

CHAPTER 2

Bharatiya Janata Party:

Organizational Structure, Functioning and Ideological Principles

2.1 Introduction:

The chapter intends to understand the organizational structure of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and also tries to explore how different organizational bodies of BJP contribute to the functioning of the Party. This chapter is also an attempt to know the affiliate organizations of BJP and the functions they play for the larger interest of the party. In addition, the chapter also tries to explore the ideological principles of BJP and how the ideologies of the party evolved with the contribution of different prominent personalities of the party. The first part of the chapter tries to understand different structures of the organization of the Bharatiya Janata Party and its supportive organizations. The second part of the chapter tries to analyze different ideological principles of the Bharatiya Janata Party. To better understand the organizational structure of Bharatiya Janata Party at the ground level and their functions within the party, the constitution of the party has been studied with a reflection from the field. Different leaders and members of BJP were interviewed to realize the actual structure of the organization of the party at the grass root. In addition to understand the significant ideological principles of BJP, different secondary literatures on the Bharatiya Janata Party and Sangh Parivar have been reviewed and analyzed.

2.2 Bharatiya Janata Party: Organizational Structure and Functioning

For a political party its organizational activities and ideological commitments are the most important part because it maintains its distinct identity through organizational activities and ideological commitments. Every political party makes an effort to develop its own organizational set up to achieve its targets. In order to acquire political strength, maintaining its organization is the most effective approach for any political party. Thus, for every political party the structure of its organization and ideology are the most substantial aspects. In the Indian political scenario, the Bharatiya Janata Party has established itself as a strong and significant political party with a structure of organization which is well-described. It has been ruling India since the 2014

parliamentary election. BJP strongly claims to have more than one eighty million members, out of which many are fully devoted to the party as the fulltime participants. The organizational set up of BJP is spreading from the countrywide to neighborhood level.

The Bharatiya Janata Party in its constitution discusses about the membership procedure of the party. The constitution allows giving membership to any Indian citizen, above 18 years of age who is ready to accept its basic philosophy, its goals and objectives and also the commitments. The newly joined person must give the membership fees and also must submit a written declaration by stating that he is not a part of any other party. The general term of the organization is six years. After every six years all the members of the party have to go through the same process again. In case of demise, elimination or resignation the party membership will be ceased. From individuals, membership is subscribed in each 3 years on the following proportions- National -10 percent, State- 15 percent, District -25 percent, Mandal- 50 percent (B.J.P. Const. Art. IX).

BJP's constitution also describes the structure of its organization which are discussed below-

2.2.1. National Level

2.2.1.1 The Party Plenary Consultation:

The party consultation is the largest organization of the party. After the interval of minimum four years, it meets. It comprises 2000 members. Its emergency or special session can be called by the National Executive. By way of majority vote, the state government can also apply for its special consultation. The president convenes the special session in such cases. The decisions taken in the plenary consultation are responsible for the solidarity and coordination of all groups and organs of the party. The National Executive of the party works as the next authority when it is not functioning. In the party plenary consultation, all the office holders of National and the state delegates participate. The participants of the two houses of the parliament, all the members of the state legislative bodies of BJP and also the members of the National and State council of BJP can attend such consultation. More delegates can be added by the Executive with its

special power. In such consultation, the party president chairs the session (B.J.P. Const., Art. XXII).

2.2.1.2 National Council:

The National Council is one of the important policy making body of the party. It includes more than 1000 members. As per the constitution, these delegates constitute some distinct mochas, cells, units and wings of the party. The national council incorporates the same number of members as the parliamentary seats of the state. The State council elects them. A minimum numbers of SC/ ST participants are also important to incorporate. The National council comprises of - participants who are elected through the state council, minimum 10 percent members of the party who are in the Parliament, all ex National Presidents, all the party leaders of Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, state assemblies and councils, the members Nominated by the President of the national party, All National Executive members and the presidents and conveners of All India Allied Morchas and cells. At least once in a year they meet. In the National Council the senior leaders play the dominant role. It has the power to amend the party constitution with the help of National Executive. (B.J.P. Const. Art. XVIII).

2.2.1.3 The National Executive:

The National Executive has the authority to take any decision within the purview of the regulations provided by the constitution. It has the authority to distribute the duties, power and functions to all the other bodies of the party. This executive comprises the president and not more than 120 members which includes 40 women and 12 SC/ST members. Although the president can call its session at any time depending upon the seriousness of the issue but generally the meeting of the National Executive held after every 3 months. It is also called the President's Committee as the president nominates all the members and office bearers. The General Secretary is assigned the duty to convene and organize different meetings by following the instruction of the president.

The members can freely express their opinions in the National Executive. In the National Executive the senior leaders play the decisive role in finalizing the planning and policies of the party (B.J.P. Const. Art. XX).

2.2.1.3.1 The National President:

The National President is the supreme authority of the party. The president is elected according to party's constitution by an electoral body. That electoral body consists of the members of National Council, minimum 10 percent members from the parliament and also the state council members which must be minimum 10 percent. The leaders of the party have the power to decide the candidate and election is held as per their instructions. Along with the topmost leaders of the party, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh and other members of the *Sangh Parivar* also play decisive role in the selection of the National President. The president has the authority to distribute the duties and works to the members. The president also monitors the functioning of different Morchas and Cells of the Party. The presidents of different Morchas and Cells are also appointed by the National President (B.J.P. Const. Art. XIX).

2.2.1.3.2 Vice-President

The Vice President follows the instructions of the President. He also fulfills all the duties of the president and presides the meetings in absence of the president.

2.2.1.3.3 General Secretary

The General Secretary can issue circulars as well as different agendas according to the instructions of the president and also arrange and conduct different meetings. The General Secretary also conducts conferences, organize agitations and also arrange different programmes. He executes the decisions and also runs the office as per the instruction of the president and executives. (B.J.P. Const., Art. XX).

2.2.1.3.4 Secretary

The main works of the secretary is to help and support the general secretary and also do the duties as assigned by the president.

2.2.1.3.5 Spokesperson

The Spokesperson is responsible to present the party in front of the public. He should present the ideas of the party in the public domain.

2.2.1.3.6 Treasurer

The Main task of the Treasurer is to maintain expenditure and income of the committee and executive. The audit of the accounts of all subordinate bodies are also done by the Treasurer. (B.J.P. Const. Art. XX.).

2.2.1.4 Parliamentary Wing of the Party:

The members of the Parliamentary wing must adhere to the rules and regulations of the party and also, they must follow the instructions and suggestions of the party high command.

2.2.1.4.1 The Parliament:

All the members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha are included in this. The parliament generally meets before the starting of parliament session at least once to discuss the roadmap of the party within the parliament. Instructions are given to all the party MPs regarding their roles and positions during the parliament session. When the party issued a whip, no member can go against it because the party considers it as breach of trust. In the Parliament committee, the chief is elected for 5 years. Only with the strength of two/third members present in the parliament, the leaders can be removed. (B.J.P. Const. Art. XXV.).

2.2.1.4.2 The Parliamentary Executive Committee:

It incorporates Parliamentary party's all the office bearers. The committee takes the decision regarding the management and expenditure of party's money and also different affairs of the party. The leaders, Deputy leaders and also the Additional Deputy leaders, Secretaries and participants who are elected from all the houses are included in this committee. Before the presentation inside the parliament, all the proposals of legislature, amendments etc. are first placed before this committee for its approval. This committee also can assign power to different status committees for the interest of the management of the party. The parliamentary and legislative affairs which are related to the party in both the houses of the parliament are regulated by this committee. It is suggestive that regular interaction should take place between the parliamentary wing and the general public. (B.J.P. Const. Art. XXV).

2.2.1.5. Morchas:

The Morchas are one of the important parts of the BJP party. These are the mass wings of the party. Women, farmers, Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes are the main target groups of these Morchas. The president of the Morchas is appointed by the party president. In every district and state different Morchas have their own mass network. The National Executive supervises the functions and works of the Morchas. All the Morchas have their own operational committees. Numerous Morchas are running across the country related to different fields which has been helping the party to expand the network of the party. (B.J.P. Const. Art. XXXI.).

2.2.1.6 Special Agencies:

To carry out various important functions of the party, the National executive of BJP appointed two important agencies. These two includes the Parliamentary Board and also the Central Election Committee. The Parliamentary Board acts as the bridge between the Parliamentary party and different Morchas of BJP. On the other hand, the Central Election Committee is responsible for party's all electoral affairs. It takes all the final decisions related to the distribution of the tickets while discussing with the party senior leadership. (B.J.P. Const., Art. XXVI).

2.2.2 State Party Organization:

State government and State council are two important organizational bodies which have been designed to run the party smoothly at the country level. The state president is the head of the party's state unit. The state council discharge its duties through a group comprises of office bearers. The party high command has the authority regarding the election and choice of the state president. (B.J.P. Const. Art. XVI).

2.2.2.1 State Council:

The State Council is an important body of the party at state level. It includes different members starting from district council to national council. It also includes party legislators, all ex-state presidents, National council members from the state, the presidents of allied morchas etc. A minimum representation of SCs and STs should also

get a place in the State Council according to the constitution of the party. (B.J.P. Const., Art. XVI).

2.2.2.2 State Executive

There are 3 categories of State Executive. All the categories of the State Executive include a president, some members and some representatives of women and SCs/STs. The numbers of the members and the representatives of SCs and STs vary depending upon the category of the state executive. The state council members elect the president of State Executive. The President must be a party member for at least 10 years and he must be an active member for consecutive three years in the party. State council functions with the guide and support of the State Executive. The State Executive provides suggestions and guidelines to the National Executive regarding different matters of the state. (B.J.P. Const., Art. XVII).

2.2.2.2.1 State Election Committee:

The State Election Committee is assigned the authority of selecting party candidates for the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha seats from the state and sends the names to the Central Election Committee. The State Election Committee is elected by the State executive. It is also responsible for the party's final decision of the candidates in various elections at grass root level. In the process of the election campaign for the party candidates it plays the decisive role. (B.J.P. Const. Art. XVII).

2.2.3 District Committee:

The District Committee is the administrative body of the party at district level. The party describes three categories of the district committee. All the three categories include a president, some members and representation of the women and Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes. The members of all Mandal Committees elect the President of the District Committee. The president has the authority to nominate other members of the committee. While the president is elected for minimum six years, the other members are selected for minimum three years. (B.J.P. Const. Art. XV).

2.2.4 Mandal Committee:

The Mandal Committee is the administrative forum of the party at the ground level. Mandal Committees are described in three categories. In all the categories along with the president few members and some representative members from women and SCs/STs are included. Only active members of the party can become a member of the Mandal committee. In all the three categories the number of the members varies. The Mandal committee monitors the local committees and it also addresses the local issues. (B.J.P. Const. Art. XIV).

2.2.5 Gram Kendra/Shahari Kendra:

The Gram Kendra or Shahari Kendra is the party forum exists at the micro level. It includes five members. The president of the Mandal Committee nominates the convener for this Kendra. It supervises local committees related to Panchayats or wards. (B.J.P. Const. Art. XIII, (A)).

2.2.6. Local Committee:

The Local Committees of the party exists at the bottom of the administrative hierarchy of the BJP party. As per the constitution, the number of members of the Local Committee varies according to the population of the locality. In case of the areas with normal population, the number of members should be at least fifty and in case of the areas with very less population the number of the members should be at least twenty-five. (B.J.P. Const., Art. XIII).

2.3 Ideological Principles of BJP

The history of any party has the roots of its ideological principles. Thus, to explore the ideological principles of the Bharatiya Janata Party, it is important to go back to the history and the context in which BJP established itself as a distinct political party. The development of the ideological principles of a party or organization is a continuous process. Different persons have contributed their opinions and ideas towards the growth and progress of a party and the way it functions, which eventually become the ideology of the Party. Out of the different opinions and thoughts of different pioneering figures

associated with the party, a party adheres to some thoughts which may direct the party in their political journey.

Prior to independence, Congress was the umbrella organization under which people from different backgrounds and interests were being united. As time passed, different interest groups were also formed within the Congress based on their religious as well as caste or community identity. Muslim League was one of the first organizations, which came out of Congress based on their Muslim identity.

On the contrary, Hindu Mahasabha was an organization formed in 1906 to serve as a counterpart to the Muslim League. The Hindu Mahasabha became the first organization established with the explicit goal of promoting Hindu interests and an implicit concern about possible preferential treatment of minority groups, especially Muslims. They wanted to unify Indian Hindus beyond caste and community divisions. But Hinduism itself was hardly monolithic. A 1911 census stated that, “a quarter of the persons classed as Hindus deny the supremacy of Brahmans, a quarter do not worship the great Hindu gods, a half do not regard cremation as obligatory, and two-fifths eat beef.” The leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha believed it was their responsibility to create a community of people who identified themselves as Hindus first, rather than by caste, community, or linguistic affiliations. Critics expressed discontent with Congress-style nationalism in the Hindu Mahasabha (Venkatesh, 2021).

Congress was accused by Hindu Nationalists of violating the principles of secular nation building, a charge that they were to repeat throughout the post-independence period. Thus, they denounced Congress' acceptance in the reservation of seats for Muslims. Later, Arya Samaj forecasted Hindu Nationalism in all these respects, to which it eventually gave birth. Provincial Hindu Sabhas (Hindu Councils) were formed by revivalist groups associated with the extremist tendency during 1907 and in 1915, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha was founded as an umbrella organization for these organizations. The Mahasabha was given a formal organization in 1923 which was modeled after Congress and also started to become more expressly anti-Muslim and began to “show an interest in contesting elections as an independent force (Kanungo, 2002).

In 1925, K.B. Hedgewar, one of the members of Hindu Mahasabha, established the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (the National Volunteer Organization, or RSS) to prohibit the Muslim aggression and also to protect the Hindus.

Hedgewar believed that India was a Hindu nation, but this nation was exploited at a time of weakness and conquered by successive Islamic dynasties (the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals) and finally the British Empire. He didn't support the idea of passive resistance to the British Raj as introduced by M.K. Gandhi from 1917-1920. Hedgewar believed that the only way to throw off the yoke of colonial rule was through more aggressive activities (Venkatesh, 2021).

Hedgewar was very critical about the disorganized nature of the Hindu Society. He believed that due to the lack of solidarity among the Hindus, the Hindus became the victims of communal riots. Thus, he made an effort to start a strong organization which could protect the interest of the Hindus. He further placed some goals before the RSS. One important goal was to expand the influence of RSS in all aspects of life. To achieve those goals or objectives, he suggested to silently undertaking different works of the organization. He was also in favour of inculcating and planting the spirit of patriotism in the minds of the common people. He strongly believed that the prime goal of the RSS was to expand the presence and influence of Hindus in the public life of the country and not to capture the political power (Jaffrelot, 2019).

The works of V.D. Savarkar was his inspiration. Hedgewar also admired the works of Benito Mussolini and the Fascist party in Italy, pointing their efficiency and seeming success in unifying a divided nation. Savarkar's political vision of Hinduism as the basis of nation building really inspired Hedgewar. He got also impressed by the working style of the Fascist parties in Europe. He tried to bring Savarkar's political vision of Hinduism and the working style of the Fascist parties together which in turn shaped his vision towards RSS. Savarkar asserted that British could only colonize India because of a lack of masculine strength among the Hindu people. He regarded the previous Islamic rulers as colonizers like the British. Muslim's interests in India, were about dominating Hindus, Savarkar stated. In particular, he believed that there has been a secret urge of the Muslims to transform India into a Muslim state which may result in a Civil war as soon as it confronts the Hindustani state.

The Hindu Mahasabha and RSS were not at all happy with the partition. Savarkar claimed that from India the land had been ‘taken away’ and it was handed over to Muslims. Savarkar is also upset that the remaining land in the subcontinent was called ‘India’ rather than ‘Hindustan’ (land of Hindus). His aspiration for post-colonial India was a united Hindustan, which would include a Muslim minority that was granted no protection from majoritarianism or populism (Venkatesh, 2021).

By criticizing Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress’s idea of Composite Indian nationalism, RSS and Savarkar advocated the Hindu nationalist ideology. After Hedgewar, it was M.S. Golwalkar who further developed RSS’s Hindu nationalist ideology. From the ideas of Golwalkar and Hedgewar it can be understood that Hinduism stands for Hindu religion on the other hand Hindutva is a political ideology. The Hindutva ideology aspires to initiate Hindu nation in India. It has been observed that In India, Hindutva can be understood through two perspectives. While the first was propagated by Savarkar, the other one was initiated by Golwalkar. Although both the perspectives are inclined towards Hindutva but they have different methods and approach. Savarkar discussed and explained Hindutva in the year 1924 in his book *Essentials of Hindutva*. Savarkar believed that identity formation is the most important criteria for nationalism. According to him Hindu religion offers that identity which can enhance the feeling of nationalism in India (cited in Jaffrelot, 2019). He believed that Hindus were connected together through religious, linguistic and cultural sentiments despite having many differences. These sentiments have been formed over the centuries. It could only be possible because of very long assimilation process. Savarkar stated that while state belonged to political category, the nation was a cultural category. According to him although all the citizens of the country were part of the Indian state but non-Hindus might not be part of the nation (cited in Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020).

He therefore identified the movement’s objective as the unification of Hindus or Hindu Sangathan. When V.D Savarkar became President in 1937, Hindu Nationalism was more pronounced in the Mahasabha (Kanungo, 2002).

Hindutva: Who is a Hindu written by Savarkar in 1920s was the first attempt at endowing what he called the Hindu Rastra (the Hindu nation) with a clear-cut identity, namely, Hindutva, a word coined by Savarkar. Declaring himself an atheist, Savarkar argued that religion was only one aspect of Hindu identity, and not even the most

important. In fact, he draws his definition of Hindu identity out of western theories of the nation. In addition to religion, land and race, language is another pillar of Hindu identity. In this context, Savarkar refers to Sanskrit but also to Hindi: hence, the equation he finally established between Hindutva and “Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan”. Therefore, according to Jaffrelot, Hindu nationalism appears for the first time as resulting from the superimposition of a religion, a culture, a language and a sacred territory- the perfect recipe for ethnic nationalism. Jaffrelot mentioned that according to Savarkar, as religious minorities are the outsiders, they must adhere to Hindutva culture, which is a national culture. In the private sphere, they may worship their gods and follow their rituals, but in the public domain, they must pay allegiance to Hindu symbols. Jaffrelot believes that Savarkar wrote Hindutva in reaction to the pan-Islamic mobilization of the Khilafat movement and therefore, most of his thoughts were derived from his deep-rooted hostility to Islam and its followers (Jaffrelot,2019).

On the contrary, Golwalkar believed that British rule was not an obstacle to achieving a Hindu nation; rather Muslims stood in the way along with Christians and communists.

Rather than challenging the British directly and putting the organization at risk, Golwalkar gave his importance on building a force that would be strong enough to create and defend a Hindu nation. Golwalkar ramped up the paramilitary aspect of RSS training activities in order to carry out his agenda. He reiterated the notion that Hindu men (particularly young men) had to be strong in order to defend their motherland from ‘outsiders’, as they had failed to do it in the past. He emphasized on the sacrifice of the forefathers of the Hindu people, who shed their blood in defense of the sanctity and integrity of the motherland. He asserted that only the Hindu has been living here as a child of this soil(Venkatesh, 2021).

Golwalkar was disappointed with the drafts of the Indian Constitution. He believed, it should have been written on the basis of ancient Hindu law rather than a ‘foreign’ approach based on human rights. As Savarkar believed, Golwalkar also blamed “hostility and murderous mood” of Muslim masses in India as the direct cause of the communal riots in 1947 (ibid). The RSS' concept of Hindu nationalism was propagated by Golwalkar. Golwalkar emphasized on the superiority of Hindu spiritualism. He asserted that as a perspective of change it is more superior than capitalism and communism (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020).

Soon after Independence, the RSS leaders realized that they couldn't remain out of politics. After the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, a ban was imposed on RSS (Jaffrelot, 2019). Golwalkar was charged of inciting communal violence. Thus, he was imprisoned for a year. After a long inquiry, the government allowed the RSS to start its activities again. Many conditions were placed before RSS which included the acceptance of the Indian Constitution and the renunciation of violence in agitations and demonstrations. As a result of this ban, the RSS leadership decided that they needed a political party that could participate in parliamentary democracy. Like this, the RSS themselves could continue propagating their ideology by flying under the radar without running the risk of being outlawed (Venkatesh, 2021).

Though reluctant, Golwalkar allowed the leaders to discuss the matter with Shyama Prasad Mookherjee who had been the president of Hindu Mahasabha. These discussions resulted in the creation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951, on the eve of the first election. When the Jana Sangh took over from the RSS, Golwalkar seconded Deendayal Upadhyaya to the party and asked him to transform it into a genuine component of the nascent Sangh Parivar. He was asked to give Jana Sangh a doctrine of its own. Upadhyaya then developed his main doctrine, which is known as Integral Humanism (1965) – a text, which provided the bases of Jana Sangh's principles and policies in 1965. Main essence of the Integral Humanism is the emphasis on the importance of the society vis-à-vis the state. It is in line with The RSS's ideology which also emphasized on the importance of ground work at the local. Upadhyaya wanted to rehabilitate the old Varna system. He also stressed on the importance of decentralization of power to the village level (Jaffrelot, 2019).

Upadhyaya remained the Jana Sangh's general secretary from 1953 to 1967. In the 1970s, the RSS named its think-tank, the Deendayal Research Institute after Upadhyaya and he has been remained as a reference point for the official programme of Jana Sangh and later BJP. It is evident from the frequent apply of Integral Humanism in the election manifestos of these parties. Integral Humanism holds the view that Bharatiya culture is integrated. In the late 1960's Balraj Madhok became the president of the Jana Sangh. He asserted that the minorities should assimilate into a 'Hindu nation' and also according to him they must adopt Hindu culture and its values (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020).

Jana Sangh was always divided between two strategies; one moderate and the other one was more militant. The militant group was in favour of Hinduness in an aggressive form. They wanted to make Hindi as the national language and protecting of cows (by banning cow slaughter). Although, initially Jana Sangh adopted the militant line, which was more in keeping with the RSS wishes but later in 1970s, Jana Sangh resigned itself to following a moderate line and merged with the Janata Party. In 1980, the former Jana Sangh leaders started a new party, the Bharatiya Janata Party which remained faithful to the moderate strategy. The RSS kept its distance from the BJP and made greater use of the VHP to re-kindle ethno-religious political activism. The more militant strategy found its main expression in the launching of the Ayodhya movement in the mid-1980's. That Ayodhya episode reinforced the champion of Hinduism image that the BJP had been trying to acquire among the majority community. By the mid-1990's, the BJP reverted to its moderate line. The moderate approach was blamed as responsible for the defeat of the NDA Government which was led by Vajpayee. The VHP leaders openly said that the Vajpayee government had betrayed the Hindus by not building the Rama Temple they longed for in Ayodhya (Jaffrelot, 2019).

2.4 BJP and the RSS Connection

Some politicians who originally belong to the RSS or Sangh Parivar starting from Balraj Madhok in 1960's and 1970's to BJP leaders today have complained about the RSS's interference in the BJP party politics. Ironically Hindu nationalists who believed that RSS should actually join politics failed to draw the RSS into politics until 1950s. Savarkar for instance, was not able to convince Hedgewar or Golwalkar to join Hindu Mahasabha. Golwalkar later changed his mind after independence under pressure from fellow swayamsevaks. Later, many advocated RSS to join hands in politics. One of them was K.R. Malkani who wrote in 1949, that Sangh must take part in politics to stop the un-Bharatiya and anti-Bharatiya policies of the Government. Golwalkar approved the views of Malkani and others who wanted to form a new party. Golwalkar met S.P. Mookerjee, the founder of Jana Sangh and settled for seconding senior swayamsevaks to the newly formed Jana Sangh including Deendayal Upadhyaya, Balraj Madhok and Atal Bihari Bajpayee (Jaffrelot, 2019).

Balasaheb Deoras the successor of Golwalkar got much more involved in politics than any earlier sarsanghchalaks. He also introduced the specific brand of 'swayamsevaks'

known as activists. As soon as RSS men took over the Jana Sangh, Hindu traditionalists were sidelined. The organization was restructured to such an extent that the pillars of the party apparatus sangathan mantris or organization secretaries for the district or state level came from the RSS. Its ultimate aim was the reform of society in the long run, and not the conquest of power since the state was not viewed as a prominent institution. Therefore, the Jana Sangh was very reluctant to enter into any alliance with any who are not fully in tune with its ideology but only to capture power. The Jana Sangh like all nationalists was against linguistic states because they entertained regionalists or even sub-national identities (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020).

The instrumentalization of the Ayodhya issue and the related communal riots that polarized the electorates along religious lines helped the BJP make progress in election after election. During the Vajpayee Government it was observed that RSS and the VHP leaders questioned the hunger for power of the BJP leaders. They also pointed out that BJP members compromised on their party principles to remain in office (Jaffrelot, 2019).

Shyama Prasad Mukherji, left the Nehru cabinet by protesting the betrayal of East Bengal Hindus. He belonged to the Hindu Mahasabha. Later, he established and became the president of Bharatiya Jana Sangh and an RSS leader, Bhai Mahavir became the General Secretary (Kanungo, 2002).

The RSS and Jana Sangh were two entirely different and separate entities. One was cultural and the other political. The RSS Constitution even provided that nobody who held office in the organization could hold office in any political party. But, Swayamsevaks like Deendayal Upadhyaya, Atal Behari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, Sundar Singh Bhandari, etc., advocated the joining of some RSS members into politics who have interest and ability. But they also stressed on the importance of the separation of politics from the RSS (Jaffrelot, 2019).

Advani in the concluding statement at the National executive meeting, stated that from time to time, the BJP leadership has been consulting the RSS functionaries. After such consultations, the party takes its own independent decisions. Some decisions may differ and some got alignment. However, lately an impression has gained ground that no political or organizational decision can be taken without the consent of RSS

functionaries. This perception will do no good either to the RSS or BJP, but both the RSS and BJP must consciously exert to dispel this impression (ibid).

2.5 Supportive Organizations:

Over the period of time a series of affiliate organizations of the Sangh parivar have been coming out which are known as Matro Sansthas. Golwalkar and played a significant role in the establishment of such organizations. Later Balasaheb Deoras also played an important role in the expansion of these affiliate bodies. These organizations have been instrumental in conducting various institutionalized service activities. They have been undertaking thousands of activities in different areas especially in the field of health and education. Their main target group is the marginalized section of the society. The ultimate goal of these organizations is to build a strong 'Hindu Rashtra' by uniting all the Hindus. In addition, they are also concerned with the infusion of Hindu nationalism into the minds of people and also maintaining national discipline (Bhattacharjee, 2021). The main supportive organizations of the Sangh Parivar are discussed below:

2.5.1 RSS

There are some organizations which represent Hindutva ideology in India. These organizations are commonly known as the *Sangh Parivar* or family of organizations. The parent organization of the *Sangh Parivar* is known as The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (Bhattacharjee, 2021). It was started in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. RSS was formed to protect Hinduism from both foreign and native influences, and to propagate Hindu culture. The stated goal of the RSS is to "organize the Hindu society and to promote national unity and pride" (Kanungo, 2002). A task of building a Hindu Nation is also initiated by them. A number of political and cultural organizations have been established to carry out the cultural and political project of constructing a Hindu identity among Hindus and non-Hindus. The success of the movement lies in building a dynamic organizational network, that at the same time, tries to maintain the ideological unity of the movement. The organizational sophistication of the movement resides in the RSS shakha, which are organized into neighborhood units and where male children and youth learn physical education exercises and the Hindutva ideology. After proving their activities in an RSS unit, members receive additional responsibilities in any of the movement's organizations (Kamat & Mathew, 2003). They can be found everywhere

like running from daycare centers and play schools in neighborhoods to trade unions in factories, or engaging in works related to rehabilitation and relief. It has helped to create a compassionate image for the RSS. Along with that, these activities also helped RSS to expand its organizational network and also undertake cadre building. These activities paved the way for RSS to even enter those regions where it had no traditional support base (Bhattacharjee, 2021).

The RSS viewed and views itself as a cultural organization, rather than a political party. It does not field candidates for elections, although it has been closely associated with parties that do. RSS members were forbidden to openly enter party politics. Initially, the BJP sought to disassociate itself from the RSS, and the RSS in turn expressed neutrality between the BJP and the Congress, which was increasingly taking a Hindu turn (Swamy, 2003). From 1950s onwards, the RSS played a central role in the Jan Sangh, it also continued to sponsor non-electoral organizations aimed at ‘unifying Hindus’ and inculcating in them the values it thought essential to strengthen the Hindu nation. Core among these are the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), or World Hindu Council, which was founded in 1966 and the VHP’s youth wing, the Bajrang Dal.

The RSS and its affiliate organizations have been continuing their relation with BJP and these organizations which are affiliates of RSS are collectively known as *Sangh Parivar* (ibid.).

2.5.2 The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS)

The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) is one of the largest labour organizations in India. From the starting, BMS has been working as a RSS affiliate organization. It was established in 1955 at Bhopal with the initiative of D.B. Thengadi who was an intellectual. It was only after twelve years of its formation, the 1st All India Conference was held in Delhi in which the first executive was elected (Saxena, 1993). Shri Ram Nareshji was elected as its first President and D.B. Thengadi became the first General Secretary. The Government of India declared BMS as the largest Trade Union Organisation of India in 1996 (Bhattacharya, 2022). It has emerged as an important organization because unlike other trade union organizations it didn’t come out of national movement and also it claimed to be a non-political trade union. BMS claims that it restricts itself to labour issues rather than politics. It wants the workers to follow

nationalism. But in reality BMS has been maintaining its relation with BJP and RSS (Saxena, 1993). The ideological basis of the BMS is centered on the Indian culture. It has been trying to find unity in diversity. BMS criticizes Marx's class struggle theory and believes that they are fighting against exploitation and injustice and not against any class (Bhattacharya, 2022).

2.5.3 Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)

Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) is a right-wing all India student organization affiliated to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The ABVP was founded in the year 1948, with the initiative of the RSS activist Balraj Madhok, but it was formally registered on 9th July 1949. It was initiated in order to counter communist influence on university campuses. A lecturer of Bombay, namely, Yashwant Rao Kelkar became its main organizer in 1958. According to the ABVP website, he is considered as 'the real architect of the ABVP'. The ABVP played an important role during the JP movement and took part in various agitations. After the emergency, it got benefited from such efforts and thus experienced a growth in members (Oommen, 1974).

It continued to grow and its membership reached to 3.175 million members as of 2016. It claims to be India's largest student organization. The ABVP spokesmen insist that the ABVP is not affiliated to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). They describe it as the 'student wing' of the RSS. However, both the BJP and the ABVP are members of the Sangh Parivar, the RSS's "family of (affiliated) organizations". The BJP is said to gain handsomely from the ABVP's support base and several politicians of the BJP, including the former Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley, had their ideological foundation in the ABVP (Ramachandran, 2017). Several scholars make no distinction between the RSS and the BJP, and regard the ABVP as a student wing of both of them or either of them. The ABVP's manifesto includes agendas such as educational and university reforms. It competes in student-body elections in colleges and universities (Oommen, 1974). The official ABVP magazine is *Rashtriya Chhatrashakti*, which is published monthly in Hindi in New Delhi. The ABVP, has continuously struggled for comprehensive educational reforms. The ABVP feels that the new generation and the future successive generations of our country should have a clear knowledge of our glorious heritage and past. ABVP aspires to make India a modern country, but with a unique identity of her own. It was this reason that the ABVP, for the past years of its formal existence, has

consistently directed all its programmes, movements, demands and every sort of constructive activity towards the goal of National Reconstruction (Ramachandran, 2017).

2.5.4. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad was founded by the RSS chief, M.S. Golwalkar, in Bombay on August 29, 1964 with Swami Chinmayanand as its President. An RSS activist, Shivram S. Apte was appointed its general secretary. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad was formed to promote Hinduism and give Hindus a "sense of identity," as claimed by the group. According to analysts, in order to uphold and maintain Hindu values the leaders of the RSS realized the necessity to bring all Hindus of the world into one platform. The leaders claimed that other religions were more popular around the world because they were more organized and uniform as compared to Hinduism (Noorani, 2003).

The VHP is a non-political organization. The VHP claims to be the only organization (along with its parent entity - the RSS) in the world fighting for the rights of Hindus. Ever since its inception, construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya has been the main goal of VHP (encyclopedia). It was decided that the VHP would be a non-political organization and no office-bearer of any political party shall be simultaneously a member of the Parishad (Puri, 2008). The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has been successful in establishing itself as one of the important and powerful members of the *Sangh Parivar*. It has also become the ideological initiator of a 'Hindu Unity' movement in the consolidation of an assertive, nay, aggressive, 'Hindutva' platform in the religious and cultural domains of the Hindu society (Lochtefeld, 1994).

Appropriately, since it is the "World Hindu Council", it established branches abroad. In March 1981, the VHP formed the Marg Darshak Mandal, a forum of religious leaders, to advise it "on Hindu philosophical thought and conduct". In 1982, this Mandal set up the Dharma Sansad, a supreme deliberative body of religious figures, the VHP's parliament. In 1984, the first Dharma Sansad resolved to demand the site of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya. Significantly, it set up soon thereafter, the Bajrang Dal as its militant wing (Noorani, 2003). The RSS-blessed VHP's massive social and cultural enterprise has not only influenced the post-1984 evolution of the RSS-inspired BJP's Hindutva politics, but also energetically endeavored to put Hindutva on the top of India's political and cultural agenda. The most prominent organization behind the demolition of

Babri Masjid was VHP together with their allies in Bharatiya Janata Party (Lochtefeld, 1994). From 1964 to 1982, the VHP concentrated on establishing its branches across the country. The main objective was to reach out to schedule castes and tribals and also unification of the Hindus through different welfare programs related to education. They have been also organizing Hindus overseas in a massive way. However, it should be noted that the VHP's growing influence in the Hindu society and its organizational expansion only became possible with the help of its parent organization RSS (Puri, 2008).

2.5.5. Vidya Bharati

Vidya Bharati is the educational wing of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It is also known as Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan. It has its registered headquarters in Lucknow with a functional headquarters in Delhi and a sub-office in Kurukhsetra. RSS, under the guidance of M.S. Golwalkar established its first Gita school, at Kurukhsetra in 1946. But, the ban on RSS in 1948, put a break on the spread of the Gita school model. After the ban was lifted, the first Saraswati Shishu Mandir brand school was established in Gorakhpur in 1952, by Nanaji Deshmukh (Nair, 2009). As the number of schools increased under the Saraswati Shishu Mandir model, *Shishu Shiksha Prabandak Samiti*, was set up to coordinate activities between these schools at the state level. Such committees were set up in the states of Delhi, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. In 1977-78, an all-India apex body, Vidya Bharati was set up to coordinate the activities between these state committees. It was headquartered in Delhi (Venkitesh, 1998).

Majority of the schools of Vidya Bharati are affiliated to the Central Board for Secondary Education or their local State Boards. Dinanath Batra, former General Secretary of Vidya Bharati, said that they were fighting an "ideological battle against Macaulay, Marx and Madrasawadis". In comparison to which Vidya Bharati advocates "Indianisation, nationalisation and spiritualisation" of education (Chandavarkar, 2009). In the areas of study that are peripheral to the core curriculum, like physical education, music and cultural education, the institution worked out its own curriculum. In addition to formal schools (which go by a variety of names such as, *Adarsh Vidhya Mandir, Shishu Vatika, Saraswati Shishu Mandir, Saraswati Vidya Mandir, Saraswati Vidyalaya* etc.), Vidya Bharati also runs *sanskar kendras* (cultural schools) and single-

teacher schools for cultural education (Nair, 2009). It has schools in remote areas of the north-eastern states as well as in the south Indian states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The main target area has been the underdeveloped regions and regions inhabited by tribal communities. It runs one of the largest private networks of schools in India (Venkitesh, 1998). As of 2019, there were 12,828 formal schools and 11,353 informal schools. In 2019, the formal schools had a total strength of more than 34 lakh (3.4 million) students (Chatterj et al., 2019).

2.5.6. Seva Bharati

Rashtriya Seva Bharati is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that works with economically weaker sections of Indian society, including tribals (vanvasi communities). On 8th April 1989, veteran social worker and the then RSS Sarsanghachalak Shri Balasaheb Deoras, addressed a huge gathering of volunteers at Ambedkar Stadium, Delhi where he called upon them to start service activities among the neglected sections of the society. He asked the volunteers to raise self-respect of the socially and economically deprived people of India. This speech is considered to be the initiating first step that led to starting the Seva Bharati (Chatterjiet al., 2019). Although the volunteers of RSS and other allied organisations had been informally working on the ground for the interest of the marginalized groups, it was opined that a formal structure would help coordinate the service programmes all over the country. Seva Bharati was thus established later that year (Thachil, 2011). It also focuses on helping urban slum dwellers and resettlement colonies by introducing welfare and social service programs such as free medical assistance, free education, and vocational training (Kanungo, 2006). Seva Bharati is inspired from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and is the official community service umbrella of allied organisations. The *Akhil Bharatiya Saha Seva Pramukh* of the RSS guides the organisation and is also represented in the *Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha*, the highest decision-making body of the Sangh Parivar (Thachil, 2011). Seva Bharati's volunteers are involved in over 100,000 service projects in remote areas throughout the country. They are often the first responders in natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes and tsunamis. Seva Bharati has a reported 17,500 projects in education, 12,000 in healthcare, 26,000 in social welfare, and 9,238 self-reliance projects. The economically weaker and socially neglected sections of society are the main target groups of these projects. They provide medical assistance, daycare, hostels,

libraries, basic education, vocational and industrial training, and support for street children (Chatterji et al., 2019). Seva Bharati's goal is to make underprivileged communities self-reliant in all aspects of their lives. Seva Bharati has numerous hostels for the economically underprivileged children across the country, especially the tribal and the rural poor. It also helps students from the remote tribal areas to enroll in schools in different part of the country and sponsors all their educational and other needs (Sarkar, 1999).

2.5.7. Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram

Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram commonly known as Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram is the India's largest tribal welfare organisation. It focuses on the welfare activities of members of Scheduled Tribes in remote areas of India. The organization is a constituent of the Sangh Parivar, the family of organisations affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, (RSS)(Gupta, 2019).The organization has been at the forefront of an anti-conversion campaign, which can interestingly trace its roots back to not only the second RSS Sarsanghchalak, M.S. Golwalkar, but also to Congress stalwart Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla and Gandhian Thakkar Bappa (Jaffrelot, 1996). The Ashram was founded in 1952 on 26thDecember, at Jashpur by Ramakant Keshav Deshpande (also known as Balasaheb Deshpande), an official of the Orissa State Department of Tribal Welfare, and also with the help of the Orissa State Government and the RSS. A committed RSS pracharak (full-time worker), Moreshwar Haribhau Ketkar assisted him as instructed by Golwalkar. Its aim was to counter the appeal of Christian missionary schools to the tribals. Based in Jashpur (214 km from Raigarh), it established schools in Raigarh and Surguja districts - areas with large tribal populations (Anand, 2020).

The first project started by the organisation had only 13 tribal children who were enrolled to be educated with hostel facilities. The Ashram grew rapidly and a permanent office was established in 1963, inaugurated by the RSS chief M.S. Golwalkar. In 1977, during the Janata Party Government, it acquired national status (expressed in its new name, *Bhāratiya Vanavāsi Kalyān Āshram*) (Jaffrelot, 1996).At present, the organisation runs more than 20,000 projects covering almost every aspect related to the welfare of the tribals. Its work has been expanded to 323 districts of the country. It has a footprint in more than 52,000 villages. The ABVKA has 14,000 village-level committees and 1,200

full-time workers, 70 per cent of whom are tribals. The full-time workers also include 300 women (Anand, 2020).

2.5.8. Bajrang Dal

The youth wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, is considered the most strident arm of the Sangh, known for its involvement in controversial campaigns in the name of cow protection, anti-conversion and prevention of 'Love Jihad' (Hebbar, 2023). After Babri Masjid demolition, Vishwa Hindu Parishad started a movement to construct Ram Temple at Ayodhya. One of the main aims was to construct Lord Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya. VHP needed another organization, which could take to the streets and agitate and connect the youth with this movement. In such a situation, Bajrang Dal was established on October 1, 1984 to guard a Shobha Yatra launched by the VHP as part of the Ram temple movement (Katju, 2015). Vinay Katiyar, who was very aggressive about the construction of Ram temple at that time, was made its face. Among the founding members, L.K. Advani was prominent. Later its women's wing Durga Vahini was also formed. The Bajrang Dal claims to be a nationalist and religious organization but it has also been linked to a variety of violent acts over the decades. The outfit comes under the umbrella of the Sangh Parivar, an umbrella group of Hindu nationalist organizations (Bandyopadhyay, 2023). The main aim of the members of Bajrang Dal is to protect the Hindu nation. The ideology of this organization is to stop the increasing conversion in India and to awaken Hindus towards their religion. Since its inception, this organization has been fighting on issues like Hindu nationalism, Ram Janmabhoomi dispute, Love Jihad, Ghar Wapsi, etc. (Katju, 2015). Apart from Ayodhya Temple, Krishna Temple of Mathura and Kashi Vishwanath Temple of Varanasi figure prominently in the agenda of Bajrang Dal. The name Bajrang is based on the Hindu Ram devotee Hanuman. The slogan of Bajrang Dal is 'service, security and culture'. Bajrang Dal opposes Muslim demographic growth, Christian conversion, cow slaughter and western influence on Hindu culture. The main function of this organization is to protect religion, promote Hindu unity and Hindu power (Hebbar, 2023).

2.6 The Role of Affiliated Organizations in Assam and Northeast

In the context to North East, the affiliate organizations of the Sangh Parivar have been playing key roles in the strengthening of the organizational base of the RSS and BJP.

RSS affiliates such as, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, the Seva Bharti, and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) have been working on the ground for several decades in the region (Singh, 2021). Two years after RSS *pracharaks* first arrived in Assam, Eknath Ranade was posted as the North-East's Prant Pracharak. He set up several Vivekananda Kendras in the region, for the cultural expansion of the RSS, as well as seven residential schools in Arunachal Pradesh. That network has expanded today, with *shakhas*, Vivekananda Schools, *Balwadis*, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, tuition centres, study circles, vocational training centres and hospitals (Gupta, 2018). The Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalayas (VKV) of the Kanyakumari-based Vivekananda Kendra is another beneficiary of the foreign funding that the Sangh receives. The Vivekananda Kendra operates various schools in the Northeast, primarily in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Under the monitoring of the Vivekananda Kendra Shiksha Prasara Vibhag (VKSPV), the VKV is administering many schools in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. VKVs promise to give 'value-based education' and patriotic upbringing of students that go to these schools (Siddiqui, 2014).

Dozens of schools and hostels including more than three thousand Ekal Vidyalayas are run by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The VHP opened its first hostel for students at Haflong in Dima Hasao district during 1970s. In the next four decades, it started four more schools and hostels in this Dimas tribe-dominated district and other parts of the state (Singh, 2021). The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, also opened hostels for students and sent them to a residential school of Rajasthan's Banswara as part of its programme, Banswara Pariyojana (Zahan, 2022). The spread of Ekal Vidyalayas in the Northeast states has been significant. Ekal Vidyalaya is just one of the many initiatives run by RSS affiliates in the region. Others like, Sewa Bharati, Vidya Bharati, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Friends of Tribal Society (FTS) or Van Bandhu Parishad (VBP), Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bharat Kalyan Prasthan (a unit of the VHP), Bharatiya Jan Seva Sansthan (BJSS) and the Rashtriya Shaikshik Mahasangh have also been running both formal and informal education units including Balwadis (pre-schools), Bal Sanskar Kendras, hostels, residential schools, night schools, coaching centres and primary, secondary and senior secondary schools across the Northeastern states. In Assam alone, Vidya Bharati affiliated to Shishu Shiksha Samiti that runs Sankardev Shishu and Vidya Niketans claims to operate 470 schools with around 1.19 lakh students (Siddiqui, 2014).

The Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA), another RSS-affiliated organization, basically, working in tribal areas, has been active in Assam since 1978. It is running boys' and girls' hostels in Dima Hasao, Silchar, Hailakandi and other places of Assam. It also runs Bal Samskar Kendras, which prepare children for schools by organizing sports, singing prayers and bhajans, and teaching them how to become good human beings (Singh, 2021). The Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram has also expanded its works among the tribal people of other Northeastern states as well. It also runs coaching centres, holds medical camps and sends tribal teams to out-of-State sports events (Gupta, 2018). Another RSS-affiliated organisation, Seva Bharti, works in the tribal and Adivasi dominated pockets like tea garden areas and provide free education, health facilities and vocational training (Zahan, 2022). Seva Bharti, has been working in the health sector in Assam since 1998. It has 'Arogyamitras' or health professionals, trained by the organization, in 3,500 plus villages. The Seva Bharti distributed some homoeopathy medicine for 'prevention and treatment' of Covid-19, among one lakh people during the pandemic. The organization also holds Dhanwantari Seva Yatra in various parts of Assam, bringing doctors from across the country to the people's doorsteps (Singh, 2021).

2.7 Organizational Expansion in Assam

To understand the journey of BJP in Assam, we have to trace the journey of its parent organization, RSS in this region. The expansion of RSS's organizational presence in different regions of India, including Assam and other parts of the Northeast began gradually after its inception. Much has been written about the growth and expansion of the saffron influence in the tribal pockets of western and central India. However, the campaign to saffronise the tribal belts of the Northeast has gone almost unnoticed (Siddiqui, 2014).

The expansion of RSS and its affiliate organizations including BJP followed a gradual process in Assam and other states of the Northeast (Singh, 2021). The RSS's growth in the undivided Assam can be traced back to the 1940s and 1950s (Gupta, 2018). Historically, the states of northeast India have been a Congress bastion. This region had witnessed many insurgency movements which have been posing challenges to the nation-building project (Saikia, 2020). So, for the RSS, it was a challenge to expand its presence in this region of the country, which was relatively unaffected by the mainland issues like Hindu-Muslim binaries. The main aim of RSS was to create a network of

activities which may create the ground for the ideology of Hindu nationalism to flourish in the long run (Jaffrelot, 2019). The religious conversion effort of Christian missionaries particularly in tribal areas was one of the main reasons of RSS's interest in the northeast region (Saikia, 2020).

The history of RSS in Northeast India begins in 1946. In October the same year, Dadarao Parmarth, Vasant Rao Oak and Krishna Paranjpe first set foot in the Province of Assam, which included most of what is today Northeastern India. The three *pracharaks* or full time RSS workers established the region's first *shakhas* or branches in Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Shillong, where their recruits congregated every day (Awungashi, 2019). The RSS had a setback when it was banned after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in the year 1948. The RSS Swayamsevaks across the country launched a nationwide Satyagraha against the ban in December, 1948. Nearly fifty-two activists from the Assam unit took an active role in this; among them were, Keshav Deo Baawri, Girish Kalita, Shankarlal Tiwari and Prafulla Kumar Bora of Guwahati. Dadarao Parmarth was arrested and detained in Shillong jail. In July 1949, after the ban was lifted, due to illness, Dadarao Parmarth left and he was succeeded by Dattopant Thengdi (Sarma, 2016).

After the ban was lifted, Thakur Ram Singh was appointed as the Prant Pracharak of Assam in 1949 by M.S. Golwalkar, the RSS's second *sarsanghchalak* or supreme leader. He remained in the role until 1971 (Awungashi, 2019). The next Pranta Pracharak was Sukanta Joshi, who extended the branches of the RSS to other states of Northeast such as, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. The next seven decades have been a story of untiring consistent efforts to propagate the ideology of the RSS among linguistically, an ethnically diverse population of Assam (Sarma, 2016). The earthquake of Assam in 1950 provided the RSS one of the initial entry points to this region, when it undertook extensive relief work for the earthquake victims (Sethi & Suvratha, 2018).

During that devastating earthquake, Thakur Ram Singh, a *pracharak* from Punjab had done extensive relief works which laid the foundation of the RSS in the state. Singh, who was a full-time worker of the RSS in Assam, used to meet some important personalities such as, High Court judge Kamakhayaram Barua and the then Principal of Arya College, Guwahati's Giridhar Sharma (Bhattacharjee, 2016). From Maharashtra, some Pracharaks were sent to this region to set up shakhas. At that time electoral results were less important than future prospects and propaganda for RSS (Saikia, 2020). Since then,

innumerable faceless RSS cadres have worked hard to make inroads in this region (Gupta, 2018). The language agitation of 1959-60 provided another opportunity in building the support among the Hindu Bengalis in the state. The Assam movement that occurred in the late 1970s finally set the ground for the growth of Hindu Nationalism in this region (Sethi & Suvrstha, 2018).

After the national emergency of 1977, the efforts of the RSS gained a significant momentum. During 1980s, Hindu Sanmilans were organized in different parts of Assam and the RSS gradually started its various operations in the state. However, the actual base was made in 1984 when Eketmata Yatra was organised where Rathes coming from Bhairabkunda and from Tripura met in Guwahati (Sarma, 2016). The rise of BJP in the 1990s was also marked by two distinct political developments – one was the rise of many regional or state parties and the other one was the weakness of the Congress (Sethi & Suvrstha, 2018). The turning point for RSS came during the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) agitation. The RSS deployed its students' wing, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), purportedly to prevent radical political groups from steering the agitation towards the demand for an independent state. Even as the AASU demanded that the names of Bangladeshi migrants should be deleted from the electoral rolls, the RSS sought to keep only the Muslims among them out. The Sangh started functioning actively in Assam after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in the year 1992. When RSS celebrated its 50 years in the state in 1997, there were 42 local Pracharaks in this region (Sarma, 2016). In 1995, the RSS and its subordinate associates had 656 units in the northeast, which is divided into two prants or regions- Uttar Assam and Dakshin Assam. According to Seva Disha, a five-yearly RSS report on the activities of the Sangh Parivar, its presence has grown at a steady pace (Siddiqui, 2014). In January 2018, the Luitporiya (Sons of Brahmaputra) Hindu Sammelan was organised in Guwahati. The traditional tribal kings and heads of several tribes, including the Khasis, Misings, Hajongs and Tiwas attended the sammelan addressed by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat. As many as 35,000 swayamsevaks from all the states in the region participated in it (Gupta, 2018).

2.8 Organizational Expansion in other Northeastern States:

In Arunachal Pradesh, RSS has been running a programme called 'Bharat Mera Ghar' (India my home) for the teachers and deprived students from the border areas through which they used to visit different parts of the country on educational tours since 1960.

The development of Arunachal Vikas Parishad, which is a brainchild of the indigenous faith movement 'Doyel golgi bote talom rukbo' in 1993, boosted the spirit in the state. Thus, RSS Sakhas in Arunachal Pradesh came into existence in 1990s (Sarma, 2016).

The operational activities of the organization in Manipur started in the year 1965, but RSS existed in the state since 1952. The other activities of RSS gained momentum in the year 1994. Since then, the organization has been working for promoting the Hindu culture. There are RSS run single teacher, Ekal Vidyalaya schools in five districts of Manipur and the organization has been regularly organising yearly educational camps on a periodic basis (ibid.).

In Tripura, the RSS started its work in 1956. However, they found it hard to expand in Tripura. Even though Tripura is an overwhelmingly Hindu State, the CPI-M's strong presence put the brakes on the RSS growth in the state. In the 1980s and 1990s, the cadres of RSS and the Tripura National Volunteers and also the National Liberation Front of Tripura clashed with each other. This came to a head when four RSS workers were kidnapped on August 6, 1996 from a Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram in North Tripura and killed (Gupta, 2018). For the last few years, cadres of the RSS have gained momentum in Tripura after the BJP came to power.

The RSS has also spread its wings in the Christian dominated Northeastern states of Meghalaya. There are three divisions of RSS in Meghalaya. They consider the influx of Bangladeshi immigrants as the major problem of Meghalaya. In Meghalaya, the RSS operates largely in the Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills. It has been focusing its attention on Bangladeshi migrants who marry local girls and 'take advantage' of the matrilineal system to set up businesses. In its bid to reach out to the Christians, the RSS is running four book banks, even as it helps to organise health camps across the State. It has also organised processions to honour Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, who continues to be something of a local hero. To commemorate the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, on January 24, 2016, the RSS took out its maiden path sanchalan procession in the capital, Shillong (Sarma, 2016).

The RSS has also been trying to expand its organizational base in Nagaland. There are five divisions of RSS in Nagaland. In 2014, Padmanabha Balakrishna Acharya, was appointed as the governor of Nagaland, who started his journey as an ABVP member and

was active in the North-East in his student days. He was instrumental in the establishment of the 'My Home is India' scheme, through which students from the Northeast were taken to different parts of the country, in an effort to mainstream them. Later in 1980, he joined the BJP and was made in-charge of Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram Manipur and Nagaland in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The presence of Acharya helped RSS to expand its activity in the state (Gupta, 2018). In the year 2015, RSS influenced the BJP government to organize and celebrate the birth anniversary of Rani Gaidinliu in Nagaland, who was a legendary freedom fighter from Naga community. If the BJP's election machine has worked overtime in the Northeast, long years of hard work by RSS workers, behind the scenes, have laid the ground for the party's successes. The results are there for everyone to see (Sarma, 2016).

2.9 The Struggle for an Entry Point

To reach its current status in the Northeast, the RSS has passed through several phases. With its tribal-dominated states and Christian-majority populations, the NE region provides a peculiar challenge to the RSS's Hindu nationalist agenda. When the *pracharaks of RSS* first wanted to expand their organization in this region, they began by building local relationships through Bengali settlers and Bihari and Marwari traders (Gupta, 2018). However, by the 1960s, the Sangh understood that it was important to have the local indigenous people by their side (Rashid, 2023). Since its inception, the RSS has recognized the centrality of education to gain prominence and power. Towards this end, it has focused its energy primarily on propagating its ideology through education. Going by their own figures and claims in Seva Disha reports, nearly 50 percent of all their Seva Karyas is dedicated to educational activities. Indeed, the saffron bodies seem to have learnt a good strategy from the Christian missionaries and like them, they also propagate their message through education (Siddiqui, 2014).

The 1962 Indo-Chinese war provided a gateway for them. A state-sponsored decision to promote Hindi learning among the local population in Arunachal Pradesh, then part of the Northeastern Frontier Agency, following the war with the Chinese, provided the RSS an opportunity to engage more with the region. It was KAA Raja, the first lieutenant general of Arunachal Pradesh, who drew the attention of Sangh leaders Eknath Ranade and Golwalkar to the issue of conversions to Christianity in the region. To mitigate this demographic complication, the RSS has adopted a more multi-pronged approach. The

Sangh emphasized on the necessity to know the local language and also have tolerance towards the local food habits for their Pracharaks. Hindi teachers, exclusively upper caste Hindus, they started to send them to Arunachal Pradesh from UP and Bihar as part of the state project. It was these teachers who started reading local myths, icons and tribal hymns in a Hindu way (Rashid, 2023).

In the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of India (EVFI) who run Ekal Vidyalays, emphasis have been given on setting up of non-formal schools with one trained local teacher and about 40 students, who are taught for three hours. The emphasis is on imparting 'holistic education', which includes Hindu prayers, 'Indian values' and promoting nationalism. The curriculum makes it clear that the Bharatiya sanskriti followed in these schools is actually mainstream north Indian Hindu sanskriti. Following on the RSS ideology of Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan, Hindi is part of the 'core curriculum' and extra effort is expended to promote it. The prayer room is adorned with portraits of Swami Vivekananda, Sangh leaders like Hedgewar and M.S. Golwalkar, and of Bharat Mata holding a saffron flag instead of the tricolor (Siddiqui, 2014).

The RSS has also been working to integrate youth from the region into the mainstream nationalist narrative. In 1965, the ABVP started the Students Experience in Inter-State Living (SEIL) initiative under which it conducts annual study tours and cultural exchange programmes for students from the Northeast, accommodating them in a local host family. Then, the Sangh started the 'My Home India' project, which helps Northeastern students to relocate to other parts of India by providing them information regarding education and accommodation (Rashid, 2023).

In 1998, as a result of the long-standing conflict between the Mizo and the Bru (Reangs in Tripura) tribes, thousands of Bru tribals had fled Mizoram following ethnic clashes with Mizos. They had taken refuge in the camps of bordering areas of Tripura. In 1998, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA), that provided relief at the camps, had stirred trouble by claiming that the Brus were Hindus. But, two decades later, there was no overt sign of the VKA's relief work at the camps. Instead, there were religious mandalis or groups (Siddiqui, 2014).

While in the central India and elsewhere, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram's (VKA) focus is on the assimilation of tribal identities into the Hindu fold, in the northeast, given the ethnic

diversity of tribes and the growth of strong Christian identities in some states, it has taken a more liberal approach. It does not try to change traditions or practices as long as they pay obeisance to the Hindu cultural narratives. On the contrary in the northeast, their main goal is supposedly the preservation, protection and promotion of the socio-cultural traditions and indigenous faiths of the tribal communities. The Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram claims that 'seva' is their main goal and their 'seva' includes running free hostels, formal and informal education centres and schools free coaching for competitive exams, medical centres and women's health camps, along with village development and forest conservation initiatives (Rashid, 2023).

In mainland Hindu-dominated India, and even in states with substantial Christian populations like Kerala, the RSS has articulated itself through the space of Hindu religious identity. However, in the Northeast, where it works in a religious environment and the prominence of Christianity, Sangh demonstrates pragmatism and flexibility. While in the mainland India, it runs a firm campaign for cow protection and demonizes beef-eating as against Hindu culture, especially targeting Muslims but in the tribal belts of Northeastern region, the Sangh did not make beef-eating an issue (ibid.).

Bhattacharjee (2021) regarded the strategy of 'Seva' as a classic demonstration of a political mobilisation by the RSS, which is creative and more covert forms of mobilisation. According to her, these activities are very subtle and non-threatening. Thus, it is a part of the larger movement of RSS according to her (Bhattacharjee, 2021) Thus, it is clear that the 'Seva' activities are being used to propagate the organizational base of RSS and its affiliate bodies in Northeastern region and in the country.

The rehabilitation and relief works have helped in creating a compassionate image for the RSS. It also generates opportunities to recruit new cadres, strengthen its organisational base and network, and even reach those regions where it didn't have any support base (Bhattacharjee, 2021). It is interesting to observe that the political construction of Seva as served by the RSS and its affiliate organizations have been playing an instrumental role in the growth of Sangh Parivar in the northeast, which further helped the BJP to expand its wings in this region.

Malini Bhattacharjee argued that the people who get benefited by 'Seva' activities spontaneously offer their thankfulness. It has been observed that a moral indebtedness is

reflected in the behavior of people which is often manifested in the appropriation of certain kinds of cultural behavior (ibid.).

Malini Bhattacharjee's understanding of 'Seva' is aptly reflected in the context of Northeast, as it helps both RSS and BJP to construct a common cultural identity despite of having multiple religious, ethnic or linguistic identities. The beneficiaries of these 'Seva' activities are those who may have struggled to get public goods from the state and hence remain eternally grateful to Sangh for its help and support. Thus, they intend to give it back to *Sangh Parivar* either by becoming members themselves and also helps in mobilising others to join the organization or by supporting and voting for the political affiliation of the RSS during elections (ibid.).

The success of this 'Seva' activities also signifies the failure of the welfare state which fails to provide basic rights like education or health facilities to its citizens as a result of which people take shelter in the 'Seva' of RSS, which in turn encourage them or morally obliged them to join their organizations or follow their ideology. It can also be argued that the 'Seva' activities have been used in a very subtle way to navigate through this region, which was supposedly a challenging place to get entry for the RSS and its affiliate organizations. The expansion and growth of RSS and its affiliate organizations have been helping BJP to expand its political dominance in Assam and the Northeast.

2.10 The political Journey of BJP in Assam:

The expansion of BJP and its affiliate organizations, including the RSS followed a gradual process in Assam. On the other hand, some of the members of *Sangh Parivar* have also been working on the ground for several decades. The BJP's presence in Assam grew over time, and its rise in the state can be attributed to several factors and strategies. The remotely located and landlocked Northeast India have historically been a Congress dominated region, despite posing continued challenges to the nation-building through many insurgency movements (Jaffrelot,2016). The success of BJP here is depended on creating umbrella coalitions with diverse ethnic groups to sustain power. The first non-Congress Government in Assam was formed in 1978 when Golap Borbora led the Janata Party to victory. However, since the General Elections of 2014, the BJP has successfully challenged the dominance of Congress, particularly in Assam (Saikia, 2020).

The BJP's journey in Assam has been closely attached to its parent organization, the RSS. The party started to expand its presence in the state by aligning its political activities with the broader ideology of RSS. In 1980, BJP was formed through the merger of various political parties and organizations including the Jana Sangh. After its formation, the BJP aimed to expand its presence in the various corners of the country. During 1980s to 1990s in the initial period, the BJP faced challenges in Assam because of the state's regional complexities and the dominant presence of the Indian National Congress (INC). However, the BJP's pro-Assam Agitation stand helped it in gaining some mass support (Jaffrelot, 2016). The 1990s saw a gradual rise in the BJP's popularity in Assam. The Ram Janmabhoomi Movement and the wave of Hindutva ideology helped the party to make gains in various elections, including Lok Sabha and state assembly polls. During 2000s, BJP continued to strengthen its organization and cadre base in Assam. It formed alliances with regional parties like the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), which helped it to broaden its support base. A significant milestone in the BJP's journey in Assam was its victory in the 2016 Assam Legislative Assembly elections (Saikia, 2020).

In the year 2016, the party secured a historic mandate and formed the first-ever BJP led government in the state. The gradual growth of both the RSS and the BJP in Assam can be attributed to their ability to adapt to various regional dynamics, address local concerns, and capitalize on issues that resonated with the people of the state. Over time, they have become the major political players in Assam's political landscape. In the General Elections of 2014, the BJP made all the right noises by capitalizing on a strong anti-incumbency wave against the Congress at the centre. The BJP in Assam decided to highlight the issue of illegal immigration and how the party would deport them back to Bangladesh if voted into power (Karmakar, 2021).

In the Assembly Elections of 2016, BJP successfully wrested power from Congress in a decisive victory in the state. In an assembly of 126 seats, it won 60 out of total 89 seats it contested. In alliance with the regional ethnic parties like AGP and BPF, it won a total of 86 seats. Congress faced a significant defeat with only 26 seats out of 122 seats contested (Saikia, 2020).

In the 2021 vidhan sabha election, it was an electoral test of the widespread anger witnessed against the BJP during the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act mobilizations in

2019. The anti-CAA protest also paved the way for the formation of new political parties in the state and led to anti-BJP consolidation between the existing ones. Despite all of this, BJP again managed to gain victory in the Assembly elections held in 2021 with 60 seats and the BJP led alliance won 75 seats (Karmakar, 2021).

For the very first time in Assam's history, a non-Congress government has returned to power following the 2021 Assembly election. Though, the collective tally of the BJP and AGP came down by six seats, their collective vote share went up to 40.5 percent from 37.6 percent in 2016. Various infrastructural developments, grass root level strategic politics, fear of illegal immigrants, pandemic and its aftermath, strong leadership of Sarbananda Sonowal and Himanta Biswa Sarma, consolidation of Hindu votes in favour of BJP, the alliance of congress with AIUDF and weak leadership of Congress paved the way for its victory in Assam for the second term (Deka, 2021).

BJP alleged Congress as responsible for the completely polarized election by having an alliance with Badruddin Ajmal (AIUDF chief). They claimed that if Congress had contested separately, this election would have been fought on the issue of development. According to BJP, the Congress-AIUDF alliance in Assam was taking the ensuing Assembly elections towards a 'conflict of civilization'. BJP talk about security threat from across the border and within. BJP also talked about civilization as according to them, it was under threat. BJP's campaign in 2016 had focused almost on similar line claiming that Assamese identity was under threat from foreigners and alleged that the Congress government was protecting them for votes. Protection to Jati (community), maati (land) and bheti was the main slogan of BJP during 2016 election. BJP had declared the 2016 to be the last battle of Saraighat. In 2021 election, BJP urged all Hindu people to consolidate and make sure that they win the civilizational war. From the voting results of the election, it has been observed that BJP's electoral campaign got translated into votes in their favour (Karmakar, 2021).

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