation of Hinduism are noticeable in the Munnai's attempts to provide a symbolic status for Dalits through encouraging their participation in organising committees and in taking a forefront role in processions. In Triplicane, for example, heads of Dalit *panchayats* lead Munnai-affiliated processions (Fuller 2001: 1613).

Practices of *seva* and *sangathan* associated with the festival are further evident with regard to questions of femininity. While inscriptions of a passive female subject with restricted access to the public sphere had worked to produce the festival as an arena of largely Hindu male participation due to its perceived masculine sensibilities, the Hindu Munnai promoted Hindu women's involvement as central to the festival's ability to unify Hindu society. Separate spaces inside the festival were demarcated for Hindu women to sing *bhajans* and perform *aarti* to Vinayaka *murtis*. Inclusion in these spaces of a popular and public religiosity then rework constructs of a passive femininity with specific gendered roles in a unified and assertive Hindu community (Geetha and Jayanthi 1995: 247). Approaches to *seva* then are given vernacularized, pro-active and *sangathanist* meanings which offer both a public and assertive role for Dalits, and a construct of public and gendered participation inside an organised Hindu community. The festival then allows us to witness the formative power of vernacularized *sangathanist* approaches to *seva*. Firstly, in terms of representing Hindu society. This is seen through the festival offering differing roles to the respective elements of Hindu society. In the spaces and cultures of the Vinayaka Chaturthi festival Dalits are positioned as included alongside the diverse array of Hindus which are celebrating the festival, and as a publically assertive section of the Hindu community. In terms of Gender too we can witness a reworking of roles and responsibilities. Indeed, a notion of Hindu femininity is constructed which encourages women to participate in the festival's spaces in certain roles, namely, as publically performing various Hindu rituals. Their responsibilities then are separate to yet part of asserting the Hindu nature of public space. The festival's associated publics therefore provide the space in which a horizontal Hindu community and its associated parts and related responsibilities are organised and enacted. The forms of *seva* linked to public assertion around cultural unity are stressed then as an example of Hindu *sangathan*. And importantly then, Hindu nationalist discourses are able to

contribute to constructing meaning related to the festival amongst a larger range of activists and associations.

These broad publics of a visibilized popular Hinduism achieve two tasks. Firstly, they provide alternative constructions of the public's concerns as related to practices of Hindu *sangathan*, and so enable the production of popular festivals in which participants can both contest meanings and perform constructions of the primacy of a horizontal Hindu community. Secondly, these pro-active traditions of *seva* thus broaden their field of reference and come to influence a widening array of practices. As Geeta and Jayanthi note regarding the previously examined Vinayaka Chaturthi festival, *seva* comes to produce and operate inside broad publics and exercise formative power over daily sensibilities and “common sense[s]” (1995: 262). It is the examination of these modes of formative power, and this widening vernacular field of reference and focuses upon daily sensibilities which concern the next section of this chapter's analysis.

2. Vernacularization and Formative Power

2.1 Vernacularization and Formative Power

Originally developed by Hansen (1996), the concept of ‘vernacularization’ refers to the rendering of political practices and languages into local idioms and concerns and the processes by which such performative formulations contribute to shifts in meaning. Following on from Hansen, the concept is deployed here to examine how such a process of vernacularization allows Hindu nationalism to operationalize “itself into a rapidly widening and increasingly influential range of contemporary political practices”, and so provides grammars for “daily practices and political contestations alike, at grassroots, national, and trans-national levels” (Reddy 2011: 412). With regard to my premise, the tool suggests a significant framework, most notably, for how the proliferation of Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* in visibilized expansive alternative publics contributed to the ability of such vernacularized discourses to become entrenched in daily subjectivities (Berti 2011: 2-3). Indeed, and following on from Reddy, I would note that both concepts of ‘visibilization’ outlined in section one and ‘vernacularization’ are “complementary” (2011: 419). This is because the tools allow my

argument to bring to the forefront the visibilized identities and claims of a popular Hinduism and its mediation through vernacularized Hindu nationalist discourses.

2.2 *The Vivekananda Kendra, the Vernacularization of Seva, and Formative Power*

In searching for the antecedents of the Vivekananda Kendra's vernacularized discourses of *seva* I am drawn to the concerns out of which the precursor to the organisation developed. In 1962 local RSS activists together with members of a variety of Hindu organisations, including the Madras branch of the Ramakrishna Mission, came together to construct a Vivekananda Rock Memorial in Kanyakumari, the most southern tip of India. The Hindu activists shared a common focus on inscribing the rock with Hindu cultures as, they argued, it was both the location where the Goddess Kanyakumari meditated, and where Vivekananda was transformed from personal to national *sannyasi* (Kanungo 2012: 124). The Sangh took the lead in organising the Swami Vivekananda Centenary Celebration and the Vivekananda Rock Memorial Committee, composed of both the local activists, together with figures from notable Hindu activist associations such as the then *sarsanghchalak* of the RSS, M.S Golwalkar, Swami Chinmayananda of the Chinmaya Mission, and Mannath Padmanavan, founder of the Nair Service Society. Constructed around shared yet broad meanings of the historical importance of Vivekananda, the organisations distributed approximately five million folders of selected Vivekananda speeches, and founded a national fundraising network where actors could participate in the campaign through donating monies.

Through taking the initiative in the campaign the Sangh had, notably, contributed to the construction of a broad association in which a range of alternative discourses inscribed meaning to both the importance of Vivekananda to Indian and Hindu history, and significantly, to the relevance of Hindu activist traditions of *seva* to contemporary public life (Kanungo 2012: 124-125). For example, for Eknath Ranade, a leading Sangh activist and later founder of the Vivekananda Kendra, the statue of Vivekananda was envisaged as a non-sectarian and unifying signifier for Hindus, with Vivekananda's 'practical Vedanta' a central part of a modern Hindu self. Indeed, Ranade proclaimed "...enough of meditation. He [Vivekananda] has done enough meditation for all of us...let people work –Activity;...do it!"(cited in Kanungo 2012: 127). With the statue inaugurated in 1969 by monks of the Ramakrishna Mission and the Dravidian

leader M. Karunanidhi, and standing adjacent to a statue of the Tamil poet Thiruvalluvar, the site operated as the location where besides asserting the significance of Hindu activism to public engagement, it additionally worked to present as cohesive both Pan-Hindu and Tamil traditions (Kanungo 2012: 125).

Thus, the campaign to construct a Vivekananda memorial enabled the visibilization of a shared concern and associated space in which a variety of actors, including Sangh activists, could participate on the basis of an ecumenical Hinduism. In 1972, both Sangh and wider activists associated with the campaign founded the Vivekananda Kendra with the conviction that central to its work would be practices which mapped over popular Hinduism, service, and national reconstruction. The Kendra's normative articulations of *seva* are best evident in how its discourses construct its *sevaks* and its wider educational and cultural projects. By 2012 the organisation operated 270 branches, and was active in twelve Indian states, running approximately 944 *seva* projects. These include Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya schools which employ 936 teachers and educate approximately 21,000 children, Balwadis, which offer informal and pre-school teaching; and Rural Welfare Kendras, which offer women classes in 'Hindu Womanhood', including literacy, embroidery, health and hygiene, yoga, martial arts, and preparing food. They further run Natural Resource Development Projects which include a focus on 'holistic health' and rural housing, medical camps, and a publishing house which disseminates selections of Vivekananda's ideas in Hindi, English, and a range of vernacular languages. The organisation additionally circulates six journals. (Kanungo 2012: 129-133, www.vkendra.org).

The organisational networks additionally reached to include the Vivekananda Prashikshan Kendra, a Maharashtra based centre which organises the training of the association's *sevaks*. These forms of activity and membership are organised and structured in codified roles and responsibilities. The cadre system reflects four categories: *jeevanvratīs* (life workers), *sevanvratīs* (full time workers for extended periods), *vanaprashthīs* (for activists who have retired from wider employment), and local part-time workers and patrons (Kanungo 2012: 129-130). While such ordered membership structures bring to the forefront similar meanings to the didactic *sangathanist* representational idioms of the Sangh noted previously, they differ in a number of

respects in ways which highlight the relationship between the Kendra's normative articulation of *seva* and its focuses upon the self.

While the physical training practices (*sharirik*) of the Sangh's *sevak*s works to invoke masculinities inscribed with physical prowess, notions of service for the Kendra signify reworked constructs of Vivekananda's 'national' and 'active' *sannyasi* (Watt 2005: 14-15). Indeed, while demanding "an all-around transformation of the self which should be manifested in a healthy and strong body, sharp intellect, capacity to understand and skill to handle men" (Kanungo 2012: 131), these trainings of the self place predominant emphasis on the development of so-called 'spiritual' as opposed to physical techniques. For example, trainee *jeevanvrat*is are placed on a five year course – a period longer than *pracharak*s – in which a syllabus of yoga is stressed, alongside a course of *samskars* and 30-40 minute daily self-study and collective study of religious scriptures (*smadhyay varga*). Each day the *jeevanvrat*is are expected to recite a *mantra* which they received on initiation, a ceremony which is concluded with the actors receiving *diksha* beside a symbol of an *aum*. Furthermore, while *pracharak*s offer loyalty to the *bhagwa dhvaj* (saffron flag) in public squares, for volunteers of the Kendra their oath is offered to an *aum* in the centre's *mandirs*. Yet, these pro-active *sadhanas* of *seva* are additionally simplified and popularised in a manner which offers distance from Vivekananda's construction. *Sevak*s were not to be initiated as *sanyasins*, with saffron robes rejected. Rather, the focus here emphasised the training of a highly educated lay order of life workers, as *sanyasins* 'of the mind' (Kanungo 2012:128-131). Thus, the Kendra's traditions of service regulate sensibilities in line with a constructed activist and spiritually disciplined self.

These points gain further significance when they are brought into dialogue with questions of associational space. Importantly, and reflective of the antecedents examined earlier, the circulating representational meanings of the *sevak* produce the alternative publics of the organisation in a relation with differing actors and associations, to those of, for example, the RSS. This is not to imply contradictory spaces or overlook degrees of overlap in terms of membership and themes. But rather, the primary cadre of the Kendra is drawn from those actors motivated by the concerns circulating in visibilized publics of the Kendra. These themes highlight the importance of an ecumenical Hinduism mediated through a public Hindu identity which offers primacy to the Kendra's reworked construct of *seva* and the *sevak*, thus allowing the organisation to

operate inside and expand into wider arenas. For example, Kanungo's field research (2002: 137) notes that the key directors, motivators, and coordinators of the Kendra are typified by those previously in professional careers and are inspired by *Vivekananda's* idioms of service. Importantly then, while continuing to be linked to pro-active and *sangathanist* practices, the development of such *seva* discourses in popular and broad visibilized publics accounts for the practices' broadening field of reference and vernacularized transmutation.

My argument surrounding the relationship between the concerns circulating in visibilized publics of popular Hinduism and their impact upon the vernacularization and widening scope of practices of *seva* is further evident in the Kendra's service projects in contemporary Arunachal Pradesh. By 1977 Kendra activists were running six schools in the State, and by 2010 the educational projects had grown to include thirty schools with 10,000 students, eight Bal Sanskar Kendras, sixteen sports centres, medical projects, five cultural and 110 prayer centres (Kanungo 2011: 105). In terms of associational space, these centres operate in degrees of a porous relationship with tribal Adi and Nyishi reform movements through their shared focuses on community consolidation. The associations related to Adi and Nyishi reform came to increasing prominence during the final decades of the twentieth century, a point represented in the foundation and growing activities of the Adi Literary and Cultural Society, the Adi Donyi-Polo Yelam Kebang, the Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Culture Society, and the Nyishi Art and Cultural Society. Such reform movements focused upon a perceived erosion of their respective 'indigenous cultures and religions'. In response, the reform movements engaged in the institutionalization and reconstruction of community boundaries in a manner which replicated a non-sectarian public Hindu identity (Kanungo 2011: 97-102). Adi reform movements, for example, selectively collected, codified, and published literature and prayers and organised such traditions into a discourse which presented the *Aabangs* of the Adis as comparable to the Hindu *Shashtras*. Furthermore, the pantheon of Adi and Hindu deities were presented as citing similar meanings with regard to a common focus on plural deities yet with a single supreme power ('Bhagwan' and 'Donyi-Polo'). Parallels too were constructed in terms of symbolism, with a non-sectarian Hindu *Aum* constructed as the overarching symbol for the Adi *Keyum*. Adi reform movements additionally began a project of constructing Donyi-Polo temples, recruiting and training priests, commissioning and installing images of deities in the

temples, and producing rituals where at the end of collective prayers priests would tie threads around the wrists of devotees as a sign of blessing (Kanungo 2011: 100-102).

This process of organising and representing constructs of belonging associated with the reform movements allowed for the development of a visibilized public in which activists of the Kendra's *seva* projects could circulate approaches to Hindu solidarity which encompassed Adi and Nyishi traditions as part of a broad ecumenical Hinduism. In 1993, the Vivekananda Kendra Institute of Culture began a series of projects working with the Adi and Nyishi reform movements in organising a series of 200 lectures which promoted the preservation of tribal cultures inside Hinduism's boundaries. Its affiliates, the youth association Arun Jyoti, the educational organisations Arunachal Shiksha Vikas Samiti, and the Vanavasi Kalyan Kendra's sister organisation the Arunachal Vikas Parishad together stressed similar themes of Hindu representation (Kanungo 2012: 134-136). Shared debates then surrounding questions of inclusions and boundaries produced both the publics of the Kendra and those of the reform movements in degrees of dialogue. Moreover, these exchanges worked to reinscribe the Kendra's articulation of *seva* with pro-active, *sangathanist*, and importantly, vernacularized meanings. For example, coordination with the reform movements is organised in order to jointly organise and celebrate Hindu and tribal festivals, with the Kendra additionally distributing greeting cards for the tribal festivals of Nyokum, Oriah, Si-Donyi, Chalo Loku, and Tamladu. Furthermore, practices of *seva* are related to the foundation and running of over 100 prayer centres and the construction of Adi temples and the dissemination of images of Nyishi deities. Finally, the Vivekananda Kendra's educational projects, while organised with in reconstructed Gurukuls, additionally teach tribal music, art, and crafts (Kanungo 2012: 136-138). The 'Youth Awareness' camps organised jointly by Arun Jyoti and the Ramakrishna Mission likewise give emphasis to both yoga and tribal sports. The approaches to *seva* articulated by the Vivekananda Kendra then illustrate my argument surrounding the significance of the shared languages circulating in expanding visibilized alternative publics, and their impact upon producing common and expansive projects in which transformed pro-active and *sangathanist* Hindu nationalist discourses are reworked and broadened to take on vernacularized meanings.

2.2 *The Proliferation of Seva and Associational Cultures as Hindu Sangathan*

This chapter has examined and illustrated the fashions by which Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* underwent a series of changes through circulation, dialogue and contestation in visibilized publics of popular Hinduism. I have shown how pro-active and *sangathanist* approaches to *seva* were institutionalized and vernacularized, and how this dynamic worked to produce expansive associations of service and bring an increasing range of practices under its formative power. Importantly, these changes worked to reorganise Hindu nationalist associational cultures of service. My premise then is that Hindu nationalist cultures of *seva* developed as implicit in certain forms of order.

Undertaken in 1995, the audit of Seva Vibhag - the collection of *seva* associations affiliated to the RSS - illustrates this impact upon the changing organisational forms of *seva*. By 1995 nearly 20,000 *seva* projects were present in over 531 districts and 9230 locales. Stretching now from practices of Education (*Shikshak*), Health (*Arogya*), Development (*Vikas*), and Social Rejuvenation (*Samajik Samskar*), the associations of Seva Vibhag had expanded to include the previously described existing organisations such as the VHP, the Saraswati Shishu Mandir, and Dnyana Pradodhini, relaunched organisations such as the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram and the Vivekananda Kendra, and new educational associations including Vidya Bharati. Collectively, the projects of Seva Vibhag now reached approximately 4,452,410 *sevas* (recipients of service). New categories of active citizenship and office-bearing were additionally codified allowing for greater numbers of individuals to participate in the arenas of the projects, with over 300 full time workers, nearly nine thousand part time workers, and over 1,800 employees. In comparison to the Sangh's intermittent practices of *seva* evident in their interventions into the Ram Navami festival, these pro-active orderings of *seva* and Hindu representation brought their associated publics into dialogue with differing arenas and worked to dramatically expand their own networks. Through this process financing networks burgeoned, with the associations of Seva Vibhag raising over RS89 million (approximately £1.5 million) annually through organised subscriptions, fundraising events, and journal advertising (Sewa Disha 1995). Indeed, the organisation of such extensive networks is further reflected in the establishment of Sewa International, a

transnational association which was founded in 1991 in England, and includes amongst other practices fundraising for the *seva* projects of Seva Vibhag.

The audit itself was in part reflective of the growing drive to know, organise, and represent such spaces, and so should be understood as representative of this ordered transmutation in Hindu nationalist associational cultures. Indeed, noting that not all *sevaks* “were conversant with the art and science of data collection”, Seva Vibhag ran a series of ten training camps to train over 400 *sevaks* in both the institutionalization of service and modes by which such associational cultures could be monitored and mined for information (Sewa Disha 2005: 7). The audit also in turn provides indication of the wider growing institutionalization of service required to organise such pro-active practices and related expansive networks. Moreover, the pro-active and wide referencing practices of *seva* and associated expansive arenas worked to transform Hindu nationalist cultures of service along the lines of the didactic organisational idiom of the Sangh noted in Chapter Three.

Note firstly that the purpose of the audit, in terms of training *sevaks* with the skills required to institutionalize, organise and catalogue *seva* in categories linked to rational knowledge is reflective of an underlying *sangathanist* concern with the necessity of ordering the Hindu community to overcome its theorised decline and divisions. The audit’s representational knowledge then was linked to issues of Hindu representation, or as the report itself notes, “The "SEVA DISHA"... seeks to serve something more than a mere cataloguing exercise”, but rather asks, “Why is it that our country, once famed for its abundance and riches and achievements in all fields of human endeavor [sic] was reduced to the present state of utter dependence and degradation?” (emphasis in original) (1995:2-3). And so, while an “elaborate, systematic and country-wide effort had to be made to collect all this authentic information” (1995: 3), the audit of Seva Vibhag and the orderings of its associated publics related to the task of Hindu *sangathan*, as ordering society as:

“*Virata Purusha* - a colossal living entity. Just as a living body keenly feels the defect or hurt in any part of the body and responds adequately to remedy it, our people should also be properly motivated and energised to involve themselves in all such social transformation efforts” (1995: 3).

Continuing this line of argument regarding how the ordering of the associational cultures of the *seva* projects illustrate themes of Hindu *sangathan*, I would further note that the codification of forms of active citizenship - evidenced in both the audit and the earlier discussion of the Vivekananda Kendra - allowed for not simply greater numbers of regular participation, but in particular, the institutionalization of ordered roles inside the projects. Practices of *seva* and the organisational cultures of the projects framed patterns of active citizenship and participation as linked to notions of a cohesive Hindu community with allotted roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, the organisation and division of the projects in terms of spatial geographies into *prants* and districts was regulated not in the divisions legislated by National and State governments, but rather in representations of the perceived regions of a historic unified *Bharat*. Thus, the growing ordering of cultures of service develops partly as a response to requirements of facilitating the organisation of such expansive projects. Yet as the same time, the particular ordered forms such a reworking of associational cultures took brought to the forefront certain meanings. Specifically, Hindu nationalist associational cultures of *seva* invoke Hindu *sangathan*.

Conclusion and the Move to Field Research

This chapter has examined and unfolded a complex picture with regard to transformations in Hindu nationalist practices of *seva*. In Chapter Three, I noted how by the late 1970s pro-active Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* worked to introduce its alternative publics to others, such as the *sarvodaya* movement which were constructed around shared Hindu activist frameworks. Hindu nationalist *sangathanist* articulations of *seva* were then contributing to the production of, and could be witnessed circulating inside, wider organisations, and were thus brought into dialogue with related themes of Hindu representation. I introduced this chapter with evidence of these contemporary Hindu nationalist practices and alternative publics, and I brought to the forefront how the Sangh-affiliated *seva* projects had undergone a dramatic expansion. Moreover, these associated discourses of *seva* had brought under their field of reference an expanded array of practices, including Health (*Arogya*), Education (*Shikshak*), Development (*Vikas*), and Social Rejuvenation (*Samajik Samskar*). What dynamics and concepts then could be examined and deployed to read such transformations?

I argued that in order to understand these multi-layered transmutations we must begin first with the visibilization of discursive fields in which participation was organised around a developing popular Hinduism. I noted two such varied publics: Hindu activist campaigns to construct ‘mega’ *murtis* and the expansion of the Hindu festivals, Ganesh and Vinayaka Chaturthi. I noted how shared religious languages allowed Hindu nationalist discourses both to contribute to the construction and circulate their meanings inside such publics. Importantly, and with evidence from a detailed examination of the activities associated with the Vinayaka Chaturthi festival, I examined how a Tamil *Hindutva* organisation, the Hindu Munnai, circulated practices of *seva* which focused upon organising and policing the festival and its processions, commissioned and distributed *murtis*, encouraged Dalit involvement and gendered participation as part of a project of Hindu *sangathan*. These visibilized publics of popular Hinduism were therefore festivals where participants could perform both notions of the primacy of a horizontally organised Hindu society, together with working as the location where proactive and *sangathanist* Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* came to regulate a range of differing practices. It is this line of interrogation which explains the diversification of Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* through dialogue with the concerns of the visibilized popular Hinduism, together with the growth of increasingly wide projects linked to the RSS’s approach to activist traditions of *seva*.

In section two I continued this focus upon the wider proliferations of service. Here, and with evidence from the Sangh-affiliated Vivekananda Kendra, I examined the degrees of porosity which structured the alternative publics of the Kendra and the Adi and Nyishi reform movements. Importantly, I showed how through being brought into dialogue with a diverse array of shared concerns surrounding community boundaries which circulated in Adi and Nyishi reform movements, Hindu nationalist approaches to *seva* underwent degrees of vernacularization, together with their entrenchment in a range of diverse practices. I showed how such practices, related to issues of the *sevak* and the regulation of tribal cultures inside an ecumenical Hinduism, could be seen to exercise formative power over the sensibilities of a modern Hindu self. I then moved onto examining how such reinscriptions worked to reorder Hindu associational cultures of service to illustrate *sangathanist* meanings.

These lines of argument serve to raise a range of important questions and themes with regard to continuing our examination of the relationship between alternative publics of service and Hindu nationalism. It has become clear that Hindu nationalist discourses have enabled the construction of wide networks of service. What is of importance now is an examination of the continuing entrenchment of these discourses in varied practices, and so how *seva* operates to advance and regulate alternative daily sensibilities. How, then, do discourses of *seva* work to operationalize daily practices from hygiene to the singing of *bhajans* to invoke Hindu nationalist meanings? How do discourses of *seva* inscribe seemingly ‘national’ questions of development and healthcare as part of the regulation of daily sensibilities? Yet as I noted in section 2.3 of my introduction, the rich field of human action stretches beyond the reiteration of or resistance to power. Examining projects of service then requires an exploration of the manners in which *sevakas* and *sevitas* transgress normative constructions, the relationship between such transgressive subject positions, the policing of transgression, and the expansion of Hindu nationalist publics of service. It is at this juncture then that the following three chapters examine Hindu nationalist publics of service and the construction of formations of the self with reference to field research undertaken in the *seva* projects of the Sangh-affiliated Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram. Chapter Five examines *seva* where its traditions operate as an alternative form of healthcare, and the significance of the practice to constructing an expansionary alternative public of service. This is together with examining the importance of Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* in which its meanings are reiterated, refocused, and importantly, transgressed.

Chapter Five

Modes of Expansion

Introduction

Kapil, Sangathan, and Jati pride

We were travelling on the road to the train station of Jharkhand's most populous city, Dhanbad, having spent a number of days staying in and around a Vanavasi Kalyan Kendra (VKK)-run school and hostel in the small town of Valmiki. As the jeep recoiled again over the roughshod and severely weathered tarmac my mind wandered back over the activities of the past few hours. Kapil, a wealthy publisher from Delhi, had opened to much fanfare, a new VKK-run school and hostel which he had financed. After being garlanded while slogans of 'Kapil Gupta-Ji Jai' echoed around the small campus, Kapil sat down on the elevated platform which stood in front of the newly opened facilities. As he sat, the next figure on the platform rose. Walking to the front of one of the building's pillars, Dilip, a retired engineering consultant who divided his now abundant leisure time between leading the Dhanbad VKK and various other voluntary associations, broke a coconut over the door frame. A cheer rose up from the assembled ranks of students who lay below him. Anil, who had been born, raised and continued to live in a small village on the outskirts of Valmiki and volunteered for a few hours daily at a VKK-run single teacher school, began to give a confident speech detailing the *seva* projects organised by the Dhanbad branch of the VKK. Anil spared very little in the ways of detail – forty four Single Teacher (Ekal Vidyalaya) schools, a network of rural Gram Vikas (Village Development) centres, and four primary health care and medical distribution centres. The event itself was well attended. Around forty of the school's students were lined in organised rows in front of the platform, and to one side, one of the VKK-run Gram Vikas chapters was busily selling *puja* lamps and other handicrafts they had produced. Behind the students and sitting on chairs was a mixture of volunteers and full time workers of the VKK, together with scattered groupings of adults whose children attended the school and hostel.

Hours earlier, over breakfast and lunch, Kapil had explained to me the reasons which motivated his financial support of the VKK's *seva* projects. As Kapil explained it, a central aspect of his support related to a broad and all-encompassing idea of supporting the development of a pan-Hindu community, one which for Kapil encompassed India's tribal communities. In these informal conversations Kapil articulated the view that his service was rooted in an approach in which stronger sections of the religious community provided for those he described as "less fortunate", after all, "*nagarvasi, vanavasi, ham log ek bharatvasi*" ("whether you are people from a town, whether you are people from forested areas, we are all from *Bharat*"). Hours later on the journey back to the central VKK complex in the Ranchi, Dilip and Venkatesh, an architect and member of the VKK who designed the newly opened school and hostel, were both listening closely as Kapil asked about my own family background. After hearing that the maternal side of my family were Brahmins who lived in Delhi, Kapil, still garlanded, proceeded at length to extol the virtues of an upper caste northern Hindu identity. Both his garlanding and grandstanding at the event intrigued me, as did his comments on caste – after all, it was only hours earlier that Kapil had couched his own identity and approach to *seva* in ideas of *selfless* service towards a *unified* Hindu community.

This chapter will examine a range of themes evident in the ethnographic vignette previously outlined. My premise has two points. Firstly, the VKK's normative approaches to *seva* are never fully reproduced, but rather are refocused by *sevakas* with differing stresses. This is significant as it suggests we need to understand the degrees of performative negotiation, dialogue and translation between alternative publics, to allow us to grasp the processes in which practices of *seva* undergo vernacularization and entrenchment in daily practices. Secondly, these differing modes of participation evident in both Kapil's reiterative and transgressive practices with regard to Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* are central to the expansion of the VKK's alternative publics. Through highlighting these alternative meanings which are sourced from a range of differing alternative publics and yet influence the VKK's practices of *seva*, we will witness how through alternative invocations of service *sevakas* take up transgressive subject positions.¹ It is significant to explore transgressive performances as they offer

¹ Briefly, transgression here refers to the ways in which actors fail to reproduce normative constructions and instead invoke alternative systems of meaning. See section 2.1 of this chapter for a detailed elaboration of the concept and its use in this work.

illustrations of how the VKK's projects are far from being publics where *seva* is performed homogeneously, but rather are more helpfully approached as sites of alternative invocations of service, with the incorporation of transgressive acts vital for the expanded reproduction of the association's *seva* networks. This examination of transgressive performances will extend to examining the forms that such transgressive practices take. This will allow this work to explain why certain transgressive practices become the focus of disciplinary policing while alternative transgressive practices are incorporated into the workings of the projects. Both sections of the chapter draw on the field research I conducted in the contemporary projects of the VKK.

1. The VKK and *Seva*: Reiterative and Refocused Practices

1.1 *Seva: Circulating Normative Approaches and the Sevak*

Firstly, let me begin by briefly outlining the notion of 'normative discourse' in relationship to the VKK's approaches to *seva*. A central aspect here is related to the discourse's hegemonic norms, understood using Comaroff and Comaroff's approach of locating hegemony as a system of "signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies", systems of meaning then which are "drawn from a historically situated cultural field" and fade into becoming the normalised, as "the natural and received shape of the world" (1991:23). The first such normative approach that I will analyse relates to the articulation of *seva* offered by Madan, a full time *sevak* in the VKK who holds responsibilities for organising the association's educational projects. Although Madan is one example of such an approach he is far from unique, and rather is illustrative of a particular normative approach to the *sevak* and *seva* inside the projects, an approach which is generally embodied by RSS workers who for significant periods of time – in Madan's case, over twenty five years – have worked full time for the organisation.

Born into an upper caste family in Karnataka, after completing a degree in engineering Madan joined the RSS as a *pracharak* in his native state during the post emergency period. After working for Vanavasi Kalyan in Karnataka, he was deputed to the re-founded Jharkhandi branch during the 1980s. In many respects this background is standard to many RSS and VKK full time workers, in that there is a degree of similarity in terms of middle class, university educated students rejecting a potential professional career to take up a full time *sevak* position. The full-time and long-standing

commitments of the *sevak* to their work is drawn from a variety of reworked traditions located in the development of a modern 'activist Hinduism', including the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission and Math and the *swayamsevaks* of the RSS. This is best illustrated in the living conditions and public dispositions of the volunteer, both of which can be seen to be regulated inside and further highlight the VKK's normative constructions of selfless service. For instance, Madan, when not touring the VKK's educational projects, lives outside of the family structure in relatively sparse accommodation provided by the organisation at their central office Ranchi. Furthermore, *sevaks* are expected to remain in the traditions of *brahmacharya* and express little in terms of a desire for material comforts, a perspective which echoes out from traditions of service developed by both the RSS and the Ramakrishna Mission and Math.

Indeed, the body of the *sevak* is constructed as a didactic reference point which invokes certain meanings of *seva*, with *sevaks* such as Madan linking *seva* to the wider promotion and circulation of notions of 'Hindu culture', with these norms performed through a focus upon bodily presentations. For example, this normative approach to *seva* understands the *sevak* as the ideal ethical Hindu, an identity which is performed as linked to constructs of north Indian Hindu cultures of clothing, such as *lungis* and *kurta* pyjamas as opposed to notions of western apparel such as shirts and trousers. Another example would be a focus upon the correct enunciation of Hindi, the absence of 'ritually polluting practices' such as the consumption of meat, and the performance of certain bodily dispositions which produce forms of hierarchy through *pranama*, and disciplined modes of eating, sitting and walking as a way of citing certain normative standards of the *sevak* as the embodiment of Hindu culture. Indeed, through certain movements and speech in everyday time and space the *sevak* produces both the self and the practice of *seva* as rooted in wider Hindu cultural sensibilities, where for example the wearing of simple white kurta pyjamas is not simply a sign of rejecting material wealth, but also a bodily technique of representing the self as connected to meanings of selfless service. Indeed, as Madan commented on the way to a VKK-run medical camp in the rural locale of Kumhariya:

It is not that there are no other organisations working [in these areas]. There are. But the difference between us and them is that we work for society. They work for some expectation. Glamour, attention, money . . . this is not the Indian way. In fact, showing off just spreads bad awareness. So as we serve, we teach, and as we teach, people can see their culture in what we do.

Yet, the normative approaches to *seva* which circulate inside the projects of the VKK reach beyond the meanings illustrated by Madan. Indeed, it is important to recognise that normative approaches to *seva* are produced and circulated by social actors who are not full time *sevaks* of the RSS or the VKK, do exist inside structures of the family, do not reside in organisational accommodation, and whose bodily dispositions draw upon differing forms to those of *sevaks* such as Madan. As I will demonstrate in the next section, normative practices to *seva* are vernacularized, refocused and reordered by a range of activists.

1.2 *Seva: Circulating Normative Approaches and Hindu Sangathan*

A central meaning which is attached to the VKK's refocused normative construct of *seva* relates to practices of duty and active citizenship, and importantly, their relationship to ideas of the Hindu community. These articulations continue a key theme with Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* in terms of their relationship to Hinduism's boundaries. In the discourses of the VKK, this relates to Jharkhand's rural and often tribal populations. The tribal population is positioned by VKK activists inside a divided yet pre-existing ecumenical Hindu community, with competing discursive claims reduced to simple geographical difference – of '*nagarvasi*' (lit. 'town dweller'), and '*vanavasi*' (lit. 'forest dweller') (Vanavasi Kalyan (R): n.d.). The meanings of duty and active citizenship then which are linked to normative approaches to *seva* produce certain claims upon India's tribal population.

Furthermore, the tribal population is produced not simply as part of a wider Hindu community, but is allotted an ordered role inside its forms, a point illustrative of the VKK's *sangathanist* discourses of *seva*. Here, 'tribal' sensibilities are related to two meanings. Firstly, as martial warriors who have a history of rallying to the 'defence' of the Hindu community. This point is evident in the widely distributed pictures present in most VKK facilities of Birsa Munda, one of the leaders of an armed rural insurgency in the Chota Nagpur area of what is now contemporary Jharkhand at the end of the 19th century (Prakash 2001:88). While the uprising has multiple narrations, in the particular readings of the event circulated by the VKK projects, Birsa is narrated as a courageous nationalist figure who struggled against foreign domination and Christian missionary power. This narrative claim upon Birsa and its positioning of the region's tribal population can be further illustrated in VKK posters – again displayed prominently

throughout the *seva* projects – which place Birsa and the Hindu God-King Ram together, both in assertive postures with their bows drawn.

Yet concurrently, while the region's tribal population is produced as an active force in terms of mobilisations in the framework of a wider Hindu community, it is also produced in VKK literature directed towards Jharkhand's urban population -- a key constituency for both finances and a professional membership – as in a state of subordination to 'urban dwellers'. This particular constructed relationship is noticeable through their portrayal as both similar to 'Us' in terms of their membership of wider Hindu community, yet 'Other' in terms of being passive victims of both neglect from 'urban Hindu society' and alleged Christian missionary conversion campaigns, due to their supposed 'peaceful' and 'accepting nature'. Indeed, they are, according to one publicity leaflet written in English, that "poor, innocent, less fortunate brother of ours", and are a "...combination of unattractive exterior and a pleasing interior. Outward indifference and inner devotion. Lack of exposure and latent talents" (Vanavasi Kalyan (R): n.d.).

Notions of duty and active citizenship then are productive of constructs of the self related to alternative passive and active forms. Tribal communities are thus positioned as passive in so far they are to be worked upon, and as active in so far as they possess an assertive and organic role inside Hinduism's boundaries. *Sevaks* and their associated targeted constituencies of urban, middle class and often upper caste Hindus are positioned as passive in terms of a history of neglecting marginalised sections of an ecumenical Hindu community, yet active in terms of their participation in activist traditions of service. Such discourses of *seva* therefore can be witnessed to engage in a vernacularized *sangathanist* reorganisation of Hinduism where symbolic cultural solidarities of ordered duties which unite 'urban' and 'rural' Hindus are constructive of a cohesive Hindu society. As Mithali, one of the volunteers in the Gram Vikas projects commented, "There are five parts to Hindu society – Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, and Vanavasi".

Indeed, Mithali's remarks here are far from isolated in terms of their circulation and reiteration, and are representative of the inscription of *seva* with meanings which approach the 'Vanavasi' as part of a *Varna*-stratified yet organically culturally linked community. Therefore if Jharkhand's tribal population are at one moment constructed inside a reworked account of an organic Hindu community, at the next moment their

position is, alongside the state's scheduled castes, produced as being on the margins of such a community, with the extremes and issues of marginalisation here reworked to invoke not structural marginalisation but Hindu consciousness and organisation. However, such vernacularized normative meanings which are inscribed onto practises of *seva* are not simply reiterated, but rather their normative meanings are refocused. This is significant as they construct such Hindu nationalist projects as expansionary sites, and work to further vernacularize and entrench the practices in daily sensibilities. The illustration of this point takes us into the heart of a VKK-run medical facility.

1.3 Refocusing Seva and the Production of Expansive Alternative Publics: Selfless Service and Arogya ('Holistic Health')

The *Arogya* (Sanskrit for Holistic Health) *seva* institutions of the VKK include one hospital specialising in eye treatment, a number of medical dispensaries, twenty health care sub-centres offering basic health assessments, blood donation camps, and monthly medical camps in rural areas. Both while on the bus travelling to the location of the medical camp, at the camp itself, and then over numerous informal discussions I had the opportunity to talk at length to Sandeep, a headmaster at a Ranchi-based Dayanananda Anglo-Vedic School. The topic turned to his support for the VKK. Sandeep allowed the association to use the facilities of the school to transport the doctors and medical equipment, without which the monthly medical camps could not occur. Sandeep did draw upon the hegemonic normative approach to *seva* circulating in the projects, but at the same time it was a selective reiteration. Indeed, for Sandeep, what appealed to his sense of duty were the numerous ways in which the VKK's approach to *seva* was inscribed with meanings which offered criticisms of the national government's 'National Rural Health Mission'. The government's programme, in Sandeep's critique, was presented as lacking in adequate buildings, technologies and basic resources, and importantly, a lack of *motivated* staff. Indeed, as Sandeep commented:

Schools, hospitals, it is the same. The workers won't turn up because they are getting paid, or they turn up late, or they take and sell the equipment. So why bother to change? Whereas here, we are committed because we are serving society, [we are serving] the forest dwellers without any rewards. We are doing it because we are one family.

The emphasis of Sandeep's argument therefore focuses not simply on resources, but rather takes up a position which is strongly critical of public sector workers whose motivations are questioned. In particular, the salary received by teachers is seen as part

of the problem in motivating good teaching standards. Without desiring to assess the veracity of this account, what is of interest here are the ways in which the VKK's approach to *seva* and specifically its critique of existing government schemes, the political sphere and wider state led development programmes form a central aspect of Sandeep's own refocusing of the normative discourses of *seva*. *Seva*, in this instance, forms a Hindu tradition which is re-evaluated and brought into the public sphere as an 'interest-free' and 'pure' religious practice to answer certain perceived contemporary concerns which the political sphere, by its very worldly interested nature, is unable to address. Indeed, the position of the *sevak* here is constructed as motivated through Hindu activist practices and not the compulsions of wage labour, and so is able to provide selfless and so motivated service in rural areas. Implicit in this articulation of *seva* then can be found a focus derived from the VKK's normative productions of service, that of the purity and superiority of religiously inspired volunteerism and therefore its inclination towards achieving its aims, in contrast to the perceived morally compromised sphere of governance.

So far I have illustrated how this process of activists refocusing the normative articulations of *seva* worked to provide the organisation with transport resources. This dynamic was central in turn to the further expansion of the VKK into practices of service linked to alternative *ayurvedic* meanings of healthcare. Continuing this line of argument regarding the refocusing of *seva* and expansion of the VKK's *seva* publics, I will now bring to the forefront a medical camp run by the VKK. The medical camp in Kumhariya was built around a small, five-roomed building which during weekdays operated as a VKK-run school. Of the five rooms, three were reserved for treating patients, one for recording the patient's names and ailments, and one was converted into a temporary store room for medicines. Each medical camp run by the association treats between 500-700 people a day, with the doctors offering both bio-medical and *ayurvedic* treatments.

Although in recent years *ayurveda* has entered the global market, its discourses can be briefly approached as constructing systems of knowledge which focus upon 'indigenous modes of healing'.² *Ayurveda* was described in the medical camps by the doctors as a holistic approach to health care – in fact, *Arogya*, the Sanskrit name ascribed

² Perhaps most closely associated with this increasing entrance of Ayurvedic systems of knowledge into global cultural flows are Dr Deepak Chopra and his work *Quantum Healing* (1990). For a wider analysis of Ayurveda on an all Indian scale see Longford's (2002) insightful work *Fluent Bodies*.

to the VKK's health wing, can be translated as 'holistic health' – whose alternative systems of knowledge combine science, religion, and philosophy to achieve a broader notion of a 'healthy life'. Importantly, articulated reconstructed traditions such as *ayurveda* were not produced as operating consistently in opposition to alternative practices associated with bio-medicine, but rather selections from its systems were presented as being in the best traditions of an intellectually strong and prosperous *Vedic* culture, with such 'indigenous traditions' seen as overcoming the lack of attention given to ideas of the 'Indian body' and its 'specific habits' by western bio-medicine. The camps therefore were not the location of explicitly counter discourses, but rather, articulated alternative practices of healthcare. Moreover, presenting *ayurveda* in such a position helps us understand the modes by which VKK's doctors inscribed traditions of *seva* with 'modern' and reconstructed traditions of indigenous approaches to health care, with the former's practices such as the distribution of antibiotics seen as located in selective appeals to knowledge of the latter. Practices of *seva* then which are inscribed with *ayurvedic* approaches can be seen to invoke a Hindu nationalist alternative modernity and entrench such meanings in daily life, a theme I shall continue to develop.³

At the medical camp a number of doctors were keen to explain the relationship between *ayurveda* and *seva*. Ravi, who I observed and spoke to at length both in the medical projects and over many informal conversations over the months that I spent in Jharkhand, had been volunteering in the *Arogya* sections of the VKK and had been attending the medical camps since their foundation in the early 1980s. Ravi elaborated his arguments surrounding the relationship between *seva* and *ayurveda* through locating contemporary practices of the latter in two texts: the *Sushruta Sambhita* and the *Charak Sambhita*. Through rooting contemporary understandings in constructions of *Vedic* culture and *ayurvedic* practice Ravi produced an unbroken link between the two, and so articulated a sense of cultural continuity with "the oldest health care system in the world", with *ayurveda*, he further commented, best translated as "the science of life" which "came out of India's soil and *sanskriti*, showing how our *sanskriti* is just like your science. The claims of science can be found in history: *ayurveda* is just *dharmic* medicine".

³ Both Chatterjee (1993) and Gilroy (2002) reference related points surrounding the concerns of Asian, African, and African diaspora nationalisms regarding the articulation of alternative modernities. Indeed, Chatterjee with reference to 19th century India notes the development of nationalisms "posited not on identity but rather on a *difference* with the 'modular' forms of the national society propagated in the modern West" (1993: 5).

Indigenous medical systems of knowledge and ‘traditions’ of *ayurveda* were represented during the late colonial period as distinctly Hindu projects, outside the so-called ‘non-Indian’ and ‘Islamic’ medical traditions of *unani tibb*. Yet importantly, these practices were positioned as inclusive of *siddha* medicine sourced in Tamil literature and an associated *Saivite*-focused ethnicity (Hardiman 2009). Moreover, and echoing themes of Hindu representation and *sangathan*, the VKK’s *ayurvedic* practices brought to the forefront formations of religious community concerned with regulating tribal systems of medicine inside reconstructed traditions of a Hindu *ayurveda*. Discourses of *seva* thus work upon the performative reiteration of practices of health care to invoke markings of a Hindu self regulated inside a modern ecumenical community. Indeed, Ravi argued that existing systems of healing practices in many Tribal Oraon villages, such as treating post-natal pains with *jadi* herbs and the treatment of stomach pains through the ingestion of guava leaves was part of the cultures of *Ayurveda*. This, it was explained, was due to their focus upon “local plants” and their respective development out of a “shared, common soil”.

These vernacularized *sangathanist ayurvedic* practices of *seva* are disseminated throughout the *seva* medical camps in a manner which is designed to allow forms of self-reiteration and so entrenchment in daily practices. This is illustrated through the distribution of two small manuals to those who are treated. Of the two booklets, one is titled *Chikitsaa* (‘medicine’) and the second *Arogya* (holistic health’). Both booklets begin with small passages which outlined a brief history of the VKK, and in particular its ‘founding father’, Deshpande, whose initial ideas – it was written – surrounding social service as a vehicle through which a strong nation could be constructed still animated the organisation to this day. Over the next pages were a series of black and white photos of Swami Vivekananda, and Bharat Mata: a gendered metaphorical deity produced as representative of the Indian nation, whose meanings from the colonial period until the present link India to Hinduism. Over the next few pages were listed a range of reasons to use *ayurveda* and its associated approaches to health care. Firstly, it was described as part of the nation’s *sanskriti*, and as such, was suited to the diets, climates, and food of the nation and its inhabitants. It was secondly described as a holistic form of health, which treated the ‘mind’ and the ‘soul’, and so produced a healthy society. And lastly it was described as financially accessible, widely available, and without side effects. Over the following pages in both booklets was a series of small texts which were written in Hindi which outlined the symptoms of illnesses and then a series of bodily positions,

plants and herbs which could provide relief. Each page was accompanied by a series of illustrations, with significant sections of the *Arogya* booklet dedicating to descriptions of advised daily ‘cultural’ routines including yoga, hygiene and temperance.

While I will discuss the importance of practices of hygiene and temperance to *seva* in later chapters, it should be apparent that this approach to health care displays an underlying process of racialization. This is evident in the construction of a grouping of subjects who possess not just shared histories and cultures, but common diets, regimes of exercise, and internal bodily constitutions, with *ayurveda* then produced as a disciplinary ‘science of life’ developed for the ‘health temperaments’ of Hindus. Through reiterating in a refocused manner particular meanings inscribed upon the VKK’s normative approach to *seva*, the *sevaks* who are enthused by and work inside the *ayurveda* clinics aid in the circulation of a series of alternative vernacularized and daily entrenched approaches to *seva* and health care. These approaches are linked to *sangathanist* constructions of a unified Hindu community which encompasses Jharkhand’s tribal populations, and the relevance of such ‘common Hindu histories and traditions’ for contemporary social life.

2. *Seva* and the Transgressive Subject

However, my field research illustrates that inside the VKK’s projects such normative approaches are both refocused, and significantly, transgressed. Indeed, the *seva* associations of the Sangh Parivar are locations not of approaches to *seva* which are homogenous and exist in closed systems of meaning, nor even that they are unified associations in terms of circulating an overall grammar which provides a single normative approach to reading and addressing social concerns, but rather that such associations are sites in which multiple discursive approaches to *seva* circulate. Indeed, an examination of transgressive performative acts is significant in terms of this chapter’s overall argument as it points towards understanding how certain transgressive practices remain unpoliced and are incorporated into the VKK’s alternative publics, so allowing for the expansion of the projects.

2.1 *The Subject and Transgressive Performances*

In order to examine the significance of performative acts where subjects inside the VKK’s projects move into transgressive positions let me firstly explain my approach to both notions of ‘the subject’ and ‘transgressive performances’. The subject, in this work,

refers to the discursively produced positions of the modern Hindu self and '*sevak*', with the production of these formations as linked to the normative practices and meanings of *seva*. Yet, subject positions are not constructed in a concluded system of meaning. Rather, as I noted in the Introduction, subject positions are helpfully approached in terms of the structured reiterative performance and regulation of associated subjectivities in relationship to alternative discourses circulating inside the VKK's projects which are drawn from differing social contexts. Everyday acts of service then are a potential location for refocused reiterations of *seva*, but also disruption and transgression. (Butler 1993, 2004, 2007).

In this sense then, transgressive performances do not occur against a pure space of normative approaches to *seva*, but rather, they are invoked in certain contexts, with the performance of alternative norms illustrative not of the 'opportunism' or 'hypocrisy' of the *sevak*, but rather of the formative power of differing discourses which circulate in alternative contexts in which the subject participates. The notion of 'transgressive performances' allows us to overcome this binary blind alley of locating the alternative publics of service as sites in which we can witness only either the reiteration of or resistance to power. The concept allows us explore instances where subjects transgress the VKK's normative approaches to *seva* in everyday locales through failing to reiterate its meanings, and instead, perform acts which invoke alternative meanings which are drawn from differing discursive systems which circulate in a range of social spaces. It is in these moments that the subject is constructed in transgressive positions.

2.2 The Dhanbad Network: Transgressive Performances and Meanings of 'Selfless Service'

Standing as Jharkhand's most populous city and also as one of the twenty-four districts of the state, Dhanbad's informal moniker as the 'coal capital of India' seemed apt as I glanced out of the window of the train and gazed upon what seemed to be an everlasting line of slag heaps, open seams, coal conveyors and plumes of thick black smoke billowing from the blast furnaces of local refineries. As I disembarked from the train at Dhanbad station, I was met by Dilip, a VKK member for over twenty years, and as I would soon discover, a central figure in what I would later refer to as the Dhanbad network. The VKK's Dhanbad network of *sevaks* produced an alternative public which encompassed industrialists from the cities of Delhi and Dhanbad, an architect, retired government employees, fundraisers in New York, and a host of teachers, trainers, doctors and administrators from across the rural and urban landscapes of the district.

The Dhanbad network ran four primary health care centres and medical dispensaries, forty four Ekal Vidyalaya schools each with between twenty to thirty students, 10 formal schools with attached hostels for hosting students from rural areas, and four Gram Vikas centres.

At the beginning of this chapter I described the events surrounding the opening of a VKK school and hostel building in Valmiki, a town in Dhanbad district. During the event itself, and more widely over the previous weeks that I had spent with the Dhanbad VKK members, I had the opportunity to both speak at length to its volunteers and observe the everyday workings of their projects. It was Saturday at the Valmiki educational project, the day which would see a new school and hostel building at the site opened by Kapil, the wealthy publisher who had funded the construction of the building and was now travelling from his home city of Delhi to take part in the official opening ceremony. Kapil originally joined the VKK while studying at Ranchi University, having been introduced to the association by Indrajeet Dey, one of his lecturers, a worker in the non-Sangh affiliated organisation ‘Society for Holistic Approach to a Planned Environment’ and current adviser to the VKK’s Gram Vikas projects. After participating in the VKK’s Van Yatra programme as a student, Kapil then took a position as a full time volunteer for the association for a year. Kapil’s relationship with the VKK now focused upon monetary support, irregular trips to the VKK’s *seva* projects in Dhanbad which he financially sustained, and occasional meetings where planning matters were discussed. Kapil was joined at Valmiki by Ajay, a retired industrialist from the city of Dhanbad who had been a member of the organisation for over eleven years. Collectively, both Kapil and Ajay funded three rural Ekal Vidyalayas in the villages of Lodharia, Bhusuakuli, and Lukaia, two Gram Vikas centres, together with Dhanbad’s four medical dispensaries. And today, Kapil was in Valmiki to formally open the new classroom and hostel building whose construction he had financed.

On numerous occasions Kapil accounted for his participation in the projects, commenting that:

Here, I am not a businessman, I am a worker, [I am] working and serving . . . working for the people. This is my job today – opening the hostel, but there are many hostels I have opened, schools too. We are all working together to serve the nation.

Evident here then, and in other conversations both at the projects and in Delhi, were meanings inscribed onto *seva* which linked its practice to ideas of a single ecumenical

Hindu community which transcended fractures of class. Furthermore, as an upper caste Delhi-ite, these representations transcended divisions related to caste and questions of disparities in access to economic and social capital.⁴ Moreover, Kapil further structured his participation in the association in two other frameworks. He spoke at length about the relationship of *seva* to ideas of religious community, arguing that:

Sikhs give to the Gurudwara. Jains to their temples. Muslims to the Madrassa. And more, Agarwal and Teli [both upper caste north Indian associated surnames] to their own *jati*. And this is what I do too. [Vanavasi] Kalyan Kendra is doing good work here, uplifting those people who live in villages, [and] where the schools are poor, and [where] there is little work. We are stopping these divisions, we want there to be harmony.

In terms of an approach to *seva* then, Kapil reiterates many of the meanings associated with the VKK's circulating normative approach to *seva* - as directed towards the marginalised, as located in religious traditions and notions of community, and of forms of service which are inscribed with *sangathanist* approaches to selfless service. So far then, so normative.

The welcoming committee which would welcome Kapil into the compound had been in rehearsal for a few hours every day since Monday. It was now Saturday morning and in a few hours Kapil was expected to arrive. The teachers and volunteers in the VKK who had arrived for the opening ceremony were busy barking orders at students who, while seemingly in good humour, were much more interested in spending a Saturday morning without school sitting in the shade and talking, as opposed to constructing a canvas roof in front of the new building in order to offer a measure of pomp and shade for the volunteers when the ceremony began. In front of the new building a raised platform was being constructed and chairs laid out ready for Kapil's arrival. A hot and eventful two hours later, a jeep slowly pulled up outside the compound's gates and the performers moved into position. As Kapil opened the car door and stepped out, he was met by two of the hostel's students, who, bending low, touched his feet as a mark of respect and hierarchy, and then rising again, bestowed a bright vermilion *tilak* on his forehead. As Kapil entered the compound a delegation of all male students raised their bows and arrows to the sky as a salute (archery is a sport

⁴ 'Economic' and 'Social' capital here is linked to Bourdieu's theorization. 'Economic' is related to financial forms "which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights" (47: 1986). 'Social' refers to "the attainment of connections and relations which allow for the advancement of specific interests, which arises from membership of networks and associational spaces" (51: 1986). Importantly, such capital is symbolic in so far that it exists through actors recognizing its forms (1986: 241-256).

popular in rural tribal communities) and then formed a guard of honour. As Kapil and his student entourage walked slowly towards the front of the stage where senior Dhanbad and wider Jharkhandi VKK members were waiting to offer him their *namaskars*, twelve female students joined at the head of the column and began to perform a dance associated with the popular tribal and wider Jharkhandi *Karma* festival. Taking up a position at the centre of the stage, Kapil, along with Ajay, was garlanded by students and offered water, with the two then seated next to a *sevak* from a nearby Ekal Vidyalaya and Madan, a senior figure in the *Shikshan* (Education) wing of the VKK. Raised on a platform in front of rows of students on the floor before the stage, and then lines of chairs which seated volunteers and parents of the students, Kapil rose to begin a speech outlining the aims of the VKK, ending by pointing out that:

Many institutions in India work for themselves. Our work though is different, and more difficult. We work for our brothers and sisters. Our thinking has to be for upliftment, not for material gain or selfishness, but for our *sevaks* to work without privilege for the nation.

Importantly, we can witness the inscription upon Kapil's work for the VKK - in terms of his position as a *sevak* - a set of differing meanings from those associated with normative approaches to *seva*. Note firstly that while Kapil's speech focuses upon the 'selfless' nature of service, his grandstanding through the ceremony specifically raises his profile in the organisation. His is clearly represented here as a key and important figure worthy of respect and honour. Importantly, the transgressive performance here can be witnessed not in terms of the acquisition of economic capital, but rather, the accumulation of social capital. As I will illustrate, these transgressions of meaning of 'selfless service' evidenced in the opening ceremony and linked accumulations of cultural capital are undertaken publically inside the projects of the VKK, and importantly with the facilitation of the organisation.

In comments that were echoed by a range of VKK volunteers, Anil, a volunteer in one of Dhanbad's Ekal Vidyalaya schools, articulated in conversations the various normative practices associated with 'selfless service' which I outlined in section one of this chapter:

Seva [is] when there is a no thought of reward; whether financial, or getting 'a reputation' (lit. '*naam*'). *Seva* must be silently. There can be no interests involved, it is honest work. This is unlike so many organisations in India, who work only for money or a reputation.

Yet, Kapil's performances at certain moments during his participation evidently transgressed the selfless nature of service. I am specifically referring to the opening ceremony, including the celebration of his arrival through dances, chants, garlanding, together with his somewhat obscene paternalist speech directed at predominantly rural subalterns which celebrated '*sevak*s working without privilege' and censuring of those actors working for 'material gain' from the platform of a raised stage. Through his participation in the projects, Kapil can be seen here to accumulate levels of prestige and recognition as a patron of the VKK and a unified Hindu community as represented by both the students and the volunteers, practices through which he acquired social capital exchangeable in alternative contexts. This position was facilitated by the particular structure of the opening ceremony. Importantly, my research illustrates that Kapil's transgressive practices here were not isolated in the projects of the Dhanbad network. Indeed, Ajay, the Joint Secretary of the city branch and retired industrialist and financier of several of the VKK's projects throughout the district of Dhanbad, had the walls surrounding his large house – which also functioned as the branch headquarters of the VKK - painted with his face, his title in the VKK, the organisation's slogans, and, next to a VKK logo, an impressive stencil emblazoned with the words 'Jai Ajay-Ji' ('Glory to Ajay'). This was organised and financed by the association.

2.3 Seva: Transgressive Performances, Languages of Empowerment, and Meanings of 'Secularism'

Also in attendance at the school hostel and classroom opening ceremony in Valmiki were Venkatesh and Dilip. Now retired, Venkatesh had been involved in supporting VKK projects since the 1970s, and as a trained architect had designed a number of their facilities including schools, the association's eye hospital in Lahordaga, and the new school building in Valmiki. In addition to his volunteering in the VKK, Venkatesh also participated in the Ramakrishna Mission and Math and the Chinmaya Mission. Dilip, a retired engineering consultant, was also a long serving member of the VKK's Dhanbad branch. In addition to financially supporting several Ekal Vidyalaya schools, his role also involved training Gram Vikas workers and teachers volunteering in the VKK's *Shikshan* programmes. Furthermore, like Venkatesh, Dilip was also a participant in various other organisations, including the Lions and the Foundation for Excellence, a U.S. educational charity which provides scholarships for Indian students. Both Venkatesh and Dilip then are part of differing aspects of the area's associational cultures, with each then a

participant in discursive fields which draw upon and circulate divergent constructions of community and duty.

During a training session for Gram Vikas workers at the Rani Sati Mandir in Ranchi, both Dilip and Venkatesh were sat at the front of a large room speaking to volunteers about the activities and aims of the village-based Self Help Groups led by the Gram Vikas projects. At the end of the session, a volunteer inquired how the Self Help Groups could deal with issues which he considered as linked to questions of development, and specifically, practices of corruption in the local bureaucracy which organised the Indian government's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. The *sevak* went on to ask how the Self Help Groups could challenge issues surrounding the fact that, despite the programme guaranteeing one hundred days of work a year, the allocations were frequently below the limit, and in any respect, could provide little in the way of a long-term solution as they were based around unskilled labour. After the event I asked Dilip what his perspectives were on the question. "He was right. I have raised many times relaunching interest protection (*bitraksha*) work for the [Self Help Group] workers. But there is little interest [in this]". I was surprised, and noted that there did seem to be a level of support evidenced by the question. Dilip went on to comment, however:

I have talked to Ajay about this issue many times. Others too. And Pradeep (an organiser of the Gram Vikas projects in Dhanbad). To them focusing on this issue would mean creating trouble, both for the workers and the villages . . . [But] the VKK should educate people of tribal villages to know about the work of [the] government for the development of tribal villages, and to use the Right to Information Act to know about projects and financial expenditures sanctioned by the government. The VKK cannot fully develop the tribal villages of India on their own. The VKK must evolve itself and [the] tribal people to question the government through the Right to Information Act and other democratic approaches to develop villages and stop corruption.

Dilip's frustrations with the VKK are linked to his own transgressive articulation of *seva*. These inscribe the practice as an approach to 'political awakening' and 'empowerment', articulated in the languages of governance, secular nation building and directed towards encouraging the marginalised to take independent action to challenge State power, whereas the VKK's normative *sangathanist* approach to *seva* offers avenues of 'consciousness raising', 'awakening' and 'empowerment' and mobilisation inside horizontal constructions of a cohesive Hindu community. While I will discuss in greater detail the differences between Dilip's and Kapil's transgressive performances later in this chapter, I would note here that Dilip transgresses *seva* norms through approaching

seva as a practice of challenging hierarchies and mobilising subaltern actors as a force outside of notions of religious community and inside cultures of civic awareness and judicial and democratic rights. Indeed, as Dilip once commented, “India is a secular country, and our work should reflect that.”

Dilip’s inscription onto the practice of *seva* of meanings associated with broadly secular approaches to questions of development and political empowerment reflect the languages circulating in differing service associations in which Dilip is active - specifically, the Lions and his work in secular educational charities. Through these acts Dilip transgresses the VKK’s normative approach to *seva*. The articulation of transgressive approaches to *seva* is further witnessed through outlining Dilip’s attempts to reorganise the school day and the relationships produced through seemingly banal forms of interactions inside the schools which the Dhanbad network run. For example, critiques were offered surrounding the school day beginning with *bhajans* and students answering the register by calling out ‘*Jai Shri Ram*’. Dilip also critiqued the dissemination of ‘Hindu cultures and traditions’ which reiterated notions of the centrality of religious forms of belonging, from practices such as abstaining from eating meat, to daily *pujas*, to greeting and taking leave from one another with a formal ‘*Ram Ram*’. Of course, the latter point is by no means restricted to the projects of the VKK, but it is these daily techniques of the self taken together which, according to Dilip, should be detached from *seva*-based educational facilities of the organisation.

Further transgressions can be witnessed through exploring the aspects of the VKK’s approaches to *seva* which produce distinctions between the VKK’s projects and the social services organised by various Christian churches and Missionary associations. The VKK’s approach to *seva* is constructed as situated within and indeed as necessitating ‘Hindu cultural’ traditions, evident for example in the *ayurveda* clinics - and so ‘indigenous to the area’ - while Christian institutions and their social service networks are constructed as operating outside Indian service traditions.⁵ These binary norms, however, were also displaced by alternative meanings of *seva* articulated by VKK members. Indeed Venkatesh, while travelling back from the hostel opening ceremony, interrupted Kapil during the latter’s argument on the alleged negative ramifications of Christian social work. “Have you seen the Xavier institute?” Venkatesh asked, directing his question at me. Founded in 1955 by Jesuit priests, The Xavier Institute of Social

⁵ Interestingly, numerous Catholic charity associations throughout Jharkhand do in fact take an interest in promoting alternative systems of health care. See Xalxo (2003).

Service is today a semi-autonomous college in Ranchi which focuses upon questions of rural development, social welfare, and training students to take up professional positions in the NGO sector. Venkatesh continued:

They have been working for a long time now in various sections of society. Maybe they used to convert. They also do works, they serve in their own way, [and] we serve in our way. If all of us work for society it is more useful than just one organisation.

Venkatesh continued talking, but switched from a register of approaching alternative service associations through questions of utility to one which was linked with certain themes found in Vivekananda's speech at the Parliament of World Religions in 1893. Most notably, the aspects which dealt with the unity of "different streams" of religious thought and practice as leading to the divine, a point Vivekananda – through quoting the Bhagavad Gita – assertively held was a unique Hindu tradition (Van der Veer 1997: 318-319). Venkatesh reasoned that just as all religions were differing streams leading to a common sea, so differing religions had common currents in terms of an approach to service. As Venkatesh developed his points, he would regularly frame his argument in the Gita and various Vedic texts such as the Rig Veda and the Upanishads. For example, commenting on the Gita, Venkatesh interpreted parts of Krishna's discourse to Arjuna as noting that "all paths talk about gaining knowledge and a duty to serve, and through this [knowledge and service] all paths lead to God". An important point should be drawn from this discussion. Firstly, these transgressive practices invoke alternative meanings to those normative approaches to *seva* circulating in the VKK's publics, and invoke alternative values then which have developed in the differing associations in which Venkatesh also participates. Indeed, Venkatesh here is invoking approaches to service which circulate in the associations of the Chinmaya Mission and the Ramakrishna Mission and Math which disseminate differing readings of *Vedanta* literature and the Gita (Sharma 1991: 224). These meanings have an opportunity to circulate inside the VKK's projects through Venkatesh's long standing membership of alternative organisations such as the Chinmaya and Ramakrishna Missions, and in terms of *seva* work, attending lectures and distributing their literature. Indeed, Venkatesh's use of textual traditions to reinforce and elaborate his approach to service was confidently performed in public and there was little in the way of any direct attempts to silence his arguments surrounding the relationship between differing religious traditions and service.

In terms of levels of transgression these acts may appear minor and so insignificant. However, they illustrate a number of important points. Firstly, it would be a mistake to view transgressive acts as transgressive only if they are influential within the organisation or are articulated in a manner designed to directly challenge normative approaches to *seva*. Secondly, and related to this first point, the importance of these acts arises from the ways in which they illustrate that the subjectivities of *sevak*s in the Hindu nationalist movement are produced not simply through hegemonic constructions. Rather, subjectivities are performed at the nexus of differing systems of meaning and ways in which *sevak*s live and negotiate in everyday life these constructed identities.

2.4 Interrogating and Explaining the Forms of Transgression

These transgressive performances then illustrate the fractured and contested nature of the subjects who volunteer in the publics and the publics themselves. Yet, it should also be apparent that the outlined transgressive practices of Kapil, Dilip, and Venkatesh take differing forms. Indeed, both Venkatesh's and Dilip's transgressive performances with regard to approaching the relationship between *seva*, languages of empowerment, Hinduism, and differing religious service associations can be seen to be distinct in terms of their linguistic articulations. For example, Dilip's were framed in broad cultures of secularism, rights and citizenship, while Venkatesh's drew upon constructs of 'tolerance', inscribed by Hindu reformist movements as a central aspect of a modern Hindu identity. Further examples can be witnessed through illustrating that Kapil's transgression of the normative constructs of selfless service are both in public and facilitated by the structure of the opening ceremony, whereas Dilip's are either tentatively raised inside closed organisational spaces, or are articulated outside the projects in private conversations. Venkatesh's, on the other hand, were confidently performed in front of other members, yet unlike Kapil's, were not facilitated by the association. Such a point will be important when considering the differing forms that the transgressions take in terms of their context and the degree to which such transgressions are the focus of disciplinary policing.

My reworked construct of an alternative public developed in section 2.2 of the Introduction provides a strong approach in reading transgressive practices, and indeed, the differing forms such transgressive practices take. I noted that alternative publics are helpfully understood as internally plural, a point which helps us understand their expansionary potential. Moreover, one of the points that Fraser (1990) elaborates upon

during her extended discussion of the relationship between publics is a recognition that publics and their associated values are socially stratified in terms of their perceived value, and so this “structured setting...advantages some and disadvantages others” (1990: 68). Developing this point further, it should be noted that such valorisations are not objective – they are results of processes of discursive contestations, and thus are valorised from subjective positions. For instance, where broad notions of state secularism may circulate in publics which exercise degrees of dominance of national policy and the state machinery, this does not lead to their meanings being highly valorised across what is in reality a fractured set of publics spread over Indian social life.

These points surrounding stratification and valorisation of publics can also be brought into dialogue with Copeman’s (2009) notion of ‘interoperability’. Developing the point specifically with regard to devotional movements, blood banks, and practices of blood donation in India, Copeman deploys the concept to examine how differing actors from diverse arenas work together to achieve their respective aims. The emphasis here then is on “...the practical nature of the set of interactive operations involved when so-called separate systems may come to interlock and work through each other”, a dynamic which “can involve disjuncture as well as fruitful combination” (Copeman 2009: 186). Such a process, argues Copeman, contributes to both the construction of wide networks and projects, with the experience of the practice itself allowing for the potential of new devotional meanings to develop (2009: 4). This is not to overlook the problematic divergences in terms of their differing meanings, but rather the concept of ‘interoperability’ focuses upon how their collaborative practice provides a well-spring of opening service possibilities (2009: 180). These two points, social stratification and valorisation, and then interoperability offer us strong conceptual tools for explaining the differing forms of transgressive practices.

Importantly, the notion of *selfless* service directed towards the marginalised can be seen to circulate contradictory meanings related to themes of Hindu representation. On the one level, there is the production of ideas of difference in terms of access to resources, for example, economic, educational, or more broadly, ‘developmental’. Yet, concurrently, practices of *seva* also invoke commonality in terms of the production and membership of an ecumenical Hindu community. It is this last point which allows for the bracketing of the former issue, and so in this instance Kapil, as a wealthy, urban, and male industrialist, can take up a position as a *sevak* on a privileged basis, without the

questioning of social fault lines, as horizontal constructs of Hindu organisation are placed as primary. Moreover, in socially stratified societies, we can also witness the production of alternative forms of culture in terms of the valorisation inscribed onto, in this instance, practices of giving which transgress the 'selfless' nature of service and instead highlight the financier, and thus transgress the normative 'selfless' approach to *seva*. Indeed, such positive valorisations of those transgressive notions of giving remain unpoliced because they do conversely reiterate another normative *sangathanist* meaning of *seva* – that of a cohesive Hindu community. This is illustrated by the male, urban, business owner not simply funding the projects of mainly rural actors drawn from marginalised communities, but also in Kapil's very participation at given times in projects encompassing a variety of actors from marginalised sections of 'Hindu society'. These transgressive performances therefore can be public as they are illustrative of how practices of *seva* invoke meanings of Hindu *sangathan*, and so the alternative transgressive meanings – the 'grandstanding' of Kapil – can be valorised as positive as they conversely reiterate the bracketing off of Kapil's class position and regulate formations of belonging inside a unified Hindu community.

However, this is not where my examination ends. This creation of a spectacle which is facilitated by the structure of the opening ceremony shows Kapil and wider VKK members as participating in valorised traditions, linking the two to notions of the historic role and associated cultures of the business notable and his relationship with the wider population, Hindu voluntary organisations and their activist traditions of 'social upliftment'. The public presentation of such constructed roles helps us to bring into the discussion Copeman's concept of 'interoperability'. Indeed, Kapil's transgressive meanings of service, practices which highlight and produce the public self as 'benefactor', and the VKK's facilitation and so the enablement of such public transgressions, allow both Kapil and the VKK to achieve their respective aims. Indeed, in fashion similar to Haynes' (1987) discussion of giving in colonial Surat in which he noted that 'the giver' was also a 'receiver', Kapil's transgressive performances, his practices which invoked meanings of the 'benevolent' and 'paternal' businessman inside the projects of the VKK, allow him to accrue forms of social capital due to the degrees of prestige associated with voluntary actions such as financing schools and social service associations. Furthermore, such forms of symbolic capital can then be exchanged by Kapil in a range of other arenas, most notably in the urban business networks within which he participates. Concurrently, the VKK can facilitate the transgressive

performances as through the relationship they receive both financial support, are able to publically present the association as possessing a degree of continuation with historic practices in which important *seva* networks received patronage from notables, and are also impressing upon participants the high level of significance the organisation possesses due to its relationship with a wealthy, urban financier. Moreover, such facilitations then contribute to the construction of an alternative public which invokes Hindu *sangathan*.

We can witness here how both the valorisation of the alternative meanings and the beneficial workings of ‘interoperability’ between the VKK and Kapil allow the public performance of transgressive practices without their attempted disciplining inside *seva* norms. An important point then is understanding that Kapil’s transgressive practices operate in degrees of interoperability with the normative discourses and the patterns by which such a relationship allows the actors to achieve divergent aims yet produce a shared and expanded alternative public. This, together with my previous observations with regard to the differing ways in which transgressions take shape and occur, helps us understand why Dilip’s and Venkatesh’s transgressive practices both necessarily take differing forms in terms of public / private and disciplined / circulated to those of each other and Kapil’s transgressions.

This unequal valorisation and lack of operability of alternative ways of being and knowing which circulate in alternative social spaces, and the ways in which this comes to structure the forms that the transgressive performances take, is seen in bringing Dilip’s transgressive performances into dialogue with Venkatesh’s. Note firstly that these *sevakas* invoked transgressive meanings with regard to a public Hindu identity and an orientation towards Christian social service projects. Yet, while Dilip’s transgressive performances occurred in cautious conversations in closed organisational meetings and private spaces such as his home, Venkatesh’s transgressive acts were undertaken in a self-assured manner during lively arguments in front of a variety of actors of whom he had little familiarity. And interestingly, Venkatesh’s open transgressions were not the focuses of disciplinary attempts to regulate his alternative practices back into discursive norms, whereas Dilip’s transgressive acts were approached as disruptive. Indeed, on one occasion when I was travelling to Dhanbad from Ranchi I was asked by a senior figure in the VKK to carry a large bag of newly published VKK literature to stock the Dhanbad branches supplies. I was further asked if I would make sure Dilip received his

own personal copies and I was then encouraged to ensure he read them. No other volunteer was either singled out to receive their own literature, or identified as an actor with a focus on ensuring they engaged with the texts.

While the attempted use of researchers as a strategy to police transgressive performances is of interest, the central point that I am outlining here relates to accounting for the differing forms of transgression which separate Venkatesh's and Kapil's alternative practices. This explanation can be found in the spatial location of the transgressive values and their reference to certain languages and traditions. Dilip's transgressive performances invoked meanings rooted in associations in which he participated – such as The Lions and Educational Foundation for Excellence –where approaches to service were inscribed with meanings of secular citizenship. For, Venkatesh, such transgressive performances invoke meanings which are infused with reconstructed *Vedanta* norms and a non-sectarian public Hindu identity, whereas Dilip's acts transgress normative constructs of a Hindu community, and invoke alternative focuses such as secular citizenship, and so are inoperable with the VKK's practices of *seva* which are inscribed with the primacy of Hindu *sangathan*. By contrast Venkatesh's transgressive practices allow for collaborative action and the pursuit of divergent aims, which for Venkatesh include deploying his architectural skills as a form of *seva*. These transgressions are left unpoliced as they are both sourced from associations which continue to affirm a public Hindu identity and notions of an ecumenical Hindu community, together with an assertive and proud articulation of Hindu traditions. They are therefore, in Copeman's terminology (2009), interoperable with the VKK's *sangathanist* approach to *seva* in terms of their shared discursive emphasises. The absence of disciplinary policing with regard to such transgressions allows the alternative public of the VKK to move into dialogue with actors such as Venkatesh's and alternative associations such as the Dhanbad chapters of the Ramakrishna and Chinmaya Missions. It additionally allows for the practical wider development of *seva* networks in terms of incorporating actors who can professionally design structures required for the VKK's expansion into spheres of education and health care. Moreover, the incorporation of such transgressive acts constructs the projects of the VKK with an expansionary dynamic. What should be apparent then are a number of points. Firstly, that both Dilip's and Venkatesh's transgressive performances were structured either by the source of the invoked transgressive approach to *seva* and its relationship to the dominant *seva* norms in terms of its degrees of interoperability. Secondly, that their transgressive

performances were structured by their separation and ability or inability to disrupt or to be brought into conformity with the VKK's normative practices of *seva*.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter I began with an ethnographic vignette which outlined a series of questions and themes relating to practices of *seva* and the expansion of the VKK's alternative publics. The arguments contained in this chapter have illustrated that, central to the expansion of the VKK's alternative publics, have been the creative modes of engagement by which *sevaks* have negotiated the circulating normative discourses of *seva*. Moreover, such negotiations have both brought the projects of the VKK into dialogue with alternative spaces and served to inscribe the discourse of *seva* with formative power over an increasing range of daily practices. Through an analysis of avenues of action which overcomes binaries of resistance and reiteration of power I have shown how central to the expansion of the alternative publics of the VKK and the transformation of practices of *seva* are complex patterns of discursive negotiation.

In the first section of the chapter I illustrated the modes by which the normative approaches to *seva* constituted the *sevak*, together with constructs of an organic Hindu community in which 'urban' and '*vanavasi*' sections were performatively positioned as active and passive subjects. The normative constructs of *seva* thus could be seen to stress meanings of a vernacularized approach to Hindu *sangathan*. Yet, I showed how the expansion of the VKK's projects centred upon not simply discursive reiteration, but rather upon *sevaks* refocusing and reordering meanings associated with the normative ways of thinking. In particular, I showed how such discursive negotiation worked to bring the projects of the VKK into dialogue with educational workers who drew upon *seva*'s implicit reference to the 'selfless' nature of service, together with medical doctors who refocused traditions of service with *ayurvedic* meanings. Importantly, I illustrated how such refocusing both invoked vernacularized Hindu nationalist meanings with regard to Hinduism's boundaries and was vital to the expansion of the VKK's discourses of *seva* into practices of healthcare.

Continuing this focus on *seva* and discursive negotiation, the second section of the chapter examined transgressive practices of *seva* and their relation to the modes of expansion related to the VKK's projects. Having introduced the variety of *sevaks* at the centre of the Dhanbad network of the VKK, I examined three transgressive

performances in which *sevak*s invoked alternative meanings sourced from differing publics, specifically, practices of selfless service, empowerment and citizenship, and tolerance and 'legitimate' service. I showed that these transgressive performances were articulated in differing spaces dependent upon their valorisation and degrees of interoperability with the circulating normative approaches to *seva*. Moreover, while such a framework accounted for the differing disciplinary measures applied to regulate such transgressive acts, the argument also illustrated how certain transgressive practices were accommodated by the association. This section therefore illustrated that central to the expansion of the VKK's alternative publics are practices of *seva* which invoke transgressive meanings.

If refocused and transgressive Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* therefore are productive of expansive organisational alternative publics in which practices of service come to exercise formative power over a range of themes, then a question arises: in what ways can we witness discourses of *seva* organising and regulating daily practices inside such expanded alternative publics? How, then, do these discourses regulate daily sensibilities to invoke Hindu nationalist meanings? How is such discursive positioning transgressed? These questions form the central approach of Chapter Six's examination of the educational projects of the VKK.

Chapter Six

Modes of Performativity

Introduction

Navjot

It was Monday afternoon and lunch time at a VKK-run formal school and hostel in Navdiha, a village in Jharkhand's north-eastern Sahebganj district. It was scorching hot, and in this stupefying heat I was being given a tour of the educational complex by Chetan, a teacher at the school and one of the volunteers who managed the boys' hostel. These walks around the facilities occurred regularly, and as I was beginning to suspect, took place mainly when Chetan felt the need to take issue with a student, fellow teacher, or simply a mundane mishappening at the project. I was slowly realising the degree of importance these discussions with Chetan possessed, as they offered my research an open window into how *sevaks* thought through everyday life in one of the VKK's largest formal schools in Jharkhand. Furthermore, Chetan was well respected amongst assorted teachers in the projects, and so the public presentation of our tours helped other *sevaks* to gain confidence and trust in both talking to me and allowing my ubiquitous presence throughout the school. Plus, as a keen – and at times aggressive -- sportsman, Chetan was popular with many of the boys at school, a point which offered me an early avenue into their everyday experiences. As we were circling back to the school's main entrance I noticed a boy who was weighed down by a heavy case struggling up the path leading to the main doors. "Navjot!" barked Chetan, "Navjot, come here." With further effort Navjot heaved his case high and stumbled over to where we were standing. Chetan looked perplexed. "What are you doing?" he questioned. The pupil began to explain that he had been absent from school over the previous weeks as his father – who ran his own store -- had been ill, and as I would learn later, the family needed Navjot to fill in shifts at the shop. "But now", Navjot ventured, "I am coming back to..." "Yes, yes, I know all about this," brushed away Chetan, "but what are you *doing*?" Suitably confused, Navjot lowered his eyes. Now taking a sterner tone, Chetan lowered his voice and rephrased the question, "What are

you wearing, Navjot?” I looked at the boy. His clothes were not dirty. Neither were they torn or particularly dishevelled. “Are you wearing jeans, Navjot?” Chetan’s rhetorical question hung heavy in the air. Chetan sighed, and over the next few minutes proceeded to elaborate to Navjot why he should not be wearing jeans - whether in the school projects or back in his village. The discourse covered a range of themes, but centred specifically on a construction that such attire was ‘foreign’ (*videshi*) and so stood outside of ‘our culture’ (*hamare sanskriti*) and how Hindus ‘behave ethically’ (*naitik rup se*). “Proud Hindu students,” finished Chetan, “do not wear jeans, and you should be showing this and setting an example.” Suitably disciplined, Navjot staggered off to deposit his case in the hostel, change into school uniform, and presumably hide his jeans.

Performativity and the Ethical Hindu Self

I decided to begin this chapter with the introduction of this ethnographic sketch as it illustrates one of the central arguments that I will be making over the proceeding pages – that of the particular ways in which the discourses circulating inside the VKK’s educational *seva* projects work to organise, manage, and produce everyday practices as inscribed with certain normative meanings. This avenue of research thus highlights how everyday performances signify regimes of ‘Hindu behaviour’, ‘Hindu culture’, and ‘Hindu traditions’. The central premise of this chapter is that Hindu nationalism circulates in the VKK’s *seva* educational projects not in a textually taught sense, or even as an explicit political outlook, but rather its forms can be located as a grammar of everyday being and knowing. And as I will show, such grammars and their associated dispositions perform what they claim to represent – that of, in the words of Chetan, “proud Hindu students” who necessarily represent “our culture” and their self through their daily practices.

To argue then that Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* are performative is to refocus our attention away from what such frameworks ‘are’ and draw attention to what they ‘do’. Such frameworks of approach draw heavily upon Butler’s theorisation of performativity and the subject explored in the Introduction to this thesis. Such everyday practices which develop out of the discursive organisation of school life work to consolidate a construction of what I will explain as the ethical Hindu self, and so naturalize the primacy of such frameworks of belonging. Elaborating upon how the alternative educational discourses of the VKK construct such a self will form the initial parts of this chapter.

I will then examine how educational discourses of *seva* attempt to organise the reiteration of daily sensibilities to invoke Hindu nationalist meanings. To illustrate this dynamic the third section of the chapter will explore the everyday dispositions associated with *Bhakti* traditions of singing *bhajans*, daily practices of hygiene and cleanliness, and the routinized auditory soundscapes produced through the performance of *mantras* in the school's assemblies. I will further examine and illustrate the particular ways in which these everyday performances are produced and regulated inside the normative discursive practices of what I will define as an ethical Hindu self. Such performative acts are inscribed with and aid in the circulation of Hindu nationalist themes relating to everyday Hindu discipline, order, and *sangathan*. However, before I proceed to discuss these points further I should like to firstly briefly introduce both the *Shikshan* (Educational) wing of the VKK and then the daily routines of the Navdiha School, one the VKK's largest formal schools in Jharkhand and the arena which provides the field research for this chapter.

1. *Seva and Shikshan*

The *Shikshan* (Education) wing represents a significant aspect of the VKK's *seva* projects in terms of its all-Jharkhand presence, financial allocations and *sevaks* working under its auspices. My field research indicates that the organisation's inscription of *seva* as an alternative approach to education helps to produce an expansive alternative public which knits together a vast variety of actors. This includes teachers, pupils, parents, village committees, hostel workers, health workers, accountants and administrators, grocery wholesalers who offer discount food stuffs, and as we saw in the last chapter, architects, financiers, and educational trainers. This network contributes to the founding and then the day to day running of over seventy-eight formal elementary schools (of which I conducted field research in nine, with extended periods in three), with each formal institution able to issue state government qualifications to Grade Ten level. According to Sahill, one of the central organisers of the *Shikshan* projects, approximately 16,000 students from nursery age to the tenth grade attend the VKK's schools in Jharkhand. Each VKK school teaches the government's Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) syllabus. In addition to the CBSE syllabus, the VKK's schools structure into the daily school life formal extra-curricular activities such as *Rashtra Seva* (Serve the Nation) campaigns, informal teaching of *samskars* (values / character traits), and *sharik* (participatory games).

During my field research I spent significant periods in the VKK's school projects, and in particular, the Navdiha School and hostel complex in Sahebganj, a north-eastern district of Jharkhand.¹ Founded in 1986, the school is part of a network of over twenty VKK-run educational projects in the district. The school itself has over five hundred students with classes ending at grade ten (14 years). The facility's catchment area is based on a radius of approximately twelve kilometres and encompassing 30 villages and a population of 10,000, 70% of whom are tribal, including Oraon and Munda. The school's complex itself is built upon an expanse of land which was gifted to the association by a previous local landowner, and is large enough to include a school with two floors and an adjoining assembly hall in which all the students can sit concurrently for the morning assembly and *puja* which begins the school day. In addition to the school building, the complex also includes both a male and female hostel, both of which were single storey and were separated by a football field-seized area of land upon which sports such as *kabbadi* are structured into the male students' daily routine. Behind each hostel lay an ablutions block and a number of hand pumps for washing clothes and collecting water. Each hostel is run by a number of full time male *sevak*s and female *sevik*s of the association together with teachers who are placed on a rota of volunteering in the hostels. Next to the hostel and fenced to one side stood a small patch of land and a room in which students took extracurricular classes on *gau seva*, horticulture and village development. And finally, standing between the two hostels was the school's *Mandir* where pupils performed daily religious rituals.

The day to day organisation of the school and hostel was focused around a strict routine which structured the lives of the participants in the projects from Mondays to Saturdays. At five o'clock the students would wake and proceed to bathe, and by five thirty lines of often surprisingly alert students were making their way to *Pratab Smaran* (Morning Prayer). After thirty minutes of ritual *puja* and singing *bhajans*, pupils then carry out yoga until quarter past six. After yoga, the students would take breakfast and then collect their books to be ready for school. By eight, the students were expected to

¹ In 2006 Sahebganj was declared by the Indian government as one of the country's 250 most backward districts, and as in the state as a whole, the district's educational facilities are illustrative of significant degrees of State-overseen marginalisation. Indeed, and although the reports of central government agencies themselves are infused with ideology, it should be noted that in 2012 the latest National University Education Planning and Administration report ranked the state thirty-fourth out of the thirty-five States and Union Territories in terms of elementary education. Furthermore, the report estimated that approximately 600,000 children between the ages of 6-14 did not attend school, and there was a short fall of 43,000 teachers in the State's 40,000 schools, in addition to an overall lack of infrastructure (Bhandari and Kale 2009).

be in rows, separated by gender and grade, and seated inside the large assembly hall where the school day would then begin with a selection of *aarti*, *kirtans*, *mantras*, and announcements. Between eight thirty and twelve thirty lessons would be held. After one hour for lunch, lessons continued until three thirty. After a rest lasting until four, three days of the week those male students who continued to reside at home would join the hostel students in playing supervised sporting games, including *kabbadi* and *keho keho*. During this period the girls of the school and hostel participated in a range of activities out of sight of any of the male pupils and their potential gaze, including standing aerobics, volleyball and badminton, and also lessons on classical and tribal dance, gendered roles in family life, and preparing the hostel students' evening meals. After sports the home students would leave, while the hostel students would be expected to wash and change, and by 6.45 an evening meal usually of lentils, a simple vegetable curry and rice would be served. One hour later, the pupils would take part in evening prayers and the singing of *bhajans* and *Vande Mataram*. Students would then have free time, which comprised mainly completing homework, washing their clothes, or simple recreational games. Saturday afternoon and Sundays were a mixture of free time, homework, and extracurricular activities centred upon the campus and the surrounding villages. These included sports, additional prayers and *bhajans*, discussions on history, and *Rashtra Seva* programmes whose significance I will illustrate later in the chapter.

It is apparent that in addition to the school classes the workings of the VKK's school project at Navdiha are full of hours of everyday routines related to religious rituals and songs, sports, narrations of history and culture, and preparations for an almost continual calendar of religious and cultural celebrations. My central concern now is to illustrate how these practices attempt to produce normative subjectivities of the ethical Hindu self and the circulation of their associated meanings, and so offer evidence as to how everyday performances are a key site in which we can witness the production, reiteration, and transgression of Hindu nationalist norms.

2. The VKK, 'Abstract Hinduism' and the Ethical Hindu Self

Of central importance to the VKK's approach to education and religion is a range of concerns that can be brought under the rubric of a broad dissatisfaction with the contemporary role of Hindu traditions in organising everyday life. Indeed, *sevakas* working in the projects draw upon the VKK's approaches to education which stress the continual relevance of constructed 'Hindu traditions' and forms of sensibility as

providing a guide for both approaches to education and wider everyday practices. Many of the teachers expressed discontent at the ways in which they considered Hindu traditions and sensibilities as a mode of informing everyday practices were marginalised by educational systems which they argued neglected existing ‘indigenous’ educational histories and values. Sanju, a long time teacher at the Navdiha project, articulated these concerns and the VKK’s alternative approaches to education over a number of conversations in which he accounted for why parents sent their children to the VKK schools as opposed to the local government institutions. As Sanju commented:

In ancient India, we educated our children in the *Gurukula* system. A student would be sent to Guru’s house, where he would be taught all the parts of a culture – moral truths, and of course mathematics and science, and also medicine that our great men had created. They would also be taught how to run a home. All their thinking was linked to discovering truths about how to live, and live with nature. But now, government schools no longer teach these cultures and values – they think that educating our children, that being a good student, is only about learning how to read and write . . . to learn this though, you also need discipline, you need national and cultural awareness. Families send their children here because they understand this, they know that here teaching is not just in the classroom. Have you seen our ‘Gau Seva Kendra’? Or our herb gardens? We teach the students the importance of the cow to Hindus, and of the importance of herbs for healthcare. Then the students can go back to the villages and teach their parents.

Sanju’s comments here illustrate a number of points and articulate most clearly the alternative meanings linked to education which are practised in the school projects. Significantly, Sanju articulates the VKK’s and a wider Hindu nationalist claim that the region’s tribal population are part of India’s ‘ancient cultures’, a claim that competing discursive claims surrounding notions of indigeneity for example dispute (Shah 2010: 134). Secondly, the VKK’s approach to education is located outside of the modern Indian state’s pedagogical designs, and rather is constructed as a modernised form of ‘Hindu tradition’ - that of the *Gurukul*. Both this critique and alternative articulation of pedagogy relates to wider questions of the continued relevance of constructed Hindu religious systems of thought and sensibilities (discipline, *gau seva*, *ayurveda*) to informing approaches to education, guiding everyday practices, and producing ‘good students’. Articulated then is a view of education which links the continual relevance and necessity of performing Hindu traditions in everyday life as a way of constructing the pupil as an ideal Hindu self. This point is illustrative then of how the school projects of the VKK are the location of alternative discourses which link religious sensibilities onto educational practices, and how this approach entwines the achievement of educational skills with the performative practices associated with an ethical Hindu self.

This view with regard to the contemporary relevance of religious traditions and knowledge and a critique of the perceived neglect of such systems in structuring education is a point which is expanded in approaching wider society. In this reading, *sevaks* take the perceived neglect of Hindu traditions in terms of forming a grammar of everyday practices which result in Hinduism becoming an increasingly abstract schema of ideas - as a series of festivals and adventurous myths, but not as a lived tradition which can provide potential frameworks for acting and knowing in the world. Indeed, as Sanju commented, “In our India, we have Ram everywhere; on walls, on television, but not where it is most important – in the heart, the mind, and our actions. So if Ram is not here, how can he be in our actions?”

These themes, related to the primacy of Hindu cultural forms of belonging as providing ‘a way of life’, is a central concern frequently associated with Hindu nationalism, with approaches to education circulated by *sevaks* such as Sanju illustrating how these themes of culture and ‘way of life’ are developed, mediated, and vernacularized relative to their relevant locales. The Hindu God-King Ram here then is not simply a character in the *Ramayana*, but rather the deity is presented as an ideal ethical Hindu due to his actions being brought into line with constructed Hindu cultures and conducts. In the VKK’s discursive construction of the ethical subject Hindus should thus ‘grasp the meaning’ of the *Ramayana* as following Ram’s example and ‘live’ their religion, as opposed to simply celebrating its festivals.

Of importance then is an ability to theorise such approaches to an ‘abstract’ and then activist ‘ethical’ approach to Hindu culture. Such a reading requires approaching ethical performances as both inscribed with meanings and productive in terms of power. I have found Foucault’s approach to questions of ‘ethics’ and ‘ethical practices’ particularly useful in this regard (Foucault 1988, 1995, 1997a, 1997b). In Foucault’s approach, ethics “permits individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conducts, ways of being” (1988: 18). As a mode of power then, ethical formations refer to certain discursive techniques which are brought into discernible form through distinct practices, with the performance of such systems working to construct the position of what I characterize as the ethical Hindu self. Such an approach suggests then that notions of ethics are lived, negotiated and produced – points which through my fieldwork I was constantly able to explore. This approach to ethical discourse then is an attempt to draw

attention to the particular circulating ethical regimes and practices, or ‘modes of subjectification’, which both produce the ethical subject and work to ensure continual practices of ‘self-modification’ so as to regulate patterns of behaviour and thought into their normative ethical formations (Foucault 1995: 27-37, Faubion 2013: 500-502).

This approach to circulating ethical regimes of discourse offers us an avenue for understanding the ‘routinization’ of ethical sensibilities and practices inside the VKK’s *seva* project at Navdiha and the activists’ linked critique of the perceived decline of Hinduism in modern India. As noted previously, a common complaint of the teachers at the project was a critique of how Hindu practices had become hollowed out and abstract, with Hindu traditions undertaken as formulaic conventions. This dynamic, it was explained, led to the decline of applying associated knowledge and rituals as a particular mode of disciplining one’s practices to live in accordance with certain Hindu ethical cultures. This point was made clear during a heated conversation I shared with both Sanju and Dinesh, both serving teachers at the Navdiha school project. Irritated no doubt by my somewhat naive inquires related to the upcoming Durga Pooja festival and how the school was planning to organise the celebrations, Dinesh moved swiftly to question my own degree of religious observance and those of my family. “Our religion is more than just festivals,” Dinesh began. “Let me ask you. When you are with your family during Diwali, what do you do?” Dinesh did not wait for my reply, but continued on:

Then you will know how Diwali is often celebrated. The market is full. People spend lots of money on fireworks. There will be special television programs. People will travel to see their friends. Families will meet. But despite the celebrations, the real meaning of Diwali is not here.

After this somewhat direct admonition I asked Dinesh to explain further what he understood was ‘the real meaning of Diwali.’ Dinesh’s concern with a contemporary, abstract Hinduism developed as a result of Hindus not understanding Diwali’s continuing and contemporary relevance and applying its themes to our own lives, resulting in its “message” (*suchna*) becoming lost. “We act” reinforced Sanju, “like we have nothing to learn from its universal truths (*vishva dharma*).” “The message” that both Dinesh and Sanju were arguing had become lost was not the knowledge of Valmiki’s Ramayana in terms of its narrative structure. Rather, both *sevak*s were here creating a distinction between on the one hand knowledge of the epic and abstract observances of the festival, and on the other, understanding the contemporary relevance

and linked everyday performances of the coded *dharmic* duties and behaviours inscribed into the text, with the latter's "messages" lost in the practices associated with an abstract Hinduism. Celebrating Diwali is then linked to transforming the self along the lines of a given set of presentations of ethical modes of behaviour, and so is inscribed as a practice through which the subject can come to understand the continuing relevance, acquire, and perform certain constructions of behaviour in everyday life. The VKK's wider approach to education therefore stresses a path which is an alternative to symbolic and 'abstract' religious displays, and instead focuses upon the importance of lived Hindu traditions and their daily performance as a mode by which constructs of the ethical Hindu self can be produced. The alternative and normative educational discourses of *seva* then work to allow the production of projects in which Hinduism is constructed as an activist grammar of practice and thought which are produced as vital for the development of ethically aware Hindu students.² What will become apparent over the next section of this chapter is how these routinized practices and rituals develop and are regulated so as to produce the normative sensibilities of the ethical Hindu self, and how such reiterative ethical performances are organised to invoke Hindu nationalist meanings.

3. Hygiene, *Bhajans*, Assemblies

3.1 *Ritual Practice, Theory, and Everyday Life*

The routines of everyday life in the VKK's formal schools illustrate the extraordinary level of focus that the circulating discourses of *seva* place upon relating questions of education to constructs of ethical Hindu practices - including the 'correct' performance of everyday rituals such as *bhajans*, *mantras*, and *aarti*, together with sensibilities such as a vegetarian diet and daily hygiene. The presentation of these practices in the VKK's projects is linked not simply to observing traditions of Hinduism, in the sense of a heightened and increased focus on performing Hindu rituals as a marker of religious identity - as then a more intense mode of 'abstract Hinduism' - nor are they designed to distinguish between the practice and wider social life. Rather, these routinized practices

² A noticeable expanding trend in wider research which is focused upon exploring the public sphere is towards addressing the constraints of modernist understandings of 'the Political' through recognizing the relationship between everyday practices, productions of the self, and the circulation of alternative systems of thought and being which significantly shape the lived experiences of subjects across the globe. For example, see Mahmood's (2012) research on the women's mosque movement in Egypt and productions of the 'pious self', together with her critique of Roy's (1994) separation of 'political Islam' from 'nonpolitical' and then 'neo-fundamentalist' forms.

are linked to realizing forms of a wider everyday religious sociability which the practices aim at cultivating. This is an important point – everyday practices, such as the singing of *bhajans* are seen to develop, work on, and bring the pupils’ conduct in line with the norms of the ethical Hindu self. Again offering an alternative approach to drawing divisions between rituals and then wider everyday practices, religious rituals in the project are not distinguished from the everyday practices of school and hostel life and its related achievements, but rather the correct performance of the former were seen as a necessary condition for the latter’s accomplishment. For example, the pupils’ regular attendance at and normative performances associated with the morning *bhajans* were linked to their ability to cultivate an everyday diligent school work ethic, represented for instance by the completion of homework. Observable then is a relationship between the mundane and the daily tasks associated with school life and the religious ritual, with the two constructed in a mutually supporting relationship. I will examine this point and its relationship to the invocation of Hindu nationalist meanings with reference to three practices: personal and public cleanliness, the singing of *bhajans*, and *mantras*.

3.2 Performing Hygiene: Cleanliness, Others, and the Ethical Hindu Self

Firstly, I will examine the particular ways in which daily performances of hygiene relate to disciplining daily sensibilities into the construct of the ethical Hindu self and work to invoke meanings linked to Othering systems of hierarchy. An early concern of *seva* projects related to paternalist and philanthropic ‘moral reforming’ campaigns directed towards Dalits and lower castes. For example, Arya Samaj activists throughout colonial North India campaigned against alcohol consumption, and for the eradication of gambling, ‘vulgar entertainment’, and indebtedness. As I examined in Chapter Two, these projects additionally focused on cleanliness. Here, themes of physical hygiene and ritual purity were increasingly mapped together, with Samaj activists entering lower caste and Dalit residential orders with brooms to physically clean the spaces together with distributing soap and toothbrushes (Gooptu 2001: 181-182). Three points are of key relevance to examining the contemporary practices of hygiene circulating in the *seva* projects of the VKK. Firstly, these historical practices of *seva* approached those on Hinduism’s boundaries as predisposed to unhygienic standards. And secondly, ‘cleanliness’ campaigns - what Gooptu describes “as a measure to dragoon the untouchables into becoming tidy, orderly, happy, right-thinking, unthreatening and docile members of society” (2001: 181) - were organised as part of moral and social

upliftment campaigns. Thirdly, these circulating discourses worked to position subaltern subjects as an unclean Other and simultaneously attempt to regulate their practices in line with an upper caste and so ostensibly ‘clean’ Hindu self.

Practices of *seva* thus have a historical relationship to themes of hygiene and its Other. Through bringing into this discussion two episodes from my field work at the Navdiha school project, I will illustrate the process by which such historical meanings of *seva* are reconstructed, vernacularized and circulated inside the projects of the VKK as performative acts, and so how the regulatory mechanisms of hygiene work to both Other overwhelmingly tribal and lower caste actors and produce Hinduism with culturally supremacist meanings. The first episode relates to a discussion between Dinesh and myself surrounding his position as a *sevak*, and the second refers to how questions of hygiene were circulated and performed. Over lunch one afternoon I asked Dinesh what had persuaded him to quit his job as a young teacher in a government school and instead take up a position as a *sevak* in the VKK’s educational wing. Dinesh replied that the VKK has a ‘wider’ understanding of education, one which includes a focus upon the importance of cultural education:

Cultural education needs to be a part of a student’s education. Moral upliftment too. Look at the problems tribal people suffer from – lack of development and corruption. Many of these problems are because of a lack of knowledge of our culture (*sanskriti ka jnana*). Anna Hazare [we had been previously been discussing the ongoing Lok Pal movement] can only do so much unless you address how people are educated. That’s why our culture (*hamare sanskriti*) is so important. But this should not just be about history lessons so students can matriculate like in the government schools. But you know I still respect the government schools and teachers, only I felt the options here offer the students more because we show them why being honest and serving the nation is part of our culture. Yes, it is history as well, but it is these days too. That is why we call our culture the eternal faith (*sanatana dharma*).

A number of interesting points can be drawn from Dinesh’s remarks. Note firstly that he articulates a viewpoint of culture as ‘*sanskriti*’ and as the ‘*sanatana dharma*’ and therefore places these inside a distinct Hindu tradition. This tradition is constructed as a necessary component of education which should therefore reach beyond pedagogical instruction and assessment in the classroom environment. Indeed, these cultural practices are produced as systems of thought and instruction which provide readings of and solutions to contemporary issues. Acting as an ethical Hindu therefore necessarily regulates and relates everyday actions in line with the significance of Hindu practices.

As part of their education students in grade ten study a series of extra-curricular subjects grouped under the rubric of 'Sanskriti'. Early during one such class Dinesh asked the pupils to open their textbooks on the chapter which detailed the topic, that of 'Cleanliness' (*Nirmalata*) and 'Hygiene' (*Swasthya Vigyan*). After asking a variety of the students to read aloud from the sections of the chapter, Dinesh summarised the approach to the topic:

Cleanliness and hygiene are important for us. When you wake up every morning one of your first acts must be to take a bath. Otherwise how can you have a clean mind in school if your body is dirty? Cleanliness is part of our Hindu culture. It is how we show respect to ourselves and others, by respecting our culture. Being clean and having clean clothes should be as important for students as doing your homework, and in fact following our culture will ensure that you can be good students, and so you should remember that your work is your worship (*karam hi dharam hai*).

Dinesh paused, ensured that the students were still listening, and then continued:

But your work is not just at school. Cleanliness must also be in all of society. After all, how can we have pride in our country if we throw rubbish on the streets? Our culture does not allow this. So, you must be clean, our school must be clean, and society must be clean. A clean society shows that the people are clean. It is proven that the cleaner the society the more developed is its people. Advanced people have a clean diet, clean clothes, clean streets, and clean houses.

After Dinesh's summary, the students were then asked to answer a series of simple questions. These included:

- 1) You are at home and your little brother has not taken his morning bath. You must explain to him why he should - what do you say?
- 2) You are walking in the street and you see a person littering. You must explain to him why he should not - what do you say?

A number of points from the class are relevant to our exploration of the particular modes in which everyday Othering practices of hygiene develop inside the workings of the project, practices which relate to the ethical Hindu self and are inscribed with and aid in the circulation of Hindu nationalist themes. These points illustrate how Hindu nationalism develops in the projects less as a political ideology but rather as performative acts. Note firstly that the teacher's discussion which is embedded into the everyday routines of the class in the school articulates an approach to hygiene and cleanliness which places itself outside a secular-rational approach to personal health care and national health agendas. Instead, this alternative approach is articulated as a mode of Hindu living, or Foucauldian ethical 'mode of subjectification', and thus cleanliness is inscribed as a daily conduct which references and reproduces religious markers.

Moreover, and this is a key point distinguishing the VKK's 'abstract' and 'ethical' Hindu practices, such daily acts of public cleanliness and bodily hygiene are seen as productive of wider constructs of a developed people and ethical self. Through their positioning as markers of a Hindu identity the performance of these daily acts of cleanliness is linked to notions of a common Hindu culture which guides approaches to everyday questions. Daily tasks such as washing are inscribed then with meanings whose performative reiteration, understood using Butler's theorisation of the concept, enables the formation of the category of the ethical Hindu self in everyday times and space.

The second significant point relates to the particular ways in which notions of cleanliness and hygiene are articulated as wider, social questions, with the cleanliness of public spaces equated to the degrees of 'development' and 'civilisation' of a people. Hindu traditions are equated with a culture which does not allow unclean states of being. This mapping of 'personal' space onto a 'social' sense of space therefore produces Hindu cultures as necessarily suited to questions of development and civilisation. The linking of these ideas onto performances of personal and public hygiene and cleanliness works to produce a hierarchy of 'peoples' and 'cultures' linked to divided religious traditions in terms of their relationship to so-called integral and culturally innate approaches to questions of hygiene and health.

Hinduism here then is constructed as a superior system of culture, as containing traditions whose daily performance provides alternative solutions to modern social questions. It should be clear that this is not to claim that cleanliness and hygiene are Hindu nationalist issues. Rather, it is their construction with meanings which link Hinduism as containing a framework for 'development' and 'civilisation', and then the subsequent reiterative performance of such daily ethical regimes which both invoke Hindu nationalist norms and regulate daily sensibilities inside constructs of the ethical Hindu self. For example, as part of the extra-curricular activities of the projects, pupils at the weekend are transported to local towns where they sweep and clean sidewalks, scrub down areas where people wait for public transport, and collect, sort, and dispose of street litter. These activities form part of the school's *Rashtra Seva* programmes. The *sevak*s and pupils of the VKK projects are far from being the sole body to organise such campaigns. In 2012 the Ministry of Tourism launched 'Campaign Clean India', which encouraged shop keepers and voluntary organisations to clean roads leading from airports, railway stations and bus stands to popular tourist destinations. The language of

the program heavily focused upon increasing national civic awareness as a vehicle through which the tourism sector of the economy could aim to expand according to the expectations of the 12th Five Year Plan.³ However, what appears formally to be illustrative of a similar set of acts between the VKK's and the government's 'public cleanliness' programmes can in fact be seen to invoke alternative meanings.

Indeed, the government-led campaigns inscribe the practice as a form of secular civic awareness, while for the VKK these practices relate to activist traditions of *seva* and religious duty. For 'Campaign Clean India', the practice is linked to the achievement of national goals such as economic plans, while for the VKK, *Rashtra Seva* campaigns stress meanings of national rejuvenation through regulating daily practices inside ethical Hindu norms. For the government program, ethical practices of public cleanliness link citizenship to promoting tourism, while for the VKK, practices of public cleanliness link citizenship to ethical Hindu practices. These practices then which are performed in everyday time and public spaces such as roadsides and pavements and as a weekend activity invoke Hindu nationalist norms which blend into the social, and as such operate as seemingly banal action. This echoes Bilig's (1995) points regarding how American national identities can circulate through 'un-waved American flags' which occupy petrol forecourts, home porches, and school classrooms. The performance of these cleanliness campaigns works to continually reproduce constructs of the ethical Hindu self and their associated cultural resources as being an alternative to those non-Hindu cultures whose forms do not - in the VKK's normative approach to the question - provide an everyday approach to cleanliness of the self and society. These performances inscribe in a non-instrumentalist manner the ethical Hindu self with meanings of Hindu cultural unity and a religious Other. Indeed, these grammars of thought develop not as political ideology or as a vocal opposition to alternative practices of hygiene, but rather as an alternative practical activity that develops and is integrated into the pupil's life, allowing us to grasp how alternative approaches to daily conducts of cleanliness and hygiene produce and stabilise constructs of the ethical Hindu self.

These performative discursive Otherings can be further examined through noting how in addition to constructing an 'external', non-Hindu Other, practices of cleanliness further work to position an 'internal' and un-easy Other existing on the boundaries of Hinduism whose so-called unclean daily practices transgress the

³ See further http://www.cleanindiajournal.com/campaign_clean_india/

sensibilities of an ethical Hindu self. Indeed, as I previously noted, the techniques of hygiene outlined by Dinesh and the *Rashtra Seva* campaigns are related to themes of social upliftment which are performed both didactically in public spaces and then towards a body composed overwhelmingly of rural tribal and lower caste students. Classroom discussions and daily practices of hygiene and *Seva Rashtra* campaigns then draw a relation between cleaning public spaces and subaltern bodies to moral reform. *Seva* thus is inscribed with a regulatory focus on the ostensive unhygienic sensibilities of tribal and lower castes, with activist traditions of service then relating to reversing the ‘moral’ deprivation of such subaltern groups. Hinduism’s boundaries are therefore reordered to refer to ethical practices, not *jati* or tribal positionings. Practices of *seva* therefore which are linked to ‘moral reform’ through cleanliness campaigns work to both Other tribal and lower caste actors who supposedly transgress such Hindu cultural norms, yet concurrently provide an approach through which such actors can ‘become one of us’ through regulating their sensibilities into ethical Hindu norms. Indeed, Dinesh noted while concluding his discussion to students in class:

If you always take your morning bath, regularly wash your clothes, and clean the *mandir*, then you will notice your life will change. You will be happier. You will achieve good results. People will treat you well. It is the same with keeping a pure diet. Do this, and you will see you will be respected, and others will change too.

Examining the fashions by which personal and public practices of hygiene are inscribed upon discourses of service has illustrated that far from abstaining from debates surrounding social upliftment and Hinduism’s boundaries, Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* do contribute to the question. Indeed, these issues are approached through reimagining a Hindu society united in terms of daily ethical sensibilities and then its un-easy Other, and in particular, the regulation of such practices into the perceived ‘pure’ behavioural standards of an ethical Hindu self. Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* thus circulate as pro-active and *sangathanist* approaches to Hinduism’s boundaries, with the significant addition of a focus upon the daily ethical “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 2007:191). As Foucault notes, discourses of *seva* therefore allow participants to

not only set themselves rules of conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make of their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria (Foucault 1992: 10-11).

Practices of hygiene in mundane time and space therefore allow for the daily consolidation of the subject formation of the ethical Hindu self in a way which seeks to conceal the identity's performative character.

3.3 Performing Order: Bhajans, Discipline, and the Ethical Hindu Self

Continuing this approach of focusing upon performativity and the ethical Hindu self I will now introduce a further activity which structures the everyday life of the projects, that of singing morning *bhajans*. The singing of *bhajans* is a tradition associated with *Bhakti* (devotional) movements in Hinduism. The singing of the *bhajans* is a form of devotion to a particular deity, and is often accompanied with participants playing musical instruments such as a *tabla* (hand drums), *kartals* (wooden hand clappers), and a *canga* (tambourine). *Bhakti* movements have frequently been associated with implicit critiques of a constructed orthodox Hinduism. For example, caste practices such as Brahmin mediation of access to the divine through a monopoly of specialized knowledge is overcome through the devotees' focus upon developing a personal, loving relationship with the divine without the need of complex rituals or access to *mandirs* (Ramanujan 1973:30, Hawley and Juergensmeyer 2004). Yet, further research paints a more complicated picture of the relationship between *Bhakti* movements and their supposed critique of Hindu practices. Singer's (1972: 230) fieldwork in Madras illustrates the performance of forms of class and gender inequalities in the *bhajan*s. *Bhakti* traditions such as the singing of *bhajans* then are best approached as sites upon which differing forms of power and order may circulate. So, whilst singing *bhajans* may appear to be an everyday activity where the operations are at some distance from dominant framings of Hindu nationalism, I will illustrate how such performances invoke meanings associated with the ordered and disciplined sensibilities of the ethical Hindu self. Importantly however, rituals including songs and prayers – whether in the *mandir* at the VKK's Navdiha school or elsewhere – should not simply be approached as directly reproducing subjectivities, but rather they are also domains wherein normative modes can be transgressed and negotiated. The ritual's normative articulations then are open to reinscription and disruption, and it is because of such potentialities that *bhajan* singing is supervised.

A key theme related to *bhajan* singing inside the Navdiha school project relates to the correct ordering of bodies and disciplining of roles which produce certain normative constructs of the practice. These everyday structures are not arbitrary in

terms of their organisation, but rather reflect valorised modes in terms of their relationship to constructing dispositions of the ethical Hindu self. This point became apparent to me one morning when I arrived early at the school's *mandir* ready for the first *bhajan* to begin being sung. Within moments a group of students – pausing only to kick off their sandals – ran excitedly into the *mandir* and made for the corner where the instruments were kept. Problem: four boys, but only three instruments. After moments spent bickering and the instruments changing hands numerous times, the boys sat down where they stood and began to play. More groups of boys began to trickle into the room until a small collection of friendship groups was scattered across the floor. After a while, and seemingly at his own volition, one of the older students began to sing a *bhajan* for Saraswati, a Hindu goddess associated with knowledge and learning. At certain moments all of the boys were singing each line back, and at other moments the volume of the *bhajan* sunk lower as the participants chatted amongst themselves, only to be given stern looks and the occasional verbal disciplining by those students who were being interrupted. These creative forms of self-organisation with regard to the *bhajan* structure and experience were frequently dotted with pauses as the boys squabbled to take the instruments of those who were clearly more interested in creating their own patterns of sounds rather than beating out the expected rhythm. Fifteen minutes into session a student stood up, hurried to the front, and then lit the oil *diya* lamps lying in front of *murtis* of Bharat Mata, Ram and Sita, and Birsa Munda, a practice traditionally performed at the beginning of worship.

As the lamps flickered into life Sanju walked into the *mandir* and observed for the moment the scene that lay before him: students sitting in groups, irregular participation in the singing, improvised musical rhythms, and a way of choosing which *bhajan* would be sung next based around which group could sing the loudest. As Sanju walked to the front of the *mandir* the students – without a word from the teacher – began to rearrange their spatial organisation and their bodily dispositions into line with what will become apparent are certain normative organisations of performing the ritual. Those pupils who at that moment were sitting in small clusters and were not facing towards the front of the *mandir* adjusted their position into a series of straight lines facing towards the *murtis*. The clapping as the *bhajan* was sung became ordered and matched the rhythm of the instruments. The minority of students whose participation had been structured around both informal conversations together with singing began a consistent pattern of repeating the lines. Whereas before each *bhajan* blurred into one

another as a differing group of students began another hymn, now there were distinct and orderly pauses between the songs, as musical instruments were passed along the lines and each new *bhajan* was chosen from a pre-ordered list. In one such pause Sanju asked the pupils whose job it was that particular week to ensure that the sandals were organised into grids outside the *mandir*, and after a lengthy silence two students stood up and left the session to rearrange the sandals.

Throughout my fieldwork at VKK-run formal schools and hostels similar scenes were enacted in many of the morning and evening *bhajan* singing programmes. Each disciplinary technique – in this case illustrated through Sanju’s presence and importantly his articulation of certain normative approaches to the rituals – worked at producing the singing of the *bhajans* as ordered and disciplined performances through regulating the spatial organisation of bodies and their dispositions. For example, the performance was governed by procedures which when transgressed exposed its normative modes, structures which organised which student was to lead the *bhajan*, whose role it was at which time to use the instruments, who lights the *diya*, who brings and distributes the *prasad*, who sweeps the *mandir* at the close of the ritual, and which pupils were rotated to order the shoes. In the VKK’s normative discourses the *bhajan* singing is thus related to entire structures of associated techniques whose practices are produced as central to the performance of the ritual. And of course, disciplinary procedures operated to regulate those practices which transgressed these normative constructions of the ritual – for example, those pupils who at certain moments engaged in informal conversations during the *bhajan*, arrived late, failed to clap, and positioned their bodies either out of the straight lines or had their backs slouched.

In bringing these everyday scenes and related points into this chapter I am not arguing that the pupils were offering a conscious critique of the VKK’s discursive construction of either the ‘re-ritualization’ of *bhajan* singing or wider questions of contemporary Hindu practices. What is apparent here though is how at differing moments two contrasting approaches to worship were performed and circulated, with each performance inscribing onto the self and the ritual practice differing meanings. In the normative approaches established and regulated daily *bhajan* singing is structured in such a mode so as to perform practices of discipline, the organisation of bodily movements, techniques of self-control, and the performance of hierarchy. Indeed, the discursive organisation of the ritual manages the students into rows, specific roles and

tasks, with rules and regulations over the noise of the instruments and the particular acceptable ways to clap and expected bodily postures ('sit up straight!').

These Foucauldian 'docile bodies' that "may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved...[and are] achieved through strict regiment of disciplinary acts" (1995:136), are thus produced in everyday disciplinary spaces allowing us to approach the normative disciplined performances associated with *bhajan* singing as working on the body as an object and target of power. What we have seen is that the normative constructs of daily *bhajan* singing work on the body and structure its dispositions in a disciplined and ordered manner, a point which both reflects the expected and valorised everyday sensibilities of the ethical Hindu self, and just as importantly works to produce such a self. The discursive structuring, daily reiteration, and importantly, disciplinary regulation of such bodily dispositions then operates to construct the ethical Hindu self and its practices of Hinduism as ordered and disciplined. We have a clear indication here of the contingent nature of *Bhakti* traditions and the extent to which their associated practices such as *bhajan* singing perform modes of order and power which critique conservatively constructed approaches to Hindu rituals. Indeed, the VKK's approach to structuring and regulating the practice work to 're-ritualise' a popular tradition which has been widely presented as offering critiques of ritualism through an emphasis on the path of loving devotion. The ritual or *bhajan* singing then produces forms of subjectivity which associate notions of discipline as a necessary generative daily pattern of self-conduct for the ethical Hindu self.

3.4 Performing Sangathan: Assemblies and Mantras, the Hindu Community, and the Ethical Hindu Self

Two hours later the school day is about to begin at the Navdiha project, and as in every Vanavasi Kalyan educational centre through India, school begins with an assembly. The assembly is a relatively banal aspect of everyday life at the school, and is held every morning in a social space which is neither simply a *mandir* nor a large hall. Indeed, the space operates as the location of sporting activities during heavy rains, as the site for the female students' daily sporting regimes, and as an exam hall. During the morning assemblies the space is inscribed with sacred meanings through the performance of *aarti*, accompanied by the burning of incense to gain the blessing of Bharat Mata, and the repetition of various Hindu *mantras*. As the students filed into the space segregated by grade and gender one of the *sevak*s handed me a piece of lined paper. As I looked at the

words I realised that noted down were the lyrics for today's assembly mantra, the *Gayatri Mantra*. While none of the students needed such sheets due to their routinized performance of the lyrics, it was clear that my inability in yesterday's assembly to recite the *Bharat Bhakti Stotra*, a Sanskrit hymn which narrates the history of Hinduism and India as woven together, had been noticed. Today it seemed no such allowances would be made – we would all recite together. The assembly began with three students being called to the front of the hall and instructed to perform *aarti* to both the poster and small stone *murtis* of Ram and Sita, Saraswati, Birsa Munda, and Bharat Mata. As they circled the camphor flame Sanju initiated the performance and the pupils repeated back:

Om
bhur bhuvah svah
tat savitur varenyam
bhargo devasya dhimahi
dhiyo yo nah pracodayat.⁴

Through exploring the daily chanting of these *mantras* what will become apparent are the particular ways in which such performances provide a sensory repertoire in which the self is imagined as part of a wider and unified Hindu community.⁵

Drawn from the *Rg Veda* (3.62.10) the *Gayatri Mantra* is a single stanza Sanskrit verse which historically has been linked to the performance of Brahmin upper caste male identities, and specifically rituals in which they attain 'twice born status' (Menon 2012: 115). Towards the end of the 19th century Hindu reform movements such as the Arya Samaj as part of their production of notions of a modern ecumenical Hindu identity began to delink the ritual from its restricted upper caste and gendered moorings. Indeed, members of the Arya Samaj reworked the tradition so as to socially disembed the *mantra*, with Bakhle (2005) noting that the association linked its campaigns to overturn gendered hierarchies in terms of access to the *Vedas* with the teaching of the *mantra* to women. Bhatt's (1968) research further develops this point, noting that

⁴ The Mantra is reproduced as disseminated by the school. The Mantra may be translated [Om, earth, atmosphere, sky].
Let us meditate on that desirable splendour of the
(sun-)god, Savitri.
May that one stir our thoughts.
Rg Veda 3.62.10

⁵ Wider research on questions on the relationship between assemblies, celebrating the nation, and productions of community are most notably articulated by Bilig and the daily flag raising rituals and pledges of allegiance in American schools (1995: 50). Furthermore, Bakhle's (2005) and Deshpande's (2006) research illustrates the particular ways in which devotional music and songs have been placed into national canons as a mode of producing Hindu nationalist consciousness.

Samajists positioned teaching the *mantra* as part of its overall project of reorganising Hinduism into merit-based *varna* constructs of community. In both instances then what is apparent are the particular fashions in which the performance of the ritual replaces and reworks constructs of the self – be they caste or gendered – into *reworked* notions of a wider religious community.

The pupils who chant the *mantra* inside the everyday routines of the projects are drawn from a variety of divisional spaces which structure notions of a reified Hindu community, most notably lower castes and tribal sections of the surrounding population. Indeed, approximately 70% of the school's catchment area is drawn from mainly Munda-and Oraon-dominant locales. Apparent with regard to the daily performance of the *mantra* inside the school assembly at Navdiha is that such practices circulate certain approaches to ethical Hindu sensibilities and representation. Note firstly the spatial geographies which are produced by the ritual. Here, we can witness a correspondence between the structures of the school assembly hall and a *mandir*. The space is performatively enacted through Hindu rituals such as the lighting of incense, the performance of *aarti* and the repetition of *mantras*, together with functioning as a space for the beginning of the school day and relevant announcements. I am arguing here that the morning assemblies are enacted as reconstructed *alankara* rituals, in which *murtis* of Ram and Sita, Saraswati, Birsa Munda, and Bharat Mata are daily given ornamentation and power through ritual, a process working parallel to the performance of civic school organisational duties. And, for those students who reside in the hostel facilities of the school, the day formally ends with the chanting of *Vande Mataram*. The official start to the school day begins then with deities awoken and adorned, and ends with the nation – understood here as a gendered Hindu deity – being saluted and 'sung to sleep'. The normative structure of the school day works to produce Hindu practices as woven into daily civic functioning, with the two cohabiting similar spatial and ritual terrain, and importantly, as central to the realization of educational achievement.

The structuring of the everyday routines of the projects through the daily assemblies and the rotation of a restricted canon of *kirtan*, *bhajan*, and *mantra* reciting ensures that pupils gain a level of competence in the *Gayatri Mantra*. Evident here is how inside the project performative acts in everyday life invoke meanings which illustrate a *sangathanist* approach to questions of Hindu representation. The practices construct Hindu society as unified then through the daily performance of uttering the *mantra* in

the school's assembly. Yet, unlike the radical Samajist's practice of teaching the *mantra* as part of a project of disturbing *jati* traditions and reworking their forms into merit-based *varna* constructs, the uttering of the *mantra* in VKK schools is delinked from such a dynamic. Instead, it is the organisation of Hinduism's boundaries that is seen as a task related to regulating sensibilities into a daily auditory performance of symbolic cultural unity which binds together ethical Hindu subjects and wider Hindu society. Deploying Butler's (2007: 188-193) concept of performativity then we can note that such utterances work to produce the illusion of such subject formations and associated constructs of Hindu *sangathan* as ontologically representative of what is in fact being daily performed

These constructs of the self and wider patterns of Hindu representation can be seen to develop through other ritualised prayers, chants, and *mantras*. What I am drawing attention to here are the particular modes in which sounds construct, designate, and allow the imagination of reality. Over the course of my research at the Navdiha School differing *mantras* were selected to introduce and begin the school day. In addition to the *Gayatri Mantra* extracts from the *Bharat Bhakti Stotra* were also sung, the lyrics of which focus upon narrating the history of Hinduism and India as woven together, and linking the health of the two to the degree to which Hindus regulate their everyday behaviour according to what I have outlined as the construct of the ethical Hindu self. This prayer, developed during the 1960s by Sangh activists, exalts a harmonious and strong Bharat, built and led by figures drawn from a pantheon of deities and historical figures that are portrayed as serving the nation's Hindu religious and ethical principles. Through the utterance of such languages the pupils produce a lifeworld of sound which constructs meanings of valorised ethical conduct, with the contemporary performance of the *stotra* working to temporarily link supposed past glories of an ancient Bharat to the present through the reiteration of common ethical practices. In the final verses of the *Stotra* the students sing:

Pratah-Smaranametad yo viditval daratah pather!
Sa Samyag dharmanisthah syatsamsmrta khandabharatah

He who properly understands this prayer and daily recites it with devotion will be a complete and whole religious person
And the picture of Akhanda Bharat [Greater Bharat] will forever remain engraved in his heart.⁶

⁶The transliteration and translation included here are those presented by the school.

In this verse students relate singing and understanding the *Bharat Bhakti Stotra* to reconstructing their daily sensibilities along the lines of *Akbanda Bharat* (Greater/Undivided India). *Akbanda Bharat* here signifies an expression of an ancient, undivided and harmonious India of Hindu solidarity and glory. Singing the *stotra* then works to link the performance of contemporary ethical practices to a constructed past ‘glorious’ Hindu civilisation. While this civilisation is seen as both in the past and carried forward by amongst others notable Hindu reformers, warriors, and deities, the auditory ritual action constructs *Akband Bharat* as a site for contemporary action. Everyday practices then invoke these temporal links, with the pupils through their daily singing inscribing and circulating constructs of the ethical Hindu self which link and produce its associated patterns of daily behaviour to rebuilding a lost Hindu nation.⁷ The significance of sound performances then lies in their referential and importantly their generative power.

This point can be further developed through noting that while the daily *mantras* are generative of wider codes of conduct and produce and invoke temporal links between formations of the ethical Hindu self, the sound performances additionally construct contemporary spatial solidarities between participants, and so the performances allow the imagination of a horizontally organised Hindu community. To help explain this point Anderson’s (2006:27) concept of homogenous, empty time is particularly useful. For Anderson, constructs of ‘Time’ play an important role in producing notions of community, with his research noting for example the role that newspapers had in allowing the imagination of national communities amongst readers. Such forms of community according to Anderson could be ‘imagined’ through the simultaneous linking of what is important to the individual on the one hand, and on the other the news occurring elsewhere, with the two brought into a relationship through reference to a perceived national interest.

Anderson’s approach here is particularly useful with regard to exploring the particular ways in which the daily morning assemblies and the chants, *mantras*, and prayers enable the imagination of a wider Hindu community. I have already noted that

⁷ This singing of nationhood into existence is also evident in India’s school system, with Benei noting the relationship between everyday ritual singing and worshipping the nation in Maharashtrian State schools in contemporary India (2008).

the school day at Navdiha begins with an assembly, a structure which is repeated at VKK-run schools both in Jharkhand and all over the expanse of India in the association's *seva* educational projects. The national spread of such routines is well known to the students, with maps of India displayed on classroom and corridor walls detailing 'snapshots' of certain schools and their day to day activities which I have discussed in this chapter, such as morning *bhajans*, assemblies and *mantras*, *gau seva*, *Rashtra Seva* campaigns, all of which reflect the routines of the pupils at the Navdiha school. And at the same time, these daily routines which stress the relevance of constructed Hindu traditions to everyday life are articulated as an aspect of the wider sensibilities of an ethical Hindu self. Importantly then, these auditory practices gain further efficacy through the particular modes in which they produce bonds of 'Hindu solidarity and community' across space between the pupils and other Hindus with whom they have no knowledge or contact. The ritual performance then sings the nation and its culturally cohesive Hindu community into existence. Indeed, these performances allow the imagination of an Indian national identity which is united through a common series of Hindu practices, and moreover, places the daily practices of the ethical Hindu self as the basis for national unity.

Conclusion

Chapter Five illustrated that essential to the expansion of the VKK's alternative publics were the creative modes of engagement - including the refocused and transgressive - by which *sevak*s negotiated normative discourses of *seva*. Such negotiations, I noted, brought the projects of the VKK into dialogue with differing actors and associations and served to inscribe the discourse of *seva* with formative power over an increasing range of daily practices. Having there examined the modes by which such discursive practices of *seva* produce expansive alternative publics and their dialectical impact upon traditions of service, I began this chapter with an ethnographic vignette which detailed a seemingly banal occurrence inside a VKK-organised *seva* educational project. Here, Navjot's attire invoked representations of belonging. This has been a key point of this chapter - daily practices in the projects can be witnessed to invoke meaning, a point I illustrated with practices of personal and public hygiene, the singing of *bhajans* and *mantras*. These practices signified normative Hindu nationalist sensibilities associated with an ethical Hindu self - meanings of an internal and external Other, Hindu cultural supremacy, order, discipline, and Hindu *sangathan*.

Yet, as Butler notes (2007: 190), surface significations are never fully realizable. This requires then daily structures which enforce reiterative everyday acts in order to invoke the normative ethical meanings and regulate transgressive practices. Informal disciplinary mechanisms – in Navjot’s case, Chetan’s verbal punishment – were the form that such attempts took to regulate practices which circulate outside of the VKK’s alternative publics back into sensibilities associated with ethical Hindu acts. Moreover, this significant point regarding *seva* and discursive structures, reiteration and regulation was consistently argued throughout the text – in the classes detailing cleanliness and hygiene, in *Rashtra Seva* campaigns, in the ordering of *bhajans*, and in the chanting of *mantras*. Importantly then, Hindu nationalist discourses circulate inside the projects of the VKK as a series of reiterative and disciplined performative acts which regulate daily ethical conduct.

In continuing to construct this argument relating to examining the relationship between service and the development of the Hindu nationalist subject in India further related and significant questions arise. If Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* are performative acts which are refocused, transgressed, and regulated, to what extent can we witness and examine such discourses as offering avenues of empowerment? To what extent do subaltern participants rearticulate discourses of *seva* to ‘talk-back’ and fragment its focuses on ethical reform and associated sensibilities of order, discipline, cultural supremacy and Hindu *sangathan*? These important questions form the central argument of Chapter Seven’s examination of the performative acts circulating inside the VKK’s *seva* Gram Vikas (Rural Development) centres.

Chapter Seven

Modes of Empowerment

Introduction

Poonam and Priyanka Debate Seva and Ethics

It was Saturday afternoon, and nine participants in the VKK-run Gram Vikas Kendra (Rural Development Centre) *seva* project in the Village of Khangar were busy sorting through a bundle of *mabua* flowers. The Kendra at Khangar is one of 767 run by the VKK in Jharkhand, reaching, over 8,000 people. Spread out across the floor, going from the front of the Kendra to its rear, the members -- of whom the majority were women, and as I later learnt struggled on 'the margins of the margins' in the village -- had organised themselves into a production line, with each participant carrying out a series of allotted roles. I was conscious that I was under visual supervision of the male members of the Kendra. Positioned at the front alongside Poonam, a part time *sevak* who helped organise a number of local Kendras, we were tasked with separating parts of the flower into those that would form the basis for the range of *mabua* flower chutneys that the project produced.¹ Further down the line participants were weighing out a given number of the flowers, with others then together selecting a collection of spices and herbs. Poonam began to explain to me the nature of the activity:

You know, if you want to study development, you have come to the right place. I'm glad that you have come here, you'll see a new side to development, one that does not talk about the big projects, or the government workers. We don't do development in fact, we do culture. In fact, for us they are the same.

As will be apparent by now, such 'Hindu cultural' inscriptions onto the *seva* discourses of the VKK circulated as normative approaches to a range of questions – evident, as we have seen, in the spheres of the *shikshan* (education) and *aroyga* (health) projects, together with framings which informed the practices of those who aided in the wider organisation of the array of *seva* programmes. I was interested in understanding how

¹ According to the Vanavasi Kalyan Kendra's 2009-10 Annual Report, the fifty Gram Vikas Kendras in the district of Dhanbad have produced 3052 kg of *mabua* chutneys and pickles, 367 kg of *mabua* jam, 75 kg of *mabua* other sauces (2010).

these alternative ‘cultural’ discursive practices were related to the VKK’s approach to questions of development and empowerment, and more importantly, the particular ways in which their practices were constructive of ways of acting on and thinking about local and wider concerns. And so here I found myself at a VKK-run Gram Vikas project.

Poonam continued:

Any successful approach to development then must focus upon cultural questions. That is why today we will begin to make another batch of our special *mabua* flower chutney. Some people here [in Khangar and the surrounding villages] will instead make alcohol with the flower, and that is a problem because poor people will spend their money on the drink, [and] then so many problems arrive in their house and our community. So, do you see how cultural awareness is relevant to development?

As I thought about Poonam’s comments on development, seemingly approached as an ethical way of acting in the world, as a focus upon reforming the conduct of “poor people”, a social drama began to unfold around me. Priyanka, another participant in the project, followed on from Poonam’s approach of understanding development as located in bringing daily activity into constructed ethical norms. Priyanka began to discuss issues of corruption in the village, and pointed the figure squarely at the village *Panchayat*. “For example...,” argued Priyanka, “...when the government worker provided them [the *Panchayat*] with fruit seeds and saplings to distribute, they were not distributed evenly amongst the villagers. In fact, it was not until we had our own programme,” Priyanka said proudly, “that people here could receive fruit seeds and saplings, and instruction on how to grow them. Here then is another example of how a lack of cultural awareness is related to development.” Poonam stopped. Glancing up from her task she retorted to Priyanka’s comments:

Come on sister, what do you expect? It’s the way. Complaining about the government will never get us what we need - we know that these things can’t change, but we can change. It is up to us. You know... I often think that the unofficial slogan of our organisation should be ‘*nach na jane angan tedha*’ (lit. ‘knows no dance, claims the stage is tilted’, more broadly: ‘A poor workman blames his tools!’)

Over the next five minutes the debate continued between participants. I was intrigued. Both actors were highlighting the centrality of ethical acts to development, and so located development as both constructed through and represented by everyday conduct and the degree to which it invoked ‘Hindu cultural awareness’. Yet, both were also focusing upon differing locations for ethical reform, with Priyanka highlighting what she argued were the corrupt practices of the village elite which transgressed

cultural and ethical norms and so served to block development in contrast to the practices of the Gram Vikas, while Poonam focused upon bringing the everyday acts of the marginalised into line with certain cultural and ethical norms. Furthermore, such a lively discussion was occurring inside a centre in which the relationship between ‘developmental’ and ‘ethical’ acts was debated in a public space in the village in which the participants spoke almost exclusively from gendered and wider marginal positions. As I was listening to the debate questions began to be formed in my mind: Why were daily actions central to the VKK’s approach to development? How were the developmental programmes themselves productive of such daily sensibilities? How did such ‘developmental acts’ reference notions of empowerment? And what did this have to do with the *mahua* flower?

I began this chapter with an ethnographic vignette as it illustrates the central arguments of both this wider work and, in particular, the fashions in which this chapter will continue to build upon themes surrounding associations of service and the development of the Hindu nationalist subject. In the previous chapter I examined and illustrated the modes by which Hindu nationalist discourses circulated inside the projects as a series of stylized performative and reiterative acts which invoked meanings of order, discipline, Hindu *sangathan* and its internal and external Other. Moreover, I noted how discourses of *seva* worked to structure daily life and police transgressive practices. That the Hindu ethical body is daily performative then allows us understand *seva* as a disciplinary practice. And yet, following on from Butler’s approach to gender and parodic performances (2007: 194-205), this approach to *seva* does not imply that to be constituted by discourse is to be determined by its practices. I am not arguing here for a pre-discursive ‘I’, but rather, suggesting an approach of examining practices of discursive negotiation which are evident in Priyanka’s rearticulation of the location of transgressive practices to include those in positions of village power.

Yet, in raising issues of agency and rearticulation a question arises: what discursive practices are coming under such negotiations? The first section of this chapter will contextualise and outline an approach to development and empowerment which highlights how these practices can be understood as performative, together with advancing the theoretical tools to explore how discourses of development can be seen to be negotiated. The second section of the chapter will examine the normative constructs of empowerment and development circulating inside the VKK’s

development projects, points hinted towards by Poonam. I will analyse how such ‘developed’ and ‘empowered’ performative acts operate to produce and divide constructs of the ethical Hindu self alongside a binary division of an ‘active’ and ‘empowered’ *sevak*, whose practices stress ethical norms, and a ‘passive’ participant, whose ‘undeveloped’ subjectivities require managing and disciplining into the sensibilities of the ethical Hindu self through a process of moral reform. This process of ‘becoming’ the construct of the ethical self through developmental acts is for participants then a process of Othering.

The premise of the third section of this chapter questions the over-determining nature of such discursive framings. I will challenge here an assumption that the projects of the VKK are solely the location of ‘disempowered’ subjects. While such developmental performative acts may inscribe participants in fields of power, at the same time subjects can be seen to creatively negotiate these normative discursive positionings. I will illustrate this point regarding subaltern agency firstly with examples from gendered and marginalised participants and their challenging of village elites in their struggle to establish a Kendra for *seva*-inspired village development. And secondly, through examining instances where subjects use the resources of the normative approaches to *seva* and development to in fact critique its forms and ‘talk back’. Through bringing to the forefront the agency of the participants then we will encounter how subaltern participants use such normative discourses to open up avenues of empowerment.

1. Approaching Empowerment and Development

In the age of neo-liberalism practices of empowerment have undergone a significant degree of reinscription. Frequently articulated as an alternative to ‘welfare dependency’, empowerment has become a buzzword for governments and voluntary associations as existing states rework what Chatterjee (2004: 69) labels their ‘category of governance’ along the lines of increased economic liberalization, and through this process, have allowed the transformation of constructs of citizenship and community. Discourses of empowerment then have become an important weapon in the arsenal of neoliberal governmentality. Following on from Foucault (1997), the concept of governmentality refers to a significant transformation in the exercise of governance from a sovereign power concerned with the right to take life and control over territory, to the management of life through institutions and practices. Foucault’s concept of

governmentality draws our attention to the technologies by which conduct is regulated and directed towards certain ends, or, as he comments in his course *On the Government of the Living*, it is “understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour. Government of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself” (Foucault 1997:82). Indeed, Rose (1996) and Rose *et al* (2006) note that the concept requires an exploration of the patterns in which everyday and seemingly mundane practices shape subjectivities. Crucially then, these modes and locations of power are not limited to state institutions, but rather encompass voluntary associations and the particular techniques they circulate which regulate conduct and manage its forms towards certain ends. I bring this theoretical set of tools into outlining my approach as contemporary research is increasingly concerned with the particular ways in which concepts such as governmentality can be applied to read and explore discourses of development, and in particular, the specific strategies their discourses deploy to manage conduct into various normative constructs of the ‘developed’ and ‘empowered’ self (Sharma 2008, Barry et al 1996, Rose 1996, Ferguson 1994, Escobar, 1995, Sachs 1992, Esteva 1992).

Following on from these approaches my own readings of questions of ‘empowerment’ and ‘development’ focus upon these discourses as productive of particular and variable formations of ‘the empowered’ and ‘developed’ self, whose conduct is brought into line with and invokes constructs of the ethical Hindu self. This approach is extended and gains strength through being brought into dialogue with Butler’s theorisation of both the productive and the performative nature of discourse (Butler 1993, 2004, 2007). Briefly restated, Butler’s concept of performativity allows us to explore the manners in which the VKK’s discourses of development and empowerment “bring to life that to which they claim to refer, rather than merely naming something already present” (Kondo 1997: 8), and so how subjectivities and constructs of community are produced and negotiated through ‘empowered’ and ‘developed’ acts.

While this chapter’s theoretical insights have gained from critical approaches which explore the disciplinary power of discursive framings of empowerment and development and their relationship to constructs of the self and community, I should like to also note that such a theoretical lens can work to mistakenly imply deterministic foreclosure. It is important then that my outlined approach to empowerment and development is brought into dialogue with literature which questions the over-

determining power of such systems of meanings in relation to the subject (Bhabha 1997, Chakrabarty 2000). Importantly, through focusing upon the 'active' aspects of subjectivity we are able to recognise the plural ways in which such actors negotiate and rearticulate Hindu nationalist discourses of development to break down certain alternative positionings of the subaltern self - be they tribal, gendered, class or caste-based and their various intersections. This is not to argue, however, that discourses of development which circulate in the *sewa* projects can be seen to be reiterated or rearticulated in such a manner so as to move the subject outside fields of power. Rather, these practices bring alternative forms of power into operation. Importantly then, through reconceptualising the agency of those actors who participate inside the projects we are in a stronger position to grasp the differing ways in which meanings of development and empowerment are able to produce broad publics *and* reconstruct everyday dispositions along the lines of the ethical Hindu self, not through a process of over-determination, but rather through negotiated rearticulation. In short, subaltern actors approach norms of empowerment and development with a voice, a point we should be quick to recognise.

This exploration of the way in which we can witness subaltern actors negotiating and transgressing norms of development and empowerment follows on from Mohanty's wider critique of the particular epistemological systems which produce poor and, I might add here, rural and Hindu nationalist, gendered subjects as victims (of either development or Hindu nationalism), and so while they may "have 'needs' and 'problems'...few if any have 'choices' or the freedom to act" (1994: 206). Moreover, through avoiding framing actors in a generalized fashion as simply subordinated due to their participation in the projects of the VKK, my approach allows the presentation and exploration of how circulating and alternative discourses of development - and this is a point I noted before - are productive of subject formations such as the ethical Hindu self through the actor's own reiterative performative acts. Power in terms of discourses of development then become less a practice which is 'held' by coherent groups and exercised over the subaltern, but rather it can be approached as a technique of daily practice which offers strategies towards constructs of empowerment and development. Or as Butler notes, "There is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability" (1993: 9).

2. *Seva*, Development and the Ethical Hindu Self

2.1 *Selfless Service as Alternative*

Practices of empowerment and development inside the VKK's Gram Vikas projects link 'Hindu ethical' and 'Hindu cultural' orders to everyday actions and sensibilities. Development and empowerment then according to the normative approaches circulating inside the Gram Vikas projects stand in an alternative relation to, for example, secular liberal approaches articulated by the Jharkhandi chapters of the 'Society for Participatory Action and Reflection' (SPAR)(SPAR: Annual Report 2011/12)². For example, SPAR encourages and raises awareness amongst subaltern actors to access State-provided development packages, lobby Block Development Officers, and situates the production of handicrafts as a mode of empowerment through moving the subject into a closer relationship with the market. By contrast, for the VKK, the production and sale of *mabhua* flower chutneys are linked to both a market relation and importantly a 'self-making project' of disciplining everyday conduct - here related to leisure activities - into ethical Hindu norms. Discourses of development despite being located in a similar practice regarding the use of local resources for cottage industry production are given differing meanings with regard to the self, the market, and the State.

Indeed, and developing this point further regarding the relationship between the self, the State, and Hindu ethical sensibilities, the normative approaches of empowerment and development circulating inside the Gram Vikas projects view the State as largely irrelevant as it approaches the questions without reference to lived Hindu traditions. Mithali, the full time *sevak* who helped organise the VKK's Gram Vikas projects, articulated this point to me regarding the necessary 'selfless nature of service' to rural development projects, and specifically, that development could only be successful if it was motivated by a duty to improve "the whole picture of our society; lives, attitudes, culture". As we were driving to a Gram Vikas Kendra in the village of Harinachapar, Mithali expanded upon this point while outlining the role of part time *sevaks* in the projects. The role of these part time volunteers is central to organising and reproducing the *seva* projects. Each part time *sevak* is responsible for organising the activities of a small number of development Kendras in their locality. This includes visiting villages to propagate the VKK's approach to development, initial meetings with actors who desire to start a project, arranging for the construction of a local centre and

² See further <<http://www.sparindia.org/#>>

so coordinating the raising of finances, guiding participants in the process of founding cooperative banks and then aiding in the accounts management, and generally taking a leading role in setting and monitoring the Kendra's activities. Each *sevak* receives initial training and travels to the organisation's headquarters to attend the monthly organising meetings where administrative matters are dealt with and developmental policy outlined and set.

While discussing the importance of the part time *sevak*s Mithali was keen to stress that central to the VKK's approach to development was the *selfless* nature of developmental activism, and so the necessity of these practices being linked to *seva*. Mithali commented that this selfless nature of service was reflected partly through the organisation paying each part time *sevak* only a nominal fee for the work:

Each worker receives only a small fee. This is a small allowance so they can travel to other centres that they run, and come to Ranchi to be trained and take part in our monthly committees. The money is little, and it is not a lot, but it shouldn't be either. You know, we are not like these government organisations, or these rich city NGOs. We serve the poor *nanavasi*, and uplift our Hindu society, and we do it quietly. This means we have little money to give our workers. But it is not just this. Even if we did take money from the government we would not pay our workers anymore. You cannot pay for what is your duty.

Mithali stopped, and then proceeded to explain the point with an analogy related to family and household responsibilities:

Think of parents. Do they pay the child to make sure they grow up with good morals and so can contribute to the nation? No, of course not. Does the child give the parents money for food and clothes? No, one more time, of course not. Good children, those who have been taught well and raised correctly know it is their duty, and they pay the parents through being respectful and studying at school, and bringing pride to our society. This is how families function. And so it is with *sevak*s.

Mithali's comments are of interest as they offer an illustration of a number of concerns which relate to VKK's approach to developmental practices. Firstly, I noted in Chapter Five that framing questions of development as organised around 'selfless duty' is a key theme which runs throughout a broad array of associations which practise activist tradition of *seva*. Secondly, relating development as necessarily linked to selfless service as religious duty works to obscure the conditions within which marginalized rural, lower caste and tribal actors exist. These practices are both structurally exclusionary in terms of restricting the position of part time *sevak*s to those rural

subalterns who can possess sufficient economic and cultural capital to volunteer. As I will argue, these approaches to development are productive in terms of constructing notions of the self related to an active and engaged *sevak*, and then its Other, a passive subject who exists at the margins and is served, and so through this relationship can come to manage their conduct so as to perform the normative subjectivities of the ethical Hindu self. Before I examine this further I will first bring to the forefront the relationship between privilege and power in the rural Jharkhandi communities in which the Gram Vikas projects operate. This discussion will help us understand how the selfless nature of service, organised through only offering modest stipends to the volunteers, works to erect barriers which exclude those marginal actors who lack economic and cultural capital from taking up the position of *sevak*, and so organises their participation as passive subjects of developmental acts.

2.2 *The Performative Acts of Selfless Service: The Active Sevak and the Passive Participant*

The majority of the part time *sevaks* from across Jharkhand whom I met at the Gram Vikas monthly training and organising sessions held at the Rani Sati Mandir in Ranchi spoke from positions of a higher caste and more powerful class background than those who were the day to day participants in the projects. Such a point was illustrated in both discussions at the projects and at the Ranchi organising meetings, and through research collected through a series of simple questionnaires.³ For example, in terms of family access to and ownership of resources such as land, bullocks, pump wells, and electricity, the *sevaks* clearly occupied a privileged position in their rural locales in comparison to those whose relationship with the Gram Vikas projects was restricted to participation. Disparities too were recognisable in terms of access to cultural capital.⁴ For example, the *sevaks* consistently completed higher school grades, and were more likely to regularly attend *Panchayat* meetings and be members of other associations.

Developing this point regarding the disparities in terms of rural hierarchy and their reflection inside the developmental projects Gram Vikas Kendras further, I will bring to the forefront issues surrounding disparities in cultural capital such as literacy. A

³ A range of valid concerns has been articulated with regard to the extent to which data from questionnaires is fully reflective of the reality its purports to objectively represent. Such material therefore needs to be understood as negotiated, and is best approached in a critical fashion through awareness of its constitutive forms of power, and necessarily requiring therefore an alternative range of validations (Russell Bernard 2011).

⁴ My approach to 'cultural' capital is drawn from Bourdieu's theorisation of the concept which I outlined in Chapter Five. See further Bourdieu's *The Forms of Capital* (1986), *The Logic of Practice* (1990), *Practical Reason* (2003) and *Distinction* (2010).

requirement of training to become a *sevak* in the Gram Vikas projects is a confident standard of literacy, explained as required due to the administrative tasks associated with organising development activities. Although illustrating a dramatic improvement in the recorded census period between 2010 and 2011, female literacy in Jharkhand remains below the national average at 52%. Literacy is defined in census documents as the ability to read and write the person's name and formulate simple sentences. Despite a confident standard of literacy being a requirement for any part or full time *sevak*, the VKK itself has little in the way of a program designed to offer such educational skills to those who desired to take up the position yet whose literacy levels fell below the required standard. Of course a range of factors impact upon access to education: the distance to schools, an adequate numbers of teachers, school facilities and resources, the relationship between qualifications offered and the demands of the employment market, and just as importantly, the particular local contexts in which communities struggle to ensure that children complete their education. Such factors are additionally mediated through disparities in terms of class, caste, and gender. And despite government-sponsored 'Mid-Day Meal' schemes, these subaltern positions strike particularly hard and work to restrict access to education. Indeed, only one quarter of children in Jharkhand complete their education. This requirement of literacy, when taken alongside the absence of any concerted effort to offer such skills to those who desire to take up a position as a *sevak*, works to exclude from these active positions those participants who have little access to cultural capital such as literacy and live at the most precarious edges of the margins. This does have implications.

Prioritizing access to cultural capital in contexts where such forms are unevenly distributed and encoding such a requirement as a necessary attribute to becoming a *sevak*, together with concurrently referencing development as linked to *selfless* service works to exclude those without access to economic and cultural capital with regard to developmental acts. Indeed, it is only those who have a high standard of literacy and are financially secure and so can offset the expenses of being a part time *sevak* and can practically afford to dedicate sections of their week (with only a nominal fee) who are able take up its position. Importantly then, in the normative approaches to development articulated by the VKK, it is those actors who already occupy positions of hierarchy who are constructed as active subjects and so are able to inscribe at training sessions and organising meetings practices of development with meaning, travel to build its networks, set the organisation's agendas, allocate finances, and more broadly oversee the day to

day workings of the projects. This active self then is created from divisions in economic and cultural capital and produces a pliable and passive internal Other. Indeed, this Other is viewed as needing to be managed into development and so without agency. These approaches to development produce an internal Hindu Other which is to be integrated into ethical Hindu acts and forms of organisation as a passive subject by active *sevak*s.

Indeed, the circulating discourses move this passive Other into positions of subordination in terms of their own agency with regard to articulating developmental practices. Instead, we can witness how the normative practices of development empower the activity and notions of development of the *sevak*, and importantly work to regulate the daily sensibilities of the 'passive' Other into ethical Hindu norms as articulated by the 'active *sevak*' who occupies positions of hierarchy and privilege in both the rural context and inside the Gram Vikas projects. The normative discourses of empowerment and development which circulate inside the alternative publics of the Gram Vikas projects then are helpfully understood as Butlerian 'performative acts' which are productive of positions of hierarchy and power.

This process of Othering is further evident in a range of approaches to development articulated by Anuja, a part time *sevak*. Anuja ran a number of Gram Vikas centres in the Gumla district, and also taught a variety of the association's training sessions at the Rani Sati Mandir. After one such session Anuja was encouraged by Mithali to describe to me her own involvement in the VKK. I was interested to know why Anuja had decided to become a part time *sevak*. "For me," Anuja commented, "it was a personal wish, and working for society is good work. I can come here, stay at this centre, teach, fix problems, and then go back to my village Kendra, travel to other villages, all the time serving others and working for our society." For Anuja then, the position as a part time *sevak* could be taken and its activities pursued, with the normative discourses positioning her therefore as an 'active self' whose participation offered her avenues of empowerment in terms of contributing to questions of development and overcoming gendered restrictions to public space and life. "Could all people in the Gram Vikas Kendra choose then to become a volunteer," I asked Anuja. Anuja replied:

Yes. But you have to be careful. For example, there are always some people who take too long to pay back the loan that we lend to them, some people are just incapable of saving money, and some spend the money on fixing their homes. How could these people be volunteers if they cannot even manage their own money, let alone a group's finances?

These articulations by a part time *sevak* who is heavily involved in the tasks of inscribing, circulating, and practising the normative approach to development offers clear evidence of the particular fashions in which such discourses of *seva* structure participation in the projects and so construct ‘empowered practices’. These practices are located in the characteristics and daily sensibilities of the ‘active’ *sevaks*, and then their Other, whose dispositions need to be regulated by those whose disciplinary power derives from their existing access to forms of cultural and economic capital. Indeed, think back here to Mithali’s metaphorical use of the parent/child relationship as a way in which to explain the VKK’s approach to duty, service and development. Anuja’s dialogue brings these themes to the forefront again as the recipients of the *seva* projects are infantilised due to their supposed fiscal weaknesses, and are therefore dependent upon the ‘duty’ of parental *sevaks* whose actions are valorised as responsible, developed, and representative of the ethical Hindu self. It is the highly valorised actions of the ostensibly ‘responsible’ *sevak* therefore which form the ethical standards within which the subjectivities of the marginal and passive subaltern must be regulated inside.

These approaches are further evident in VKK recruitment material distributed to students at various colleges who are considering taking up a position as a full time *sevak*. Here, participants in the projects are constructed as “neglected by many”, “less educated”, “without enough food or medicine”, and yet, with the involvement of VKK *sevaks* “in this noble cause” capable of “superb art and potential” and who “in a nutshell are a hidden mine of gold” (*Shraddha* 2011). Empowerment and development are then inscribed not with meanings of solidarity, or bringing to the forefront the aspirations and voices of those subaltern groups who struggle in rural locales without sufficient access to capital to enable them to volunteer in the developmental projects of the VKK. Rather, developmental acts are productive of alternative formations of the self and community which reference hierarchy in new fields of power. Discursive practices of development and empowerment are thus both productive and performative.

2.2 *Samskars, the Mahua Flower, and Alcohol Consumption*

I will now draw attention to a specific developmental practice which relates to constructing everyday *samskars*. The focus will be on the Gram Vikas’ practice of transforming the *mahua* flower into a variety of culinary products, as opposed to local alternative traditions of fermenting the flower to produce alcohol. I met Jhulan, a part time *sevak*, at one of the association’s Gram Vikas Kendras in the village of Deodra,

Dhanbad district. Deodra was a small hamlet with a population of approximately six hundred residents, the majority of whom worked as agricultural labourers. The village was 90% tribal. Surrounding the village, which was only partially connected to the road, lay acres of paddy and forest. Jhulan had joined the Gram Vikas Kendra in the village when it was first founded four years ago, and was encouraged to do so by her father, who was a member of the local *Panchayat*. Deodra's Gram Vikas project, Jhulan informed me, involved around nine people, with the construction of the Kendra financed by the 'Dhanbad circle' of *sevak*s whom I discussed in my fifth chapter. Indeed Dilip, whose transgressive articulations of *seva* formed a central theme of that chapter, regularly financed the project's cooperative bank through matching financially the monies raised by the chapter. In addition to the bank, Jhulan commented that the chapter ran a range of programs, including the production of handicrafts such as *diya* lamps which were to be sold at the upcoming Hindu festival of Diwali, the distribution and planting of fruit-tree seeds (mango and papaya) and spice seeds (chilli and ginger), and the construction of a '*jal* pond' to collect runoff surface water. Additionally, the Kendra also functioned as a location where doctors who volunteered in the VKK's medical camps would run smaller health clinics, and where over the coming months there were plans to hold a monthly teaching session on 'soil and water management' for the village farmers. And as seemed to be the case at many of the Kendras in which I spent time researching, small cloth sacks of *mabua* flower were stacked neatly at the side of the hall, evidence of the chapter's anti-alcohol consumption campaigns.

After pointing out to Jhulan that the chapter appeared to be fairly active, I asked to what extent did she feel that they were successful? For example, what would her recommendations be for other, non-VKK developmental associations? Jhulan responded by suggesting that key to the Gram Vikas projects and successful development was an indigenous and culturally focused articulation of the practice:

The question is one of development and dependency (*adbinata*). Development cannot just come through the government's work and charity. Let those who would focus on building large roads or providing government work do their work. You will see that after a time this does not create development, just dependency on the government or some other people. Our success is because we recognise that development means Hindu cultural awareness too. With this people can develop themselves and the community and not be always blaming others. There is no point in some government worker giving villages more money. It isn't a solution because it will be wasted. Now you can understand our successes – although we are smaller we work better because instead of

giving and then leaving, we serve our community through seeing development as creating the conditions where character traits (*samskars*) can grow and so our members have the ability to improve themselves.

A number of points are of interest here in exploring the VKK's approach to development and this clear focus upon linking these practices to "creating the conditions where character traits can grow". Firstly, note that 'development' without 'Hindu culture' is produced as leading to 'dependency' on the government and voluntary associations. In this sense the sphere of the State and its intervention into social life is seen as ideally minimal, with questions of development located as village-centred projects which are focused upon reworking the sensibilities of actors through appeals to constructs of ethical behaviour.⁵ For the normative approaches circulating in the VKK's Gram Vikas projects, regular participation in the development programmes is seen as productive of a range of *samskars* which are constructed as both creators and markers of the daily subjectivities of the empowered and ethical Hindu self. Jhulan expressed this relationship between regular practices in the programmes as productive of certain *samskars* succinctly when we continued discussing what she perceived were the successes of the projects.

What makes us successful...," commented Jhulan, "is that we don't talk about 'rights'. Too many people think that the government is responsible for development. But I ask you, how will the government stop you from having too many children? And then people shout out that the government has to take care of their children. So, this is not a problem of development, it is a problem of thinking (*sachna*) discipline (*anushasit karna*. Lit 'to discipline', more broadly 'to practise self-control') and culture (*sanskriti*).

I asked Jhulan how the local branches within which she worked approached development in such a manner which was related not to 'rights' claimed against the State, but rather as 'thinking', 'discipline', and 'culture'.

If you spend a long time here, you will notice a number of things. Firstly, it is in the villages that you will find people who are poor in money, but who are rich in their hearts. But at the same time such characteristics do not lead to development. People need guidance to allow their true talents to grow. This is our work, we help our society to gain good characteristics through our programmes. So, you already know about our *mabua* flower. You know that people collect the flower to make and sell *mabuali*, and then people all over the society will be drinking it. This means that instead of saving money, they are spending

⁵ This point regarding the State is more widely a theme which is shared across associations and approaches to *sewa*, and is seen from the VKK, to Jayaprakash Narayan's 'Social Constructionist' movements (Shah 1977a, 1997b, 1997c), Gandhi's approach to post-colonial nation building (Chatterjee 1986, Gandhi 1997) and the Ramakrishna Mission's (Beckerlegge 1999, 2000).

it all of the time. So the problem here is how people are acting, and it's not something the government can solve, because it is a question of an absence of discipline and cultural awareness.

Jhulan went on to list a variety of issues which she argued were a consequence of this lack of discipline and cultural awareness which was represented through this particular quotidian leisure practice of consuming alcohol. These included 'laziness', debt, drunkenness, dirty housing, disengagement from village life, and a lack of any desire to improve the productivity of land, so leading to malnutrition. What we have here then are a number of discursive movements which are then inscribed upon developmental practices. Firstly, a seemingly banal leisure activity is produced as partially causative of a range of social problems related to questions of development. Secondly, the consumption of alcohol is then linked to constructs of personal daily conduct, and the extent to which these daily practices are informed by characteristics such as 'cultural awareness' and 'discipline'. The issue raised then by Jhulan and reflected by the Gram Vikas' *mahua* flower programmes focuses less upon the leisure activity of drinking itself, but rather what this practice is constructed as representative of – that of an 'undisciplined' self, whose everyday sensibilities needs to be regulated inside the normative subjectivities of the ethical Hindu subject. Indeed, Jhulan continued to talk at length with regard to the productive potential of the *mahua* programmes:

What we do then is encourage people to join us in collecting the flower. We do this at regular times. They can store what we have collected at the Kendra. And then instead of selling the flower to those who will make alcohol, or maybe even making it themselves, we make pickles, jams, and sauces. Then we will pack it, and every month I will collect what has been made and bring it to Ranchi. Then it will be sold under the label Vikas, with the money then going into our bank. Or, we can use it to feed our own families. And of course this has health benefits, but others too. Through this programme people learn how being disciplined leads to development. You see, working for the programme gives us all a structure in our lives. You might think it's easy, but it's actually very complicated, and everyone has their own roles and responsibilities. The programme then teaches a range of new ideas about our culture, raises money for our projects, but most importantly it makes us self-reliant and disciplined, and so then we can have development. It's the whole package!

Jhulan's extended comment offers evidence that the normative discursive practices and meanings which are inscribed upon the *mahua* programme are helpfully understood using Foucault's notions of governmentality and Butler's outlining of performativity. Indeed, such approaches to development provide resources for subjects to manage everyday conduct into states of a 'healthy Hindu body' which relates to

development and is inscribed with ethical Hindu norms. Moreover, such technologies of the self are necessarily constitutive of subject formations through the management of daily conduct, and importantly, their performative reiteration as regular activities inside the Gram Vikas projects. Development then is related to regulating and managing the everyday sensibilities of those who exist and struggle to survive in India's rural margins into codes of conduct such as discipline and temperance associated with ethical Hindu norms.

3. Spaces of Empowerment and 'Talking Back'

Yet, following on from Butler's approach to gender (2007: 190), and Bhabha's (1997) and Chakrabarty's (2000) own critical approaches to the relationship between discourse, power, and the self, it is my contention that such subject formations are never fully internalized. Such a point will be the focus of this final section of the chapter. Specifically, I will illustrate how participants inside the projects negotiate such discursive positionings with regard to their construction as passive 'Others' through their rearticulation of the circulating normative approaches to development and empowerment. My premise then is that through continuing to examine the Gram Vikas Kendra at Khangar, we will see how such a process of discursive 'Othering' is rearticulated by participants in a fashion which opens up paths of empowerment, illustrating then both subaltern-negotiated agency at the margins and how the VKK's *seva* projects are sites where power is reiterated *and* rearticulated. I will illustrate this point firstly with the participants' struggle to construct a Kendra in Khangar, and secondly, through bringing to the forefront where participants rearticulated the location of practices which transgressed constructs of the ethical Hindu self.

3.1 *Seva and Spaces of Empowerment*

It was early evening in the village of Khangar, Dhanbad. This was now my fifth visit to the village's Gram Vikas Kendra. There were nine members of the program in attendance that night, seven of whom were women, with the remaining two husbands of two of the participants. We had just returned from collecting the *mabua* flower, and from the behaviour of the men – and the apparent disdain that the women had for their overall incompetence in collecting the flower – it was apparent that their participation today arose not out of a longstanding interest in the project, but rather so as to ensure my own behaviour was monitored. Sitting inside the specially built Kendra, I quickly

took note of the scene: cloth bundles containing the flower lay on the floor in neat piles, *dimas* handicrafts were stacked at the rear of the hall, and on tables pushed to the side were small potted saplings and a range of sieves, seed packets, and spades. Adorning the walls were posters explaining how ‘*gau seva*’ was vital for development, and hung up alongside these were picture *murtis* of Ram, Sita, and Bharat Mata. One of the participants, Rumeli, began to ask me in a bemused tone of voice why I had travelled half way across the world to visit their village. Conceding that her subtle mockery of western researchers was somewhat valid, I asked Rumeli what was it that motivated her to spend hours every week in and around the Kendra participating in the various programmes. Rumeli commented:

Actually I was convinced by Poonam [the organiser of the local chapters] to do some work here. They had some small samplings and seeds to give to people. We began to speak about the situation in here, about the lack of development. One thing that Poonam said seemed important – that all the people know that the situation is bad, but very few people will do anything about it. And she’s right. There is no point complaining about the government if we can’t change ourselves. I invited Poonam to our village so she could see what we could be doing to change the situation, and she came and spoke to the Panchayat. A few of us were really impressed, and agreed that a change in the village requires a change firstly in our thoughts. So a few of us began to collect the flowers as a way to show how being culturally aware can improve the village. This is why I continue to come, because I understand, we all do, that improvement begins by improving culture. You have one, you have the other.

Rumeli frames her own participation as related to the normative practices of development circulating in the Gram Vikas projects. As the conversation continued, Rumeli explained that as the weeks went on more people began to express interest in their activities, and with this came a desire to engage with a variety of the other programmes offered by the organisation, such as the sewing machine training and self-employment opportunities. Yet, this presented a small problem. If the participants desired to expand the Gram Vikas’ development projects then they would require a small building within which the activities could occur and materials be stored.

To continue then with the normative practices of development articulated by the VKK a space in the village needed to be found. Rumeli began to explain to me the difficulties they had encountered in constructing such a Kendra space. These Gram Vikas centres, she explained, had been built in neighbouring villages, and most had faced similar problems. In this village, the main problem related to land and the village *Pradban*. At first, the participants were told that no land was available for the centre.

After Rumeli along with a *sevak* from the VKK located a plot of land on top of a steep and rocky incline adjacent to the village, the *Pradhan* then argued at a *Panchayat* meeting that none of them had the mandate to authorise its construction. Besides, the *Pradhan* said, there was already a recently built *Panchayat Bhavan* which the government had constructed. “Despite arguing for what seemed like weeks, and having meeting after meeting, and even raising the issue at the *Gram Sabha*, in the end we were just told that if we were so keen then just hold our activities in the *Panchayat Bhavan*...,” summarised Niyati, another of the participants. “We discussed the idea,” she continued, “but decided no. We needed our own centre.” Rumeli explained the decision in a matter of fact manner. “It is all very well,” she said, “telling us to use the *Panchayat Bhavan*. But we don’t control it. I mean we are supposed to be able to use it – it’s for the entire village, but in reality it is controlled by the ‘bare bare log’ (lit. ‘big people’ more broadly, ‘people of importance’).”

Rumeli was using the Hindi colloquialism, ‘bare bare log’, in a sarcastic manner, and was referring broadly to the *Ratiya Kanwars*. In the rural Jharkhand context, *Ratiya Kanwar* refers to those who possess legal rights over their land which allows it only to be transferred to their male descendants. This high status is related to their male ancestors being the so-called ‘founding fathers’ of the village, and as Froerer (2007: 182) notes in the context of neighbouring Chhattisgarh, these figures exercise a degree of domination over the use of much of the village land and resources. Although constituting a significant section of the village population, there was little in terms of common associational interaction between groups, with the village itself spatially divided in terms of housing, water-pumps and shrines. The *Ratiya Kanwars* were absent in terms of membership of the VKK, and there were no other Hindu nationalist-affiliated organisations working in the village. However, an occasion in which there was the potential for developed interaction was during the celebration of traditional festivals. However, VKK activists pointed out that the organisation of these celebrations together with the space in which they were carried out was largely under the control of powerful *Ratiya Kanwar* figures, which dominated the position of the village headman and the *panchayat*. Rumeli noted the degree of power the *Ratiya Kanwars* exercised in village life:

When we wanted to use the hall in the past they just tell us it is bad day. Their Karma [a popular festival in Jharkhand held in August or September] committee is always using the hall. Even in January. And they store paddy there too. I ask you, it is their personal *godown*? We would have got no-where had we used that building. No, if we wanted to have more of the programmes, if we wanted to keep going with the

development, we needed a Gram Vikas Kendra. Actually, you know, this is one of the reasons why we have little development. We have the ideas, the traditions, the culture, but the community is not working together.

Virender, Niyati's husband, made to interject but was quickly silenced by other assenting voices:

It took months of negotiating, of going back and forth to the *Pradhan*, of more discussions, of promises to discuss the matter further. In the end, I think they [the *Panchayat*] got bored of us and gave in. Never test a women's patience, you'll lose.

The discussion continued surrounding the particular ways in which the Kendra was used. During the summer, I was told, the village homes became as hot as a furnace and when the women sat outside under the trees to get some air they were told 'to stop being lazy'. During the winter, the village became dark early (the village was without electricity) so there was little point sitting outside beyond a certain time even after the chores had been completed. "So we thought," said one of the volunteers, "why not spend this time improving the village. After all, we too can make chutney from the flower and learn about hygiene."

A number of important points can be taken from the struggle to construct a Kendra for their development work. Firstly, in Rumeli's account, it was clear that the driving force in the desire for the establishment of a separate VKK Gram Vikas centre came from her and other female participants, with both the full and part time *sewaks* of the organisation silent in the story. And secondly what is apparent is that the separate space represented by the Kendra was seen as an important space for these marginalised and gendered participants, in terms of offering them a *pukka* building to carry out development activities along the lines of the VKK's normative approach to empowerment and development. Importantly, the space would also work as a clearly outlined symbol and public arena where women who were not perceived as having a high status – and so were informally excluded from sections of the public sphere – could congregate. The construction of the Kendra then was seen as a fourfold achievement – a *public space* which was for the *seva-inspired development practices* of those *marginalised* and *gendered* actors, whose positions informally excluded their participation and voice in matters of development and access to public space.

Each time I visited the Kendra I noticed that the women used the space in a variety of ways. Firstly, as a Gram Vikas centre, where the practices would focus broadly

upon the normative approaches to development and empowerment I previously outlined. Such discursive practices, as I have illustrated, work to produce constructs of the self and community structured around notions of hierarchy, and manage patterns of behaviour into the everyday sensibilities of the ethical Hindu subject. The projects then were the location of operations of disciplinary performativity structured through the VKK's normative approach to development and empowerment. Yet, at the same time, what was noticeable were the differing ways in which women used the space, both as a Gram Vikas Kendra, and also as a space in which the negotiation and transgression of discursive positionings occurred. Indeed, from the very beginning, in the very struggle to found the centre the women entered into the public arena as agents, with the Gram Vikas Kendra a focal point in challenging intersections of gendered and class exclusionary practices. These challenges were articulated without reference to practices of patriarchy or patterns of class hierarchy, but rather to *seva* and its relevance to Khangar's development. In the process of these successive attempts to establish a *seva* project, gendered and marginalised actors created an arena in public where they argued they could organise development mediated through the normative articulations of the practice circulated by VKK *sevakas*. Discourses of *seva*, their inscribed meanings of development and empowerment, were then negotiated and used by these subaltern actors as offering avenues which opened up the potential for modes of public agency.

This point is important and worth stressing – the struggle to construct a centre and its subsequent use by these actors in development activities produced the participants as active subjects, and so worked to break down hegemonic and disciplinary operations of power which structured subaltern subjects as passive. These spaces of empowerment were constructed without recourse to a language classically associated with gender or economic empowerment, but rather they were opened up through the deployment of development as framed in the normative constructions of the VKK's Gram Vikas projects. Yet, at the same time, this discursive negotiation by subaltern actors reconstructed their subjectivity in a new field of power - that of the ethical Hindu self, with its rearticulated focus on action working to invoke ideas of ethical self-discipline, hierarchy and passivity. The participants' use of the normative discourses related to development is still productive therefore of new forms of regulatory discipline which constructs formations of the self and community in alternative fields of power.

To conclude this section I should like to raise a significant point related to theorising the participation of subaltern subjects within religious movements. Contemporary scholarship often approaches such subaltern engagement as an aberration, as an indication of gendered and marginalised actors advancing interests which are ‘antithetical to their own’. Indeed, feminist scholars such as Sarkar (1991) and Chakravarti (1996) in approaching women’s involvement in Hindu nationalist movements argue that participation in such organisations uniformly leads to subordination. Following such a theorisation, the struggle to construct and then participate in the VKK Gram Vikas Kendra in Khangar would be an illustration and site of subaltern subjects subordinating and disempowering each other. Indeed, following such an approach it would indeed be perplexing to explain and understand why then subaltern groups participate in their own reinscription into hegemonic forms of power. What my analysis helps us to grasp is that the creative use and negotiated performative reiteration of the VKK’s approach to *seva* and development worked to break down certain gendered and marginalised structures of exclusions with regard to public space and questions of the beneficiaries of development, a process articulated using a Hindu nationalist religious tradition of service. It is the movement offered through using VKK’s discursive practices associated with their approach to development and empowerment which helps us to understand and explain the agency inscribed upon subaltern participation in the VKK’s Gram Vikas projects. This understanding then has allowed us to avoid Mohanty’s (1994: 206) critique of those approaches which construct third world women as possessing “problems” but without “choices or the freedom to act”.

3.2 *Seva and ‘Talking Back’*

In section two I noted how the performative acts associated with the VKK’s normative approach to development positioned actors as ‘active’ *sevaks* and ‘passive’ participants, with the latter’s patterns of daily conduct seen as requiring disciplinary regulation. Following on from Butler’s wider points surrounding the inability of discourse to exhaustively compose that which it concedes (1993: 10), I will continue to build my argument surrounding the modes by which participants negotiated such discursive positioning of ‘active’ and ‘passive’ subjects. In particular, I will examine how participants redeployed the normative languages which placed emphasis upon regulating the conduct of marginalised subjects. Such rearticulations, I will argue, emphasised the

actions of those in positions of power in the village as needing to be ethically regulated. While the previous section noted then how in the struggle for a Kendra gendered actors created public spaces in which questions of development could be discussed – and thus overcome certain restrictive gendered roles – while concurrently managing conduct into ethical Hindu norms, this section examines how such rearticulations of the normative language worked to relocate the actors whose sensibilities were seen to transgress such subject formations. As we will see, such instances of ‘talking back’ which invoke alternative meanings are articulated not in developmental languages of a secular community nor in traditions of gender and tribal ‘rights’ (*haq*), but rather are expressed in frameworks related to constructs of ethical Hindu practices. These alternative performative acts disrupted constructs of a passive participant whose conduct needed to be managed in ethical Hindu subject formations.

I noted previously that one of the reasons Rumeli argued was responsible for the lack of development in the village was the lack of a ‘community feeling’. This absence, she noted, was displayed by those families in the village whose high status was descended from their ancestor’s position as a so called ‘founding father’, a point which contributed to a degree of legal land security and relative position of power in terms of access to local institutions of political rule and so access to developmental resources. Importantly, Rumeli’s explanation then proposed the existence of a common, Hindu community linked by locality and ‘cultural traditions’. Despite recognising division in terms of unequal access to resources, Rumeli saw this as evidence not of the constructed nature of such notions of unity and the particular ways in which such constructs masked experiences of – for example – gender marginalisation, but rather saw these divisions as resulting from the ‘naturalised’ community as operating incorrectly due to a lack of community feeling. Rumeli’s approaches therefore remain broadly inside the normative approaches to *seva* circulating inside the projects of the VKK -- the problem is not with the disciplinary power of such singular discourses of community, but rather, the problem is located as a lack of Hindu *sangathan*.

Priyanka was a member of the Gram Vikas project at Khangar. Both Priyanka and her husband, Suresh, worked a single acre of land upon which they grew paddy. The plot of land was too small to financially support them both, their two small children, and a small extended family, and so Suresh – although back now – undertook seasonal migrations to Kolkata where he worked as a labourer. Priyanka attended the

Gram Vikas project regularly, and it was in such a space that I was both able to observe her interactions with other participants and discuss with her alongside others the perceived problems and concerns related to ethical acts in their locality. Earlier I noted how the chapter had faced difficulties in constructing the Kendra due to opposition from the village *pradhan* and a lack of support from the *Panchayat*. Priyanka continued this theme further, noting that this unequal access to local political power led to the centring of developmental resources provided by the State in restricted areas, and specifically, in the areas of the village where those with a perceived higher status resided. “Take a look for yourself...,” Priyanka commented, “...Go and have a look at where they live. They are powerful people. So they get to decide what gets done, and what goes where, and so who benefits.” Priyanka’s points regarding the uneven distribution of resources seemed correct. For example, the sections of the village closest to her accommodation (and where many of the attendees of the Gram Vikas project lived) had only one water pump, while areas in which a majority of the *Ratiya Kamwars* lived possessed approximately five. Moreover, Priyanka offered numerous other examples of the ways in which State developmental resources were distributed in an uneven fashion. For example, government programmes existed which provided fruit trees and seeds to rural villagers. In fact, according to Priyanka, it was not until the VKK’s ‘Viranga Singi Dai’ project (the programme was named after a female tribal who raised a female battalion to fight Mughal forces) on ‘World Environment Day’ that members of the Kendra had access to and distributed to other villagers a similar amount of saplings.

A number of points are of importance here to exploring how participants ‘talk back’ and rearticulate the normative language of *sewa* and so expand the constituency of transgressive actors to include sections of the village elite. Indeed, note firstly that we have witnessed how the circulating normative approaches to development focus upon managing the conduct of those existing on the margins of village life. For example, I outlined earlier how discourses associated with the *mabua* flower program located development as a question of marginal actors under the watch of active *sewaks* working to manage their own conduct so as to support temperance campaigns and regulate perceived transgressive daily practices. Such paternalistic projects are reminiscent of both the Arya Samaj’s temperance campaigns of the late colonial period, together with the points I raised in Chapter Six regarding hygiene and cleanliness (Gooptu 2001: 181-184). Yet here, through highlighting Priyanka’s discussion which occurred inside the Gram Vikas projects, we can see how the normative language circulating inside the

VKK's *seva* projects provide the resources for and is rearticulated to expand the constituency of actors whose everyday conduct requires regulation.

These rearticulated norms are apparent in a number of ways. Note firstly that obstacles to development in Priyanka's articulation are located away from the ethical conduct of the participants in the projects and more broadly from those living at the margins of the margins, but rather are related to and now include the actions and access to resources of the village elite. It is these actions which are additionally seen as transgressive. This 'talking back' against the normative discourses of development still highlights issues which focus upon conduct, yet focuses upon questions of power, and how the exercise of power works to splinter attempts to produce subaltern subjects as an integral part of a Hindu community through their daily ethically infused performative acts. This is not to claim that Priyanka's 'talking back' should be seen as articulating an approach to development which stands in direct contrast to the VKK's approaches. Indeed, this relates to the point I discussed at the beginning of this section regarding the particular fashions in which subaltern actors neither simply reiterate, stand outside, or directly challenge discursive norms. Rather, they can also be witnessed using the language to question the normative categories associated with the discourse. In this sense then, and again not expressed in clear languages of secular community, or even caste, gender, or class identity, the VKK's normative discourses provide the resources for their own critique in so far as they 'talk back' to expand the actions which transgress ethical Hindu norms and constructs of a unified Hindu community. As Priyanka commented:

You have to think, there are government programmes. But corruption means that those who need development never receive it. Yes, we all live in Khangar, we are one community, here, or all over India, our culture unites us and this is what is important. We should work together. That seems great to me. But if this does not happen, then what can we do? We will get development, with or without their help. The Block Development Office too – they have programmes, but who benefits? It only goes to a few people. So, there is no community feeling, how can there be with so much corruption. This is why we come here [the Gram Vikas Kendra]; because it is here we can work for development for all the people, not just a few.

Charu, another participant in the project developed Priyanka's points further:

You ask us about what are our activities here, are our friends in the organisation, why do we work here, but all of this can be answered with a single point. The problem we face is that although we live close together, and share our religion, our culture, there is much distance between people in the community, between *aam janata* ('ordinary folk')

and *bare log* ('important people'). But here, we look after one another. We get loans from the Kendra's funds, we work together on so many issues. We act as one community (*samaj*), we act truthfully, and this is how development will come.

What is so important about these points is that the participants use and rearticulate the normative approaches to linked questions of community, ethical acts, and development to critique the normative circulating articulations. Both Priyanka's and Charu's discussion on ethical acts and development articulated a sense of community which produced those they considered to be the village elite as both 'inside' and 'outside' Hindu society. They argued that those who had access to State developmental resources (such as the water pumps) distributed them in a manner which benefitted a small minority of the village, rather than the wider community as a whole. These practices were articulated as corrupt acts in terms of linking their responsibilities to the community. Indeed, according to Priyanka and Charu, there was an absence of community development because of the moral corruption of those who held power within the community. Ethical acts – or their absence in terms of corrupt practices – are then linked with development, with such acts rearticulated away from Othering the conduct of the marginalised. Rather, everyday ethical Hindu norms are advanced and it is, according to Priyanka and Charu, the 'corrupt conduct' of local hierarchies which obstructs the development of the village in the interests of "all the people, not just a few". Ethical Hindu action therefore is a practice located outside of local elites and instead is associated with rural marginalised actors.

Moreover, what Priyanka's and Charu's comments are representative of is a striking example of the ways in which participants in the Gram Vikas projects rearticulate questions surrounding the relationship between ethical Hindu acts and development. Their conceptualization of their actions are viewed as moral and working for the Hindu community, in contrast to the village elite, whose actions are produced as corrupt, dividing the Hindu community, and requiring regulation. What is brought to the forefront then are re-written questions of Hindu ethics. Everyday acts which relate to ethical Hindu norms are still seen as central to development, but what is focused upon now with regard to obstacles of development are not the supposed 'undisciplined' practices of the rural marginalised, such as consuming alcohol or 'having too many children', but the corrupt actions of the local elite which fail to performatively enact the subjectivities of the ethical Hindu self. The VKK's normative approaches to the

relationship between moral conduct and the self then are rearticulated and used to question the disciplinary discourses which stress notions of a unified Hindu community on the one hand, and a passive, marginalised actor whose everyday conduct requires self-regulation to be truly Hindu.

Importantly - and this has been a consistent theme which I have developed throughout this chapter - as with their normative counterparts, the rearticulated approaches which I have examined should be understood as productive in terms of notions of the self and community. Through focusing upon the conduct of those in positions of relative power in their locality, and linking this to questions of community, we can see how instances of 'talking back' express meanings which transgress and tease out the contradictions of the normative narrations of an ecumenical Hindu community united around a supposed common cultural and ethical way of life. These transgressive articulations were expressed using the terms of debate fixed by the hegemonic discourse, in particular, the centrality of reforming conducts into sensibilities of the ethical Hindu self. Through 'talking back' constructs of Hindu community as defined through ethical everyday practices are read against the corruption of those who exercise local political power, and thus subaltern participants such as Charu and Priyanka produce those with access to State resources and a high status in the village as both abstractly inside, yet through their behaviour's transgression of the normative conduct of the ethical Hindu self, at a distance from those who struggle on the margins of rural life. The dominant and circulating discursive performative acts associated with ethical Hindu subject formations are therefore made unstable and fractured through the particular ways in which its normative meanings are rearticulated and brought into dialogue with subaltern intersectional experiences of marginalisation. Participants such as Priyanka and Charu then articulate a construct of the Hindu community in which they are both marginalised actors, yet gain agency through participation in the VKK's projects through reassigning the location of a transgressive un-ethical Other and normative ethical Hindu self.

These narrations which articulate tensions and fault lines in a constructed Hindu community occur without reference to secular and developmental discourses and their associated framings of 'duty' and 'rights'. Indeed, these transgressive instances of 'talking back' remain firmly located in broader questions of Hindu 'cultural citizenship' and still speak in the language of the VKK's normative focuses with regard to the

centrality of reforming daily conduct in order to produce ethical Hindu practices. What is apparent then is that for participants in the VKK's rural Gram Vikas projects, questions of ethical Hindu acts are far from closed, but rather are open practices upon which culturally encoded articulations of development compete for meaning. It is in this rearticulation of the circulating norms in which we can witness, as in the previous discussion of the campaign to construct a Kendra, discursive negotiation and empowerment through the rearticulation of self-making projects.

Conclusion

Chapters Five and Six illustrated that Hindu nationalist discursive practices of *seva* allow for the construction of expansive alternative publics in which ideas of healthcare, education and hygiene circulate as daily performative acts which are refocused, transgressed, and regulated. Importantly, I showed that such discourses worked to regulate these performative acts in line with ethical Hindu norms. Moreover, such practices operating in mundane time and space were organized to invoke Hindu nationalist meanings. Yet, and following on from Butler (1993: 4-12, 2006: 192), I argued that such surface significations resist foreclosure, and so discourses of *seva* operationalize as structured and reiterative performative acts together with disciplinary mechanisms. Yet, if reiterative practices are central to the stabilisation of such formations of the self, they are also central to its troubling, a key premise of this chapter.

I opened Chapter Seven with an ethnographic vignette taken from a VKK-run *seva* project which illustrated the tensions between 'doing' and 'troubling' ethical Hindu formations. Here, inside a VKK-run Gram Vikas Kendra, a scene was unfolding which illustrated the central premises and arguments of the chapter. Poonam, a part-time *sevak*, outlined a key meaning linked to the VKK's discourses of *seva* which circulated inside the development projects – that of the necessity of spreading 'cultural awareness' as a mode of organising 'poor people' to manage their conduct into those sensibilities associated with the ethical Hindu self. In the second section of this chapter I examined further such normative inscriptions using the tools provided by Butler's concept of performativity and Foucault's theorisation of governmentality. I illustrated that the necessary 'selfless' nature of *seva* and its emphases upon regulating the conduct of those positioned without access to cultural or economic capital constructed a passive and

internal Other – Poonam’s ‘poor people [who] will spend money on [*mabwali*] drink’. Practices of development and *seva* thus attempt to produce and maintain disciplinary ethical Hindu norms.

Yet, building upon Butler’s approach to formations of identity as a series of “stylized repetition of acts” whose possibilities for “transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat” (2006: 191, 192), I brought to the forefront dynamics in which subjects could be seen negotiating positions as a passive internal Other. Hindu nationalist *seva* projects are therefore not sites in which we can witness the foreclosed production of ethical Hindu subjects, but rather, as Priyanka’s discussions in the opening pages suggest, sites in which we can witness subjects rearticulating such discursive systems of the self. Indeed, in section three I brought to the forefront how participants rearticulated the VKK’s practices of *seva* as a mode of questioning gendered restrictions in terms of access to public space and engagement in significant issues related to their locality. While such negotiations of *seva* reworked participants in alternative fields of power related to ethical Hindu acts, they concurrently opened up alternative paths of empowerment which positioned these participants as active subjects.

Moreover, in the final part of section three I examined how performative acts circulating inside the projects reorganized the normative languages of *seva* to rearticulate the very location of transgressive subjectivities – for example, Priyanka’s admiration in the opening vignette of the VKK’s tree and fruit seed program in contrast to the *Panchayat*’s corruption. Here, the regulation of daily conduct was emphasised as a task directed at broadening the scope of Hindu ethical reform to include both temperance and the village elite. These rearticulated performative acts stressed a construct of the Hindu community in which actors gained agency through participation in the VKK’s projects and through rearticulating the location of a normative ethical Hindu self and un-ethical Hindu Other. Indeed, I have shown then how inside these projects a range of reiterative and rearticulated performative acts circulated, working to invoke both concurrently empowering and Othering meanings of Hindu subjectivity. The VKK’s Gram Vikas projects then are helpfully approached as far from being the consistent and smooth waters which they may appear to be on the surface, but rather as rapids riven with disruptive current and potential.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion: Key Arguments, Wider Contributions and Directions

1. Key Arguments: *Seva* and Hindu Nationalism

On September 13th 2013 it was announced by the BJP that the current Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, would be nominated as their Prime Ministerial candidate for the 2014 Indian elections. The decision to select a politician most widely associated with the 2002 Gujarat communal riots caused considerable debate. A media furore erupted; politicians, news anchors, journalists, all competed to evaluate the significance of the event to the Hindu nationalist movement: was this an indication that the ideologues of *hindutva* were gaining a receptive national audience? Would Modi's election campaign lead to wider communal tensions and violence? Would the victory of a Hindu nationalist-led alliance in the election weaken India's approach to secularism? All interesting questions. Yet, as this thesis has argued, such questions alongside their academic counterparts are both suggestive and restrictive in terms of understanding the circulation and significance of Hindu nationalist practices— they at once outline the importance of explicit political forms of Hindu nationalism, yet give cursory analysis to the significance of alternative sites, and in particular, spheres in which its practices develop outside of high politics and instead through attempts to use Hindu traditions to intervene into everyday life and regulate conduct.

As commentators engaged in debates surrounding Modi's elevation to Prime Ministerial candidate and its implications for the Hindu nationalist movement, another important – yet largely glossed over – series of dynamics with significance to understanding Hindu nationalism was developing. In the wake of the 2013 north Indian floods, teams of volunteers organised by the Hindu nationalist-affiliated *Seva Bharati* were engaging in relief work throughout the disaster area. While the floods themselves clearly stand as an event operating outside of daily life, my point here draws attention to the particular ways in which *sevakas* continue to reconstruct Hindu activist traditions of service in response to contemporary events outside spheres traditionally associated with the study of nationalist movements, and how such interventions work to invoke meanings of national and religious belonging. Moreover, through avoiding ascribing

significance to the relief operations for the development and circulation of Hindu nationalist practices, we are unable to answer a series of questions which are of key importance in understanding the formative power of Hindu nationalist cultures. For example, what were the forms of existing associational cultures of service – local, national, and transnational - which allowed a swift fundraising operation to occur? What circulating practices of citizenship and service guided the involvement of the *sevak*s? In what ways did the *sevak*s interact with alternative relief organisations such as the Ramakrishna Mission and Math, and how did this construct public space in the disaster area? In what ways did those affected interact with and negotiate the discourses of relief articulated by the *sevak*s? And in what fashions would the normative practices of community and ethical sensibilities outlined by *sevak*s structure the reconstruction efforts? Exploring such questions requires thinking *hindutva* and its relationship to Hindu activist traditions differently.

This thesis has detailed an alternative reading of the relationship between Hindu nationalism and Hindu practices of *seva*. Developing my argument over the previous seven chapters and with reference to both archival and field research, I have demonstrated how *sevak*s through their contributions to debates surrounding the associated subjectivities of a modern Hindu self have transformed the practice of *seva*. Indeed, and emerging from organisations associated with orthodox *sangathanist* approaches to Hinduism's boundaries, I demonstrated how the organisational idioms of the RSS enabled the inscription of pro-active meanings onto discourses of *seva* during Partition and the subsequent post-colonial period. These practices were productive of increasingly broad alternative publics. These service projects, I have shown, are the location of the development and circulation of vernacularized daily performative acts which invoke Hindu nationalist meanings.

Importantly then, I have shown how Hindu nationalist practices circulate in unfamiliar spaces. Everyday discursive practices are structured into and develop out of the seemingly banal arenas of the *seva* projects, from leisure activities which stress abstention from alcohol consumption in rural Self Help Group Kendras, to ways of disciplined sitting and singing during *puja* and *bhajan* singing in school halls and *mandirs*, to performances of personal and social hygiene as a daily morning routine in households and at roadsides, to practices of healthcare in monthly medical camps, all have been demonstrated to invoke vernacularized Hindu nationalist approaches to ethical ways of

being and knowing. I illustrated how these practices and projects - often left untouched by scholars of both *hindutva* and more broadly nationalist ideologies - develop in publics with porous borders, inside of which circulate normative discourses predicated not upon universal reason but particular ethical subjectivities. As such, the projects illustrate the continuing formative power of alternative religious traditions of service in the age of late modernity.

However, I have been careful to illustrate the centrality of acts which stretch beyond normative practices. While reiterative practices are central to the production of the projects and ethical sensibilities, I have stressed the significance of refocused, transgressive, and rearticulated performative acts. These discursive practices gain importance for three overall reasons linked to studying associations of service and the production of the Hindu nationalist subject. Firstly, these practices allow for the expansion of alternative publics of service, together with these publics developing porous borders with alternative associations which share common Hindu activist traditions. Following on from this point, these wider projects create the potential for the vernacularization of Hindu nationalism as its practices come into dialogue with alternative meanings, and so pro-active and *sangathanist* practices of *seva* come to exercise formative power over a wider degree of practices. And thirdly, my narration of the relationship between Hindu nationalism and *seva* demonstrates how practices of *seva* have acted as an alternative language related to questions of service, ethical Hindu norms, and the nature of a modern Hindu identity.

This last point raises a wider contribution and a modification I made to Fraser's understanding of civil society and associational space. In the introduction I noted how Hindu nationalist approaches to service were articulated as varyingly alternative appeals in shifting degrees of opposition, and not as an explicit counterpoint formulated in a consistent oppositional discourse to other practices. It was in this context that I argued that *seva* publics were helpfully understood as alternative publics, as opposed to Fraser's notion of the counterpublic. In Chapter Five I brought this point to the forefront when examining the alternative traditions of healthcare performed in the VKK's medical camps. These were not framed in direct opposition to bio-medicine. Rather, *ayurveda* was presented as an alternative all-encompassing Hindu science of life, which, due to its indigenous development, was a marker of community identity and best suited to the minds and bodies of Hindus. The alternative framing of traditions of service was further

developed in Chapter Six on issues including hygiene. For example, practices of public hygiene in the School's *Rashtra Seva* campaigns were predicated on alternative ethical sensibilities and constructs of citizenship to those associated with the Ministry of Tourism's 'Campaign Clean India'. In Chapter Seven and through an examination of the VKK's Gram Vikas projects I demonstrated how Hindu nationalist discourses of service formulated issues of development as linked to the cultivation of everyday ethical sensibilities. On the issue of the *Mahua* flower, activists used developmental practices linked to the local production of handicrafts, cottage industries and the market, and reworked these approaches to stress an alternative practice of development linked to the cultivation of ethical Hindu *samskars* and Hindu identity-making.

Moreover, I have illustrated how practices of selfless service can be witnessed advancing alternative answers to questions of healthcare, education and development through drawing upon and reconstructing religious practices linked with *ayurveda* and *bhajan* singing, along with questions of ethical *samskars* such as alcohol consumption. In contrast to approaching the relationship between Hindu nationalism and *seva* as a form of politically instrumentalist appropriation, I have outlined how such discursive practices develop as part of the wider debates surrounding the continuing relevance and reconstruction of Hindu traditions. The performative reiteration of *seva* thus becomes productive of broad and alternative publics inside of which its own meanings are reiterated, reworked, and Hindu nationalist subjectivities produced and enacted.

This study approached the relationship between Hindu nationalism and *seva* through a focus upon secondary material written by historians and political scientists, together with ethnographic field research. The key findings drawn from my field research suggest a complexifying of the historical relationship between Hindu nationalism and practices of *seva*, as outlined in chapters two to four. The historical chapters detailed the sustained actions with which Hindu nationalist associations have engaged with practices of *seva*, and further demonstrated how these relationships contributed to the production of increasingly expansive alternative publics and the transformation of traditions of *seva*. My field research demonstrates the complexity of this process. Indeed, as chapters two, three and four illustrated, the interventions, debates and processes which structured Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* developed out of and contributed to answering an array of so-called issues facing Hindu society, including Hindu (dis)organisation, social upliftment and national rejuvenation

Moreover, whether we are discussing the debates in colonial period religious reform, practices of *seva* and early Hindu nationalism (chapters two and three), or the ways in which discourses of *seva* come to exercise formative power during the post-colonial period over an array of practices in newly developing visibilized alternative publics (chapter four), this variety of spaces and associated contexts and concerns encompassed actors with an array of motivations. The field research ‘reaches back’ and sheds light upon the historical period as it documents how Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* can come to shape alternative publics and engage diverse actors and their concerns. The ethnography documents then how actors renew, transgress and rearticulate practices of service and so provides a lens for understanding the complexity of the expansion and transformations of Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* illustrated in the historical chapters.

At the same time, the historical chapters work to provide a perspective on the field research. A key point here relates to associational space and practices of dialogue. The historical chapters demonstrated that central to Hindu nationalist productions and transformations of traditions of service have been the ways in which associated alternative publics operated not as bounded totalities, but rather as porous publics. For example, I noted in chapters two and three that while the Sangh’s organisational idioms illustrated its didactic approach to service and the reorganisation of Hindu society, its practices increasingly became pro-active in terms of their engagement in the processes of partition and then early post-colonial relief work, and then the *sarvodaya* movement. It was as a result of these pro-active engagements that Hindu nationalist associations incorporated an increasing range of activists into their associated *seva* projects, together with the practice coming to exercise formative power over an growing array of issues and sensibilities. My ethnographic field research demonstrated that these histories are carried into the present of Hindu nationalist practices of *seva*. Indeed, these historical and inherited languages contributed to setting the ways in which traditions of *seva* could be thought, practised and reworked. Indeed, chapters five, six and seven illustrated that far from ‘appearing’ out of an expanded instrumentalist deployment of *seva*, contemporary Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* which incorporate actors from industrialists and Hindu reformers (chapter five), to teachers (chapter six), to rural developmental workers (chapter eight), and exercise power over practices from healthcare (chapter five), to sanitation and education (chapter six), and temperance

campaigns (chapter eight), are made possible because of these historical legacies and debates over practices of service, ethical actions, and a modern Hindu identity.

2. Wider Contributions

2.1 *Alternative Publics of Service*

A first contribution of this thesis relates to theorisations of associational space and practices of service. A consistent theme of this thesis has been the exploration of the particular diverse cultures of service which have been produced, circulated, and practised inside the Hindu nationalist movement. Yet, such associational cultures of service which are linked to Hindu traditions are not restricted to the projects of the Hindu nationalist movement. Here, I am referring to the arguments developed throughout this thesis regarding the porous borders between Hindu nationalist *seva* publics and alternative associations constructed upon shared Hindu activist traditions. The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF India 2000) noted that by the year 2000 India had approaching one million voluntary associations, the largest in Asia. This diverse array of organisations, including historical societies, Trade Unions, cooperatives, and of course *seva*, philanthropic, and related humanitarian associations, has contributed to a flourishing array of vibrant and varied associations organised around practices of identity, community and service (Bornstein 2012, Tandon 2002, 2003). It is in the wider framework of neo-liberal governmentality that such contemporary voluntary associations have both come to the forefront of service provision and, as I have noted in Chapter Seven, worked to shape and reconstitute ethical subject formations.

Alongside both Mahmood's (2012) explorations of the contemporary Egyptian women's mosque movements, and Cloke, Thomas and Williams' (2012) analysis of present day Christian charities in Britain, my research surrounding the relationship between *seva* and Hindu nationalism contributes to this growing field in theorising how faith-based activist organisations, together with their cultures and practices of service, have been brought into dialogue with day to day techniques of governmentality. This thesis then contributes to the growing body of literature which explores associational life as the location of new forms of politics where traditions of service and cultures of ethical citizenship are deployed to recast daily subjectivities.

Yet, this thesis differs in terms of its specific contributions to questions of associational space and the regulation of daily sensibilities. Specifically, this thesis is

informed by Fraser's concept of subaltern counterpublics, an understanding of civil society as fractured into differing publics which exist in degrees of dialogue with one another, together with the public's own discursive diversity, what Felski calls their "Partiality" (1989: 167). Outlining these specific contributions requires bringing to the forefront a growing body of work which theorises the associations of faith-based voluntary organisations. Notable aspects of this academic endeavour are the studies produced by the Birmingham School of Religions and Development, and their focuses upon the relationship between religious belief, questions of development and empowerment, and Faith-Based Organisations (Radoki 2012).

At the centre of this research stands an examination of these questions in the contemporary context of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The wider contributions of this thesis stand in a relationship of dialogue with the particular arguments of the Birmingham School, most specifically regarding questions surrounding 'bounded space' and 'internal homogeneity' with regard to differing religiously inspired service organisations.

Developed over a series of papers, the research associated with the Birmingham School outlines a relationship between the histories and cultures of Hindu nationalist and wider service associations along three mutually related arguments, points which contribute more widely to their picture of the associational cultures of 'Faith-Based Organisations'. Firstly, Nair and Bano (2007:25) focus upon the examples of Hindu Aid and the Hindu nationalist Sewa International. The associational spaces of both organisations are theorised divergently. In effect, those associated with Sewa International are 'exceptionalized'. Indeed, the spaces associated with Hindu Aid are approached as devoid of formative power and plural, whereas the arenas of Sewa International are theorised as homogenous and politically instrumentalist. Nair and Bano (2007) are of course correct in noting the allegations which link Seva International to the funding of Hindu nationalist associations linked to communal violence.¹ Moreover, this understanding of service associations which emphasises a binary of 'religiously inspired service' vs 'political', 'legitimate vs instrumentalist', 'developmental' vs 'sectarian' is an approach which is more widely applied to case studies across South Asia by researchers associated with the Birmingham School of Religions and Development. For example, Bano (2009) argues that the extensive welfare networks of

¹ See further 'A Foreign Exchange of Hate' *South Asian Citizens Web* <www.cac.ektaonline.org/resources> accessed online 16/12/2013

the Jama'at -i- Islami were a response to political conditions after the formation of the Bangladeshi nation state. Yet, in this reading and overall focus there is little in the way of an exploration of the histories, cultural exchange and degrees of dialogue which structure the relations between Jama'at -i- Islami with alternative associations related to Islamic traditions of service, and the impact of such relations upon the cultures and practices of Islamic reform movements.

This thesis has contributed to problematizing theoretical readings of associational space which stress distinct boundaries between the cultures of 'legitimate' and 'non-political' traditions of service and then their supposed cynical deployments. Instead, through reading such spaces through the framework of an 'alternative public', I have contributed to understanding the wide circulatory mechanisms and diverse shapes of Hindu nationalist cultures of *seva*, and more broadly, the fashions by which these activist traditions of service produce expansive social arenas which are structured in a porous relationship with alternative associations. Indeed, I have presented an understanding of associational spaces of service which both stand in dialogue with differing publics, and are the location of varying divergent reiterative, refocused, transgressive and rearticulated discursive practices. The concept of the alternative public and its internal 'Partiality' then contributes to rereading associational cultures of service as developing out of borrowings and contestations from pressures both internal and external to their own publics. Importantly then, this thesis draws attention to understanding how such spaces and cultures of service are founded upon open practices, allowing their meanings to be reinscribed and linked to a range of non-rational sectoral interests in pursuit of rethinking how past traditions contribute to answering contemporary social questions.

2.2 Associational Space and the Negotiation of Discourses of Service

Continuing to examine the impact of this wider contribution related to theorising associational space, I now turn to a significant theme related to the central importance of the previously discussed diverse array of ethical practices of service which, alongside their institutional normative counterparts, are brought into dialogue, performatively enacted, and enable the production of social arenas of service. In their theorisation of ethical volunteering in faith-based homeless charities in contemporary Britain, Cloke, Johnsen and May (2012) argue for an approach to understanding both the circulating cultures of service and the space itself which places at the forefront

questions of difference. In this reading, actors both perform differing roles inside the charity dependent upon their own ethics of service, and, at the same time, through the everyday workings of volunteering bring their own 'ordinary ethics' into relationship with the circulating normative cultures of service. The context of such an approach gains its importance through recognising that the internal organisation of the space is structured around no singular hegemonic approach to service, but rather, "...that spaces of care can usefully be understood as performatively brought into being, not simply in terms of performing to impress or performing routines, but also in acting out care unreflexively and through improvisation during eruptions of non-routine events and practices" (2012: 143). Such lines of research draw attention to the ways in which volunteers bring into dialogue normative ethics of service, together with their own constructed traditions, with cultures of service then reflecting both these normative and interpretative practices.

While these lines of research are drawing attention to the contingencies of everyday volunteering and its role in producing a variety of creative practices of service, I would note that this thesis too contributes to Cloke's, Johnsen's and May's (2012) overall theme of understanding that cultures of service circulate in the projects in open systems of meaning, with such a point ensuring that their practices avoid foreclosure. Indeed, in the final three chapters of this text through case studies focusing upon a variety of constructed Hindu practices including selfless service, *ayurveda*, the singing of *bhajans* and *mantras*, *sanskriti* and *swashtya vigjan* (hygiene), and ethical *samskars* and temperance, I illustrated how volunteers refocused and negotiated aspects of the circulating normative articulations of *seva*, and in the process contributed to the diversification of its forms. For instance, I demonstrated how doctors working at the organisation's monthly medical camps (chapter five) and teachers volunteering in schools (chapter six) refocused its forms in the context of their own volunteering. This thesis's argument therefore that central to the expansion of *seva* projects are the manners in which it is refocused contributes to the wider arguments raised by Cloke, Johnsen and May (2012), in so far as they both note that central to theorising publics of faith-based volunteering is necessarily an understanding that they are produced through the transformation practices of service. Performative difference then is central to publics of service. The circulation of practices of ethical volunteering in open systems of meaning then contributes to examining the modes in which spaces encompass a variety of actors and cultures of association.

Moreover, these significant points related to understanding publics of service as riven with performative negotiation bring to the forefront questions of transgression and the policing of such acts. As I previously noted, Cloke, Johnsen and May's (2012) research contributes strongly to understanding the associational cultures which circulate as necessarily reflexive and mediated through 'ordinary' and 'institutional' discourses of service and care. Moreover, in their research detailing the modes by which contemporary Christian Faith-Based Organisations can be seen to both co-constitute and offer potential pathways of 'theo-ethical resistance' to neo-liberalism, Cloke, Williams and Thomas (2012) suggest that transgressive practices of service can be understood to be a latent and largely under-researched central element of practices which develop and structure publics of service. Yet, while recognising the differing approaches to service practised by actors, their work stops short of exploring the inconsistent modes by which differing plural mediations stand in relation to normative or institutional ethical approaches. I have shown that understanding associational cultures of service relates not simply to noting the production and circulation of these differing systems and their centrality to producing the public as a social assemblage, but further that such examinations contribute to knowledge regarding the integration and policing of these transgressive meanings. To put this differently, the dialogue between 'ordinary' and 'institutional' ethics is productive of practices which operate in fields of power in relation to hegemonic articulations, and thus the context of Cloke, Johnsen, and May's contributions could be strengthened through an examination of the modes by which transgressive practices come under disciplinary operations. This thesis contributes to understanding how the refocused and transgressive practices of service come under disciplinary operations dependent upon their degrees of interoperability with the circulating normative discourses. For example, in Chapter Five I noted how transgressive practices undertaken by rich Hindu industrialists who financed the *seva* projects were performed publically and left unchallenged as they concurrently affirmed alternative aspects of the circulating normative approaches to *seva*, including the centrality of Hindu *sangathan*. Yet, transgressive practices of service articulated in secular traditions were restricted and policed.

3. Further Directions

Two pertinent avenues of future research develop from the questions and conclusions central to this thesis. Firstly, an examination of the development and entrenchment of

Hindu nationalist practices outside associations affiliated to the Sangh. Secondly, an analysis of how practices of *seva* construct transnational interconnections which mediate formations of identity. This thesis has provided a differing way of approaching the circulation of Hindu nationalist cultures and practices outside explicit spheres of politics and spectacular violence. I noted in the introduction that this framework developed in the context of a range of scholars increasingly turning to such differing approaches to think through the questions raised by contemporary Hindu nationalism. Continuing to contribute to this developing field offers a range of rich opportunities for future research. Hoyez (2011), Toffin (2011), Pagani (2011) and Voix (2011) call attention to the development of convergences of cultures and practices of both non-Sangh and Hindu nationalist associations.

3.1 Hindu Nationalism and Convergent Cultures and Practices

An avenue of future research related to the development of ‘convergences’ and so how Hindu nationalist themes come to influence wider practices and spaces relates to the various anti-corruption movements which have been periodically asserted over the previous decade, in particular, the anti-corruption movements associated with Ramkrishna Yadav, popularly known as ‘Baba Ramdev’. This point related to convergences was brought to my attention when I visited the movement’s Ramlila Maidan protest camp in Delhi during June 2011. Convergences between the movement and practices and cultures traditionally associated with Hindu nationalism were strikingly evident in a range of ways. In particular, shared cultures were noticeable in the meanings linked to corruption, the corrupt, and the anti-corruption movement – framings which circulated amongst the thousands of activists at the Maidan. Of interest then for future research are the ways in which Hindu nationalist themes develop in associations linked to anti-corruption movements and work to exercise formative power over related practices.

While avoiding the postulation of a singular anti-corruption discourse, a popular reading of corruption circulating inside the space inscribed the practice as a cultural question. Specifically, corruption was articulated as resulting from ‘diseased’ cultural conduct which placed the very health of the nation in jeopardy. Such a national crisis was discussed as resulting from the importation of corrupt ‘globalised’ (read ‘Westernised’) cultures which were infecting both the political elite and increasingly the conduct of wider sections of society. The response to such dynamics required, it was

argued, a two-fold approach. Firstly, an anti-corruption movement to pressure for legislative reform. Secondly, the reworking of conduct to reflect ostensibly 'pure Indian cultures' rooted in India's ancient past as opposed to 'foreign corrupt' forms. Such articulations offer a rich array of questions to examine.

Avenues of research open related questions surrounding the relationship between a 'crisis in corruption' with a 'crisis in culture', together with the particular ways in which 'corrupt conduct' is seen as transgressing the nation's Hindu culture. Interestingly, and here echoing points of convergence, such cultures were framed as organised into practices which signified broad Hindu unity. For example, an array of large television screens showed repeated clips of Ramdev's yoga exercises and camps. While clearly evidence of the ascetic's business acumen, a further important question arises: how are somatic cultures and practices associated with Hinduism, such as yoga, seen as contributing to the production of 'anti-corrupt' sensibilities? Furthermore, in a similar manner to my considerations in Chapter Six of the ways in which *bhajan* singing and the recital of various *mantras* were seen as daily practices which enabled wider conduct to be brought in line with ethical formations, in what ways did Ramdev's call from the stage for all Indians to practise daily *pranayamas* bring to the forefront convergent Hindu nationalist meanings? How does what Chakraborty labels Ramdev's 'somatic nationalism' (2006) map fitness and health regimes with anti-corruption practices, in a manner which invokes the superiority of Hindu cultures and so converges with Hindu nationalist discourses? These avenues of future research offer the opportunity then to think *hindutva* differently through examining the entrenchment of Hindu nationalism in daily practices outside of arenas traditionally associated with its discourses.

3.2 Hindu Nationalism and Seva, Transnational and Local Spaces

Increasingly, scholars are turning to analyse the particular fashions by which patterns of globalisation have created the potential to participate in what Skrbis describes as a "process of multiple and transnational interconnectedness, accompanied by a process of deterritorialisation" (2008: 234). Both Levitt's (2007) and Yang and Ebaugh's (2001) text, for example, examine how immigrant groups build networks which span across nations, with Ignacio (2005) more widely exploring the relationship between online space and transnational identities. Theories of 'Transnationalism' arose out of a recognition that migrants' identities are helpfully approached as not bounded

inside either 'home' or 'host' nation states, but rather reflect a spanning of cultural and material ties between nations (Vertovec 2000). Indeed, as Zavos (2014) notes regarding the development of Hindu diaspora consciousness in contemporary Britain, such formations are helpfully understood as "...subject to localized, national AND transnational pressures which form multiple and sometimes conflicting contexts to emerging identities" (2014:3). Such frameworks of approach bring to the forefront both the informal and institutional transnational spaces within which such identities circulate and are performed. In particular, it would be of interest to further explore the work that Hindu nationalist discourses of *seva* play in producing such arenas and forms of identity.

Contemporary research on Hindu nationalism in diaspora contexts has a propensity to replicate a range of the problematic approaches I have noted with regard to understanding its *desi* manifestations, with an overriding focus upon its organisational representatives, in particular the HSS and the VHP, and then its explicitly instrumentalist articulations of a "deeply politicised and chauvinistic" identity which either forms an open or hidden agenda (Bhatt 2000:289, Jaffrelot and Therwath 2007, Mathew and Prashad 2000). This research has provided a range of strong contributions, with perhaps the most notable being Mathew and Prashad's discussion of the relationship between Hindu nationalism, discourses of multiculturalism and racism, and the search for 'model minority' status and Hindu cultural assertion in the context of the contemporary United States. Yet, following on from Zavos's (2010) own research regarding the development of Hindu diaspora identities in contemporary Britain, it would be a mistake to overstate the formative national and political influence of such spheres or organised representations of Hindutva upon the diverse array of Hindu diaspora notions of belonging. Instead, Zavos draws our attention to what he labels as a '*Hindutva* effect' (2010) – or, the particular wider shapes of Hindu nationalist themes that are held at a national level outside of prominent *hindutva* diaspora organisations, and the prominence of organisations such as the VHP at a local level. Moreover, Zavos notes that it is at this local level that we can witness Hindu nationalist associations influencing Hindu diaspora consciousness, with these identities then developing from the "informal politics of everyday social action" (2010:6), derived from constructed Hindu traditions, locally perceived contextual concerns, and imaginations of homeland. Indeed, it is through focusing upon such 'everyday' transnational interconnections that alternative ways of thinking and new avenues of research can be opened up surrounding

the relationship between transnational spaces, the development of diaspora Hindu identities, and practices of *seva* and Hindu nationalism.

One particular pathway of research which opens up with such a framework in mind relates to exploring the National Hindu Students Forum (NHSF) in the United Kingdom. Founded in 1991, the NHSF is the preeminent organisation for Hindu students studying in University and Further Education, with, according to its own figures, a membership of over 10,000 students. In addition to providing a space for British Hindu students, the organisation also includes a degree of international students drawn from a range of diaspora contexts, including America, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Importantly, a significant constituency of its membership base is drawn from Indian international students. Functioning to “protect, preserve, practise and promote Hindu Dharma” (NHSF 2014), the NHSF is organised around local chapters operating at an individual university level. In addition to campus-centred celebrations of Hindu festivals, the organisation’s university chapters engage in a range of *seva*-orientated activities, including yearly participation in National *Seva* Day. Begun in 2012, National *Seva* Day operates as a space in which volunteers undertake coordinated social actions to meet locally perceived concerns. NHSF activities on the day are organised as ‘relieving hardship or poverty’, ‘spreading joy to others’, and ‘helping the environment’. Zavos’s (2014) research has concerned itself with exploring these local forms of action with regard to their resonance with volunteering discourses associated with ‘Big Society’, the work they achieve in representing constructs of a ‘model minority’ Hindu community, and the wider yet ambiguous shapes of Hindu nationalism which echo out of local actions. I would suggest that through focusing upon the participation of NHSF activists a differing set of questions arises related to practices of *seva*, and themes of diaspora Hindu identities and transnational spaces.

Indeed, one such question which is raised approaches the particular modalities by which alternative representations of identity are produced through *seva* work. Indeed, Raj (2000) notes how during the early 1990s student activism associated with the establishment of University Hindu societies deployed a variety of techniques to rework diaspora forms of belonging away from constructs of a geographical South Asian identity and towards a stress on asserting the primacy of a Hindu consciousness. Following on Raj, research questions arise which call for an examination of the fashions by which an ‘ethnic Hindu’ identity is produced through practices of *seva* as an

alternative to contending notions of diaspora belonging, articulated for example as 'British Indian' or 'South Asian' and associated with campus-based Indian and South Asian societies.

While such systems operate as loose and fluid contingencies with blurred boundaries, it would be of interest to further understand how activist practices of *seva* contribute to constructing an 'authentic' formation of diaspora belonging rooted in Hindu religious traditions of service. Following on from Werbner's (2004) exploration of differing 'Islamic' and 'South Asian' publics in contemporary Britain, and their alternative sensibilities built around contending cultural practices spanning from music to marriage, approaching such a question with my framework in mind would highlight the role of *seva* then in the production and fracturing of diaspora space. It would continue then this thesis's focus upon the patterns by which practices of *seva* act as an Othering discourse internal to constructs of a wider diaspora Hindu community. Moreover, it is in such a context that the role of the translation of such practices gains significance – what discourses, for example, work upon international students from India and negotiate the fashioning of NHSF *seva* work? How does the organisation's official charity – the Hindu nationalist-aligned Sewa International – allow for transnational spaces of exchange to develop, in which *seva* is inscribed with meanings which allow Hindu students to rearticulate religious traditions of service as illustrating their 'model minority' status, and so engage in the Othering of so-called problematic immigrant communities. Furthermore, how are these constructs of *seva* brought to bear in everyday and differing locales? Indeed, in the context of contemporary interventions into and the policing of University Islamic Societies through 'counter-terrorism' measures such as *Prevent*, and more widely the shift from multicultural practices to discourses of 'community cohesion' following the 2001 Bradford riots, significant questions relating to practices of *seva* and Hindu public representation on campuses and surrounding localities are brought to the forefront, as are the transnational cultural connections which inscribe Hindu activist traditions of service as providing a platform for local actions surrounding issues of poverty, joy, and the environment (Zavos 2010, 2009, Thomas 2010). This future research proposes an approach then which locates students, their localities and expanding levels of transnational flows, together with their relationship to performative acts of service.

4. Final Remarks

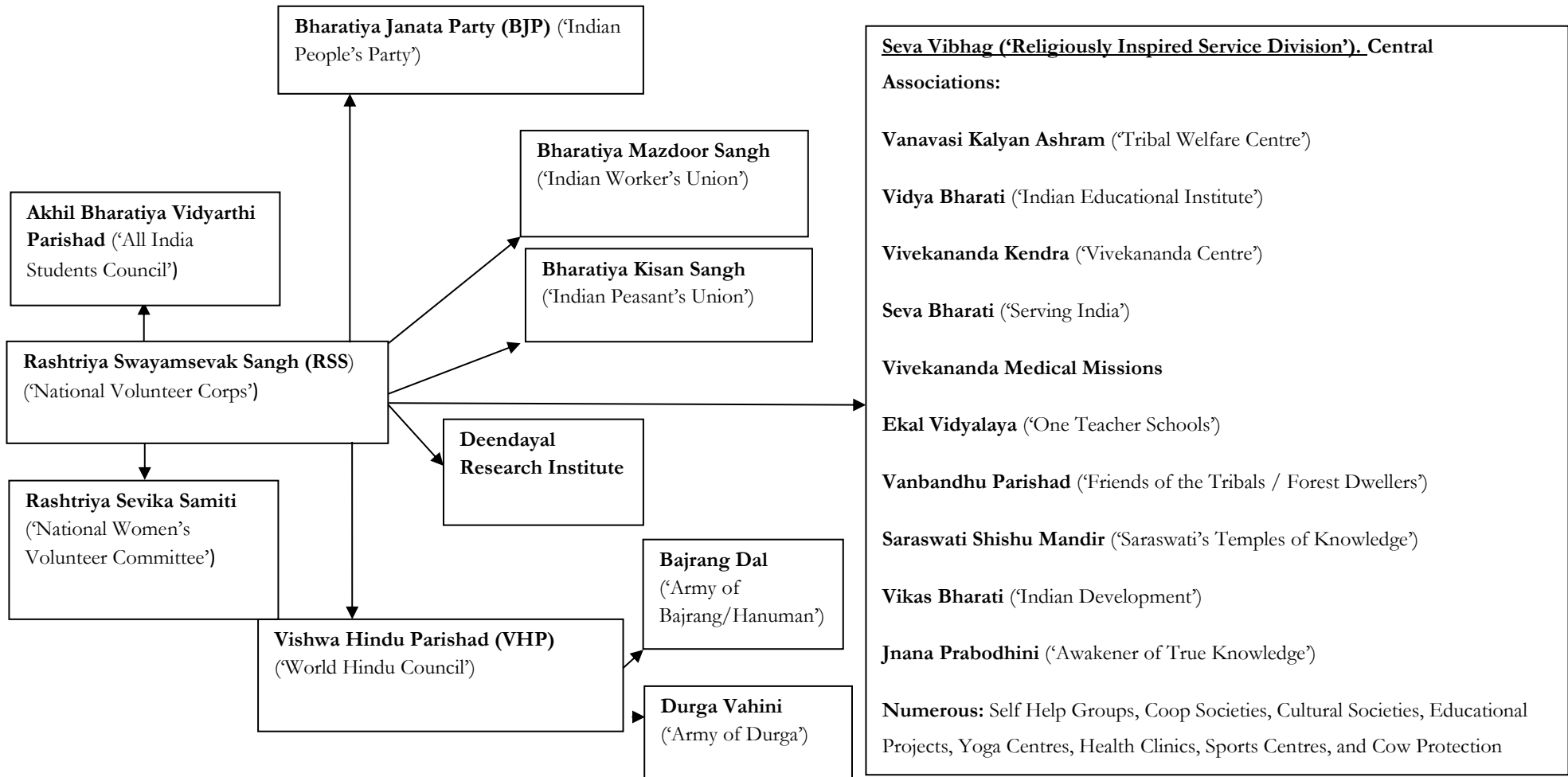
This thesis began through complicating a series of seemingly closed questions with regard to Hindu activist traditions of service and Hindu nationalism. Over the previous seven chapters I have demonstrated how Hindu nationalist articulations of *seva* have produced alternative publics, which, unlike related political manifestations and corresponding academic focuses, stand outside spectacular projects of communal violence or the capturing of governmental power. On the contrary, through reading the relationship between service and Hindu nationalism using Butler's (1993, 2007) theorisation of performativity, and a reworked understanding of Fraser's (1990) approach to fractured publics, I have demonstrated how Hindu nationalist practices of *seva* contribute to the development of alternative yet porous publics in which practices of service are rearticulated in the pursuit of an ethical reforming project organised around the reiteration and regulation of daily subjectivities of the self. Importantly, this work illustrates that far from being of inconsequence to the circulation of Hindu nationalism, such articulations of *seva* and constructs of the self become sites where Hindu nationalism operates as an unspoken mode of everyday sensibilities.

From the moment I began to embark on such a journey of research I have been forced to continually question my own assumptions. Indeed, at the end of such a project it is tempting to fall back upon the stability of my own previous certitudes. And yet, such chains can only be felt as such when we attempt to move. It is only through the labour of such a project, including immersing myself for lengthy periods of time inside the projects of Hindu nationalist *seva* projects that I have been able to move closer to understanding and explaining the formative power of Hindu nationalist practices of *seva*. While avenues of future research open up upon the horizon, perhaps the one conviction which we can still hold stable was best articulated by Priyanka, a participant in a VKK Gram Vikas Kendra, whose transgressive practices of development I brought into the seventh chapter, when she noted:

*Everything here is not what it seems. It's, well, it is turmoil.
But that is life, and that is how we have to live it. You will write
what you will, but in the end, we have more to teach you than
you do us. Put that in your book!*

Appendix One: The Sangh Parivar

Sources: Behar and Prakash (2004), Jaffrelot (eds) (2006), Kanungo (2002, 2012), *Sewa Disha* (1995), *Sewa Disha* (2009), *Sewa Disha* (2011).



Appendix Two: Details of Interviews

NAME	POSITION / BACKGROUND	DATE	LANGUAGE	LOCATION
Ajay	VKK Part-Time <i>Sevak</i> , Dhanbad Based Financer of E.V and Formal Schools, Gram Vikas Kendras.	6/08/11, 5/08/11	Hindi, English	Valmiki School Centre. Dhanbad.
Anil	VKK Part-Time <i>Sevak</i> , Teacher and Volunteer at Valmiki E.V.	5/08/11	Hindi	Valmiki School Centre.
Anuja	VKK Part-Time <i>Sevak</i> , Gram Vikas Kendra.	20/9/11, 25/9/11	Hindi	Rani Sati Mandir, Ranchi. Gumla.
Charu	VKK Gram Vikas Participant	1/10/2011	Hindi	Khangar Gram Vikas Kendra
Chetan	VKK Teacher at Valmiki School Centre	10/10/11	Hindi	Navdiha School Centre, Dhanbad.
Dilip	VKK Part-Time <i>Sevak</i> , Dhanbad Based Financer of E.V and Gram Vikas Kendras	6/08/11, 5/08/11	Hindi, English	Valmiki School Centre. Dhanbad
Dinesh	VKK Teacher at Navdiha School Centre	11/10/11	Hindi	Navdiha School Centre
Jhulan	VKK Part-Time <i>Sevak</i> , Gram Vikas Kendra	10/10/11	Hindi	Gram Vikas Kendra, Deodra
Kapil	Delhi Based Businessman, VKK Financer.	05/08/11, 06/08/11,	Hindi	Valmiki School Centre,

		07/08/11		Ranchi.
Madan	Senior Figure in the Formal Educational Wing of the VKK	04/08/11	Hindi, English	Valmiki School Centre. VKK HQ, Ranchi.
Mithali	VKK Full-Time Gram Vikas <i>Sevak</i>	06/08/11, 20/09/11	Hindi	Valmiki School Centre. Rani Sati Mandir, Ranchi
Navjot	Student at Navdiha School Centre	10/10/11	Hindi	Navdiha School Centre
Niyati	VKK Gram Vikas Participant	01/10/11	Hindi	Gram Vikas Kendra, Khangar
Poonam	VKK Part-Time <i>Sevak</i> , Gram Vikas Kendra	01/10/11	Hindi	Gram Vikas Kendra, Khangar
Priyanka	VKK Gram Vikas Participant	01/10/11	Hindi	Gram Vikas Kendra, Khangar
Ravi	Doctor, Medical Camp <i>Sevak</i>	20/10/11	Hindi, English	Medical Camp, Kumhariya
Rumeli	VKK Gram Vikas Participant	01/10/11	Hindi	Gram Vikas Kendra, Khangar
Sahill	Senior Figure in the Formal Educational Wing of the VKK	2/09/11	Hindi	VKK HQ, Ranchi
Sandeep	Headmaster, Dayananda Anglo Vedic School, Ranchi.	20/10/11	Hindi	Medical Camp, Kumhariya
Sanju	VKK Teacher at Navdiha School Centre	10/10/11	Hindi	Navdiha School Centre
Sourav	Officer, Society for Participatory Action and	7/10/11	Hindi	Ranchi

Reflection. VKK Advisor on Gram Vikas Projects				
Sunil	Senior Figure on the State Committee of the VKK	20/09/11	Hindi	Rani Sati Mandir, Ranchi
Venkatesh	VKK Part-Time <i>Sevak</i> , Architect for VKK Seva Project Buildings	7/08/11	Hindi	Valmiki School Centre, Dhanbad
Virender	VKK Gram Vikas Participant	01/10/11	Hindi	VKK Gram Vikas Kendra, Khangar

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