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‘Neo-Hindutva’: the Asia House M. F. Husain campaign and the mainstreaming of Hindu nationalist rhetoric in Britain

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This paper re-evaluates certain core understandings of Hindu nationalism in Britain through the analysis of a disputed 2006 art exhibition in London. It considers the two main protagonists objecting to the M. F. Husain show: the representative umbrella organisation, the Hindu Forum of Britain, and the web- and protest-based group, Hindu Human Rights. In particular, the paper considers the relationship between these groups, the government, and the Hindu nationalist movement in India. The central role played by performative tropes of outrage and offence in the public representation of Hinduism is explored. It is argued that a reconceptualisation of diasporic Hindutva is required. Firstly, whilst still connected to India in various ways, Hindu nationalism in Britain has outgrown the institutional and ideological boundaries of the Sangh Parivar. It is proposed that these idiosyncratic inflections of transnational Hindutva might be termed ‘neo-Hindutva’. Secondly, it is suggested that the M. F. Husain protests, and subsequent activities of the Hindu Forum, indicate that Hindutva has become mainstreamed and normalised in the UK. Whilst elements of this narrative are distinctly domestic, we must also understand the transnational context which is intrinsically linked, discursively and practically, to India.

Keywords: Hindutva; Hinduism; multiculturalism; diaspora; Sangh Parivar

Introduction

In 2006, a vigorous mobilisation erupted in opposition to an exhibition of paintings by the celebrated Indian modern artist Maqbool Fida Husain at Asia House. The location of the gallery was not New Delhi or Mumbai, but Marylebone in central London. This episode represents an important and telling moment in the development of Hindu public representation and Hindutva in Britain. Whilst it has received international press coverage and varying levels of support and criticism from British South Asians, it has attracted limited academic attention to date. The agitations, primarily led by the Hindu Forum of Britain (HFB) and their rather enigmatic partner, Hindu Human Rights (HHR), marked a significant strand of Hindutva protest in the UK. Two paintings were vandalised by an unidentified assailant – an act of iconoclasm described in *The Daily Telegraph* as ‘the first act of Hindu extremism in Britain’ (Roy 2006). The incident reveals the proximity of Hindu nationalist rhetoric to an umbrella group which claims to represent the interests of all Hindus living in the UK and which has been engaged with since their inception as a

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core interlocutor in the government's increasingly faith-focused, multicultural 'cohesion' policies.¹

Hindutva – the majoritarian, assertive, chauvinist, and sometimes-militant ideology of Hindu nationalism – emerged out of Indian nationalist and Hindu reform movements of the nineteenth century.² As is well known, the ideology – literally translatable as 'Hinduness' – was first articulated in a 1923 publication by V D Savarkar, a Maharashtrian Brahmin, inspired by Giuseppe Mazzini's Italian nationalism, and jailed by the British for sedition. Hindutva proposed an ancient, ethnocultural, racial basis for a Hindu territory, in which the subcontinent was both Holyland and Fatherland. This conception of India as *Bharat* – the Sanskrit word for the greater Indian peninsula – simultaneously sought to 'reinstate' the land to a pre-invasion 'purity', whilst proclaiming that 'the only geographical limits of Hindutva are the limits of our earth!' (Savarkar 1999, 74).

Since 1925, Hindutva ideology has been propagated by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS – National Volunteer Corp) and its Sangh Parivar (Family of Organisations, or simply 'Sangh'). The Sangh constitutes a diverse, interconnected constellation of some of the largest volunteer-based organisations across India. The RSS – an organisation whose membership perhaps numbers up to five million persons – sits as the patriarch of the Sangh family, which includes cultural and educational wings, charities, student associations, unions, and the current ruling political party of India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP – Indian People's Party). The ideology of Hindutva is so synonymous with the Sangh Parivar that the word is used interchangeably with Hindu nationalism and the Hindu nationalist movement.

Since the 1940s, these organisations began to establish branches or counterparts abroad – first in British East Africa and subsequently in Britain, the USA, and certain other countries with Indian diaspora populations. These Sangh outposts have varying levels of mimesis and divergence, coordination, and independence, from their Indian progenitors. In certain ways they have developed successfully; the RSS's British wing, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (Hindu Volunteer Corps), currently operates approximately 60 weekly *shakhas* (branches), for instance. Sangh groups emerged in England following the influx of East African Asians, and was stimulated by the rise of the Hindu nationalist movement in India from the late 1980s onwards. However, despite their entrenchment into the Hindu landscape of Britain, anti-Hindutva campaigning (particularly by secular leftists) and controversies regarding philanthropic remittances to the Sangh in India, amongst other reasons, have meant that organisations which more explicitly espouse Hindutva have been less visible in the public sphere than other Hindu groups.

This paper uses the M. F. Husain incident as an entry point for exploring the influence of Hindutva on the HFB. Religious umbrella groups have become increasingly significant in the last decade, and the Hindu Forum has emerged as the main representative Hindu organisation (Zavos 2008, 2010a). Ecumenism, which is desirable for multicultural policy-makers when seeking representatives of broad communities, is more common to Hinduism in the diaspora than in India (Williams 1992, 239; Vertovec 2000). However, it is also associated – in particular through the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP – World Hindu Council) – with Hindu nationalism. Whilst in Britain the core Hindu nationalist organisations have a low public profile in national arenas, Zavos (2010a) identifies a 'Hindutva effect' which influences groups outside of the Sangh Parivar, for instance the HFB (see also Zavos 2010b). The M. F. Husain episode (which is described in-depth in the following) and other activities of the HFB illustrate this 'Hindutva effect', but perhaps require us to re-evaluate whether Zavos was too restrained in his identification of 'latent Hindu nationalism' (2008, 333–334).

This paper proposes that we can identify a new, dynamic, and significant type of Hindutva in the Asia House incident. I suggest that ‘neo-Hindutva’ might be used to refer to idiosyncratic expressions of Hindu nationalism which operate outside of the institutional and ideological framework of the Sangh Parivar. Neo-Hindutva is a global dynamic, often expressed in online spaces, as well as in India itself. To a degree, this builds on Reddy’s observations of Hindutva in the diaspora as a ‘diffuse logic ... increasingly impossible to isolate’ (2011, 421). Neo-Hindutva can both mediate Hindu nationalist ideology from India to the diaspora, and have a ‘reverse’ effect, influencing Hindu nationalism in India.

Neo-Hindutva can further be subdivided into two separate forms: ‘soft’ neo-Hindutva, which can be found in the HFB’s rhetoric, and whilst this can be very similar in tone and topic to that of the RSS family, it lacks the militancy and unambiguity of the second sub-category – ‘hard’ neo-Hindutva. Whereas ‘soft’ neo-Hindutva distances, obfuscates, or denies connections between the Sangh and Hindutva ideology, hard neo-Hindutva not only represents more explicit inflections of Hindu nationalism, but also sometimes articulates differences with the Sangh quite overtly. This latter category is seen in the Asia House incident in the form of the little-understood group, HHR.

The paper also suggests that activism against Husain’s artworks is just one example in a much broader strategy of public displays of offence which have come to define a significant aspect of Hindu (nationalist) public representation in twenty-first-century Britain. These instrumentalised, performative expressions of outrage are evidenced in a series of campaigns which have ‘visibilised’ Hinduism (Zavos 2008). This ranges from outcry over the state’s slaughter of infected temple cows (Warrier 2009), to objections over various uses (or misuses) of Hindu iconography by non-Hindus. We can think of these in terms of neo-Hindutva as political praxis, and more specifically a ‘mediating discourse’ in the diaspora (Reddy 2011, 421). Moreover, they serve as moments at which a community can coalesce, and display unity and resolve (albeit perhaps only fleetingly). However, whilst the tropes of defamation, blasphemy, and outrage have particular resonance for Hindus in the west, this trend is unique neither to the diaspora nor to Hinduism. In this light, the Indian context of Hindutva activism is also considered.

Finally, this paper argues that the Asia House affair highlights the HFB’s role in the normalisation and mainstreaming of Hindutva rhetoric in the UK. Through a variety of factors, a radically conservative, puritanical, and often-intolerant position has emerged as a dominant feature in the public representation of Britain’s Hindu community. As will be shown in the following, this can be located in a trend towards essentialist, and homogenised or ‘devernacularised’ representations of Hinduism. Furthermore, whilst the Forum’s self-projected purview is domestic to Britain, we can best understand the M. F. Husain campaign, and the broader narrative of image rights campaigns, in a wider transnational context, discursively linked to the Indian milieu.

Research for this paper involved a comprehensive analysis of primary material from the principle organisations involved, predominantly constituting press releases and online material (including official websites, blogs, and other social media). It also collated and analysed newspaper and magazine articles, government reports, and a comprehensive review of secondary literature. Semi-structured interviews with 12 individuals were conducted in 2013 and 2014. The interviewees were identified according to their significance to the research question and representing a wide range of perspectives. They included leaders and representatives of Hindu organisations, government officials, individuals in the art world with extensive experience dealing with M. F. Husain, activists, journalists, and academics. Those not named in the article chose to remain anonymous.

The Hindu Forum's Husain campaign

In opposing the 2006 exhibition 'M F Husain: Early Masterpieces 1950–70s', the Hindu Forum asserted its representative credentials. It argued that the Asia House exhibition 'is already causing considerable offence to many of the UK's 700,000 based [*sic*] Hindus', and urged 'Hindus in Britain to join the protest organised by Hindu Human Rights' (Hindu Forum of Britain 2006). In sharp contrast with the anti-Husain crusade in India, which was a cause célèbre *only* for advocates of Hindutva, the campaign appealed to all Hindus in Britain. The National Hindu Students Forum also supported the campaign against the London show. Their angry statement against Husain alluded to the student group's frequently obfuscated Sangh connections (National Hindu Students Forum (UK) 2006). Performances of outrage were planned for outside Asia House, directly comparable to protests which have taken place across India. However, even more dramatically, on the eve of the demonstrations, an unidentified man entered the gallery and defaced two paintings.

The 'youth' sprayed two goddess portraits with saffron paint. Asia House's lack of security was exposed, the insurer withdrew cover for the exhibition, and the owner of the works swiftly cancelled the show for fear of further reprisals.³

The HFB and HHR both disassociated themselves from the vandalism, and the perpetrators were never apprehended. The exhibition was abandoned, with Asia House stating 'security concerns' and reports of anonymous threats. A political angle to the campaign was also relevant. Apparently, one source of anger was the fact that the exhibition was opened by Indian High Commissioner Kamalesh Sharma, which, Ramesh Kallidai, the Secretary General of the HFB, told the *Times of India*, reflected 'India's double standards in the treatment of Hindus and other religions' (Lall 2006). This highlighted the inextricability of the mobilisation from homeland politics. Even the Japanese company Hitachi came under fire as a sponsor of the exhibition and supplier of television screens, with HHR's press release bemoaning their complicity in the 'abuse [of] Hindus and Hinduism' ('Protest at Asia House Gallery', 2006).

Although aspects of this protest were distinctive to the British context, and the outraged protagonists were UK based, the rhetoric and tactics of the HFB and HHR's campaign closely resembled the mobilisations of cultural policing that have occurred in India. It is important, therefore, to carefully tease out the overlaps from the new features of the British campaign. In doing so, we can elucidate this emergent form of 'neo-Hindutva'.

M. F. Husain and his detractors

As is well known, the art of M. F. Husain, and indeed the artist himself, has been a locus of Hindutva militancy in India since the mid-1990s. Husain's exhibitions have been systematically picketed and vandalised in India. The disputed paintings are a handful of representations of female gods, depicted in the nude, but in the artist's stylised, linear, Cubist-influenced manner (Figure 1). Mobilisations started abruptly in 1996 after the publication of an article about Husain's works in *Vichar Mimansa*, a Hindi journal from Madhya Pradesh, titled 'Yeh Chitrakar hai ya Kasai [Is this an artist or a butcher]?'⁴ Most of the disputed artworks were created in the 1970s and 1980s, but they suddenly became a flashpoint around which Hindutva activists rallied. This arbitrary chronology, in many ways analogous to the *Ramjan-mabhoomi* (Ram birthplace) agitations over Ayodhya, is discussed in the following.

The fact that Husain was a Muslim was central to the India campaigns. When his Mumbai home was ransacked in 1998, Bal Thackeray, the leader of the Shiv Sena (Shivaji's



Figure 1. Hanuman and Sita, 1982. Lithograph depicting the Ramayana scene in which Hanuman recovers Rama's wife, Sita, from Lanka. Whilst this particular work was not featured in the 2006 exhibition, it is an image which has attracted outrage from anti-Husain activists. © Trustees of the British Museum, Reg:1997,0503,0.33. Donation of Mr Chester Herwitz and Mrs Davina Herwitz.

Army, a popular Marathi regional and Hindu nationalist political party), justified it in communal terms by pronouncing, '[i]f Husain can step into Hindustan, what is wrong if we enter his house?' (Narula 1999). Mere association with Husain was enough to incur the wrath of Hindutva opponents. In January 2008, a group calling themselves the Hindu Samrajya Sena (Army of the Hindu Kingdom) ransacked a television network's Ahmedabad office and attacked employees simply for including Husain in an opinion poll on who should receive India's highest honour, the *Bharat Ratna* (NDTV 2008). On the other hand, many liberal secularists lamented the artist's harassment; in 2004, Guha-Takurta (2004, 247) wrote, 'the anti-Husain campaign provides a vivid instance of the kind of terror, censorship, and punitive action that sustains the cultural politics of the Hindu right, sparing neither average citizens nor their celebrity counterparts'.

Activists of the largest, core Hindu nationalist groups were at the centre of actions against Husain, including the VHP, RSS, Shiv Sena, and Bajrang Dal (Army of Hanuman). However, there were also some more marginal Hindutva organisations, including the aforementioned Hindu Samrajya Sena. One such fringe group, the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HJS – Society for Hindu Awakening), was a driving force behind Husain's persecution. The HJS constitutes a Hindutva group with particularly militant rhetoric, which operates at the sidelines of the Sangh Parivar, and is primarily engaged in protests and expressions of outrage at perceived defamation. Based in Maharashtra, the HJS also commands a strong online presence (with a rallying cry for a 'Cyber Activist Group' on its website), and hence a global reach and perspective.⁵

Anti-Husain activists have a moralistic fixation with eroticised readings of Husain's nude goddess works. This is interpreted in very different terms by the artist, art historians, and critics.⁶ A frequent line of attack, largely perpetuated by the HJS, has been to highlight Husain's 'hypocrisy' and 'hatred for Hindus' by occasionally painting Hindu deities in the nude, yet never treating his Muslim subjects in the same way. In many ways, this rhetoric cuts to the core of conservative Hindu hatred for Husain: he represents a highly successful, secular Muslim, much-lauded by the liberal, cosmopolitan elite. Furthermore, by focusing on his depictions of female goddesses in the nude, which they interpret as a disrespectful, insolent sully of Hindu feminine purity, they create a basis for an aggressive, performative articulation of protective, hyper-masculine pride.

Husain's most controversial painting, which landed him in the Delhi High Court in 2008 charged with obscenity and 'wounding religious feelings', was an anthropomorphic depiction of the subcontinent as an unclothed, blood-red female (Mitta 2011).⁷ The work, known as *Bharat Mata* (Mother India – although this title was not given by the artist), was created in response to violence and communal tension in India. It is perhaps a rejoinder to Hindu nationalist *Bharat Mata* iconography, but in Husain's version Mother India is prostrated in anguish.

Legal manoeuvres against Husain were deployed systematically; the Hindu Jagruti Samiti boast on their website to having coordinated '1250 formal police complaints'. Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, in the Delhi High Court, dismissed one of these cases, stating, 'In a free and democratic society, tolerance is vital ... India's new "puritanism", practiced by a largely ignorant crowd in the name of Indian spiritual purity, is threatening to throw the nation back into the Pre-Renaissance era' (Tripathi 2009, 26–27). In 2008, a verdict by the Supreme Court dismissed five more cases against Husain for his *Bharat Mata* painting, although this did not end the artist's legal struggles, which he once estimated comprised 3000 separate cases (Ramesh 2008).

In the wake of the furore, and with hundreds of cases simultaneously filed in several courts for 'hurting the religious sentiments, displaying obscenity in public places, defaming *Bharat Mata*, and conspiring to cause communal unrest and disunity in the country' (Ramswamy 2010, 6), Husain offered a pragmatic apology. However, amid the turmoil that the new painting produced, Husain's destiny was set. He was forced out of India, spending the last years of his life between London and the Gulf. Hindutva extremists celebrated his exile and eventual acceptance of Qatari nationality as a 'win for Hindutva forces' ('Qatar Nationality for Husain', 2010). Yet a great number of secular Indians (many Hindus amongst them) bemoaned his forced emigration as symbolising the failure of India's post-colonial, secular modernity.

M. F. Husain died in London in 2011 at the age of 95 and was buried at the Brookwood Cemetery, Surrey, in accordance with his wish to be buried where he passed away.

The Hindu Forum of Britain

In order to fully understand the role of the HFB in this story, it is important to briefly consider their history and development. It could be said that the HFB, the UK's pre-eminent representative Hindu organisation, has always been in the sights of the Sangh Parivar. The *Organiser*, the main newspaper of the RSS, reported their launch on 11 April 2004 (Sonwalkar 2004). Moreover, circumstances under which the Forum was set up, and the rhetoric deployed in its formation, have parallels with the ecumenism, assertiveness, and sense of victimhood which parallels that of the Sangh. But there are important differences, too, which this paper seeks to draw attention to.

On 25 October 2003, during Diwali celebrations, two men entered the Sanatan Dharma Hindu temple on Ealing Road in west London. After calling for people to convert to Christianity, they desecrated the *murti* (image) of Ram, breaking the idol on the floor. This caused anxiety amongst the local Hindu community. Many were dismayed and angered when the perpetrators were handed what were seen to be light sentences.

On 14 December 2003, a 'Hindu Security Conference' in London was held in response. C B Patel, the prominent East African Gujarati publisher of *Asian Voice* and *Gujarat Samachar*, spearheaded the gathering. The Forum was conceived following the conference, with a feeling that the existing umbrella group, the Hindu Council UK, was ineffective in the face of anti-Hindu hostility. Patel, who went on to become the Chairman of the Patrons Council of the HFB, said at the time, 'I believe people know up until now Hindus are the easy targets' (BBC News 2003).

From its early days, the Forum claimed to speak for hundreds of the UK's Hindu organisations. It rationalised its umbrella group credentials with a 'cut-and-paste' approach to representation, with few of their stated 'member organisations' actively involved.⁸ The number of organisations the HFB say they represent fluctuates greatly, claimed at times to be as high as 420. However, only 36 have made financial contributions, and therefore are allowed to stand for election to the National Executive Committee (Hindu Forum of Britain 2011).

Within the first year of their existence, the Forum participated in seven major government consultations (Zavos 2008, 334–335). In 2006, the publication of *Connecting British Hindus: An Inquiry into the Identity and Public Engagement of Hindus in Britain*, an HFB report sponsored by the Cohesion and Faiths Unit of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), consolidated the Forum's status (Runnymede Trust 2006). Their position as an important Hindu organisation endures. Recently, in an interview for this paper, an anonymous civil servant in the Faith Engagement Team of the Department of Communities and Local Government referred to the HFB as 'our number one group', 'better than others', and with 'a relatively liberal position'.⁹

The rise of the Hindu Forum owed not a little to their immediate acceptance by the British government. This acceptance, in turn, reflects the government's desire to secure a representative of 'the Hindu community'. Such a goal poses various challenges when faced with the great diversity of Hinduism and its much-discussed differences to Abrahamic religions (whose central, organisational hierarchies are more established, albeit still contested). The format of interfaith forums and government consultations with religious groups inherently privilege organisations which present essentialist, ecumenical versions of religious communities. This creates an environment where umbrella groups are useful for a 'box-ticking', 'take me to your leader' approach to representation (expressions used by an anonymous DCLG official in an interview with the author). Ian Bradshaw, Deputy Head of Integration and Faith in the Tackling Extremism & Hate Crime Division at DCLG, explained to me that the government can get 'nervous' about approaching individual groups, particularly with the internal diversity of Hinduism. From the government's perspective, umbrella groups not only represent a range of views but also 'understand how government works'.

This nervousness is partly based on a quiet apprehension felt by the UK government about Hindu nationalism in Britain. Whilst domestically it is considered inconsequential in comparison to concerns over radical Islam, the government's position is not as naïve as some critics and activists may suggest. But although interviews for this paper reveal that Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials are familiar with the Sangh in India, and those at DCLG are aware of RSS-connected organisations operating in Britain, the British government seems less aware that Hindutva ideologies might be perpetuated through umbrella groups.

In the past, the British government has deliberately, although not entirely, avoided public interactions with Sangh organisations in Britain. Whitehall's concerns over Hindutva have largely been stimulated by the Gujarat violence of 2002, and by reports suggesting substantial capital flows to the Sangh from the UK Hindu diaspora (AWAAZ 2004). There also exist more general fears that Hindutva is at odds with multicultural cohesion, particularly vis-à-vis British Muslims. In turn, this has instilled a prevailing consternation within the Forum over open connections with the Sangh. In an interview, the then Secretary General of the HFB, Swaminathan Vaidyanathan, told me that, 'With the VHP, HSS ... the mainstream government doesn't want to be working with them, like they would work with us. So we also honour their sentiments, that's it'. In spite of this, as shown in the following, it appears that the umbrella group retains both ideological and institutional connections to various Hindu nationalist and 'hard' neo-Hindutva organisations.

Hindu Human Rights

It is important to shed some light on HHR, the group with which the Forum affiliated for their campaign, but which has attracted little scholarly interest. HHR was founded in London in 2000 and is run by SOAS graduate Ranbir Singh, with a stated goal, 'to highlight cases of persecution and defamation of Hindus and Hinduism around the globe' (Hindu Human Rights, n.d.). HHR have a primarily web- and protest-based presence, and a diaspora-oriented, assertive Hindutva tone. Online, content skips between neo-Vedanta, Hindutva ideology, and Hindu (nationalist) politics. Lengthy articles cover topics such as 'Are you an apologetic Hindu?' and 'Caste politics in UK and India'.

HHR protests are replete with Sangh imagery, from the saffron flag and *trishul* (trident), to muscular images of Lord Rama. HHR has been particularly active on cases of image-based 'blasphemy'. In one of many such demonstrations, HHR picketed in front of the French embassy over French designer Minelli's use of Hindu iconography (Rama) on a line of shoes in 2005. A photograph of this protest shows a diverse group of agitators, one holding a banner bearing the slogan 'Victory to the Prince of Ayodhya' (Hindu Human Rights, n.d.). The HFB were also involved in this mobilisation.

Despite being UK based (and only actively protesting in Britain), the organisation is best understood as 'quasi-transnational'. A significant proportion of their website traffic and social media engagement comes from India as well as other parts of the world, including North America, Australia, and Europe. HHR's Facebook presence is substantial, with over 132,000 page fans from around the world, as of November 2014 (about the same as that of HJS). Their transnational reach was in evidence when the same issue of the blasphemous footwear was raised in the *Lok Sabha*, India's lower house (Raj 2009). Although one can identify sporadic support for the Sangh, it is important to note HHR's self-defined position as an 'alternative to the traditional activism of the RSS and the rest of the Sangh Parivar family' (YouTube 2014). This is seen in HHR's close relationship with Koenraad Elst – the prominent Belgian, hard-line Hindutva writer – who has authored many articles for HHR's website, and is often critical of the Sangh.

Gavin Flood recently suggested a dichotomy of 'two forces at work within Hinduism in the modern world'; one, 'a trend towards universalization', and the other, 'a trend towards exclusive, local or national identity formations' (Flood [1996] 2012, 273). I would argue that HHR and other Hindutva-sympathetic forces represent a convergence of these two discourses. In this light, we can see HHR (and to a certain extent the HJS) as an emergent form of 'hard' neo-Hindutva, which possesses limited and nebulous formal allegiance to the

Sangh, yet is fervent, dynamic, innovative, and often militant in its commitment to much more universalist perspectives of Hindutva.

Given the Forum's ostensibly mainstream, 'representative' credentials, its alliance with HHR, which has an unequivocally hard-line Hindutva approach, might seem unusual. However, both are engaged in very similar discourses of outrage, defamation, and 'disciplining' the use of Hindu imagery. In this sense, we might see the Forum as embodying a different, *but related*, form of 'soft' neo-Hindutva, which tends to avoid any public association with Hindu nationalism, but shares ideological overlaps.

In addition to the issue of the M. F. Husain exhibition, and other 'image rights' campaigns, the HFB and HHR converge in other areas. For instance, on the issue of caste legislation in Britain, Koenraad Elst argues in an HHR article that 'the object of this law is simply to hurt Hinduism' (Hindu Human Rights 2014). A very similar position to this has been adopted by the Hindu Forum, which vigorously opposed the inclusion of caste in the Equality Act. In its major *Caste in the UK* report, the HFB quoted the Hindutva ideologue Ram Swarup, praising the system which 'combined security with freedom ... [and] provided social space as well as closer identity' (Hindu Forum of Britain 2008, 6). This stance can be tied into a broader narrative within Hindu nationalism – the 'flattening' of Hinduism's internal diversity in pursuit of a unified national community – which in many ways can also be important to the role of an umbrella organisation.¹⁰

Responses to the HFB and HHR's anti-Husain campaign

The M. F. Husain campaign precipitated a small but anxious backlash. This jeopardised the Forum's claims to represent all British Hindus and challenged their self-projection as the authoritative voice of Hindus in Britain. Several decried the HFB's alliance with HHR. AWAAZ South Asia Watch, the anti-Hindutva activist network, remonstrated that HHR 'are not democratically elected representatives of Hindu populations or opinion in the UK and represent little beyond their limited and chauvinistic political agendas' (Zavos 2008, 332–3). Pragna Patel referred to HHR as 'shadowy', and was consternated by the fact that the organisation 'was quoted in the press as if it was representative of the Hindu "voice"' (Patel 2008, 16).

These critics were supported by economist and Labour peer Lord Meghnad Desai, who called the campaign 'an outrageous attack on artistic freedom in the British context' ('Husain's Painting Exhibition Cancelled in UK', 2006). In a letter to *The Guardian* (2006), he spoke of his dismay at the British media's lack of coverage of the attack, asking, 'Would the media have ignored such an event had the protesters been Muslims and not Hindus?' More recently, Sunny Hundal reflected in an interview that Hindu groups, even radical ones, simply 'don't have a high enough profile ... No-one sees them as an immediate threat'.¹¹

We might also consider the extent to which the public, or even the government, possesses an understanding of the political ramifications and nuances of conservative Hindu mobilisation (particularly when located beyond the Sangh). This has arguably been obfuscated by the successful promulgation of Hindus as a 'model minority' (Mathew and Prasad 2000, 523–525), which the Forum have consistently perpetuated in a variety of ways. Relevant to this dynamic is the overwhelming focus on Islamic fundamentalism in Britain (for instance, in the government's Prevent Strategy), with other religions rarely entering the lexicon of religious extremism.

The M. F. Husain controversy and other cases of Hindu 'defamation' can be tied, somewhat ironically, into the broader development of 'minority religious outrage' that first

exploded with the Rushdie Affair, but has become increasingly significant for many groups in the post-9/11, post-7/7, multicultural landscape of Britain. Through performativity – expressed in terms of campaigns against perceived defamation – the Forum reiterated its legitimacy and representative credentials in the ‘expression and creation’ of a Hindu community (Zavos 2008, 334).

This process therefore seems to be linked to various government funding of such fora, which some have suggested have ‘sparked competition’, incentivising groups to ‘build controversies where they can thrust themselves into the media limelight as representatives of a community under attack’ (Hundal 2007, 86). Motivations for claiming a victim status are not only linked to the success of Muslims in getting their voice heard following the Rushdie Affair, but also to Jewish communities, in particular through the vocabulary of defamation and blasphemy.

‘Defamation’ and Hindu–Jewish connections

In 1997, American Hindus Against Defamation was formed by VHP America members in the USA. Its members vowed to defend of Hinduism against defamation, commercialisation, and misuse. Its platform was modelled directly on the tactics of similar, influential, Jewish groups (Kurien 2006, 730). Hindutva groups often invoke identical language, some even referring to a Hindu ‘holocaust’ (at the hands of Muslim invaders). In Britain, too, many Hindu organisations (whether tacitly or explicitly) are imitative of Jewish lobby groups, in both rhetoric and ambition. But there are also various more concrete connections. The Hindu American Foundation, the principle umbrella organisation based in Washington, DC, has close ties with Jewish groups, particularly the American Jewish Committee (Kurien 2012, 105). So too does the Federation of Hindu Associations (Kurien 2007, 148).

In a memorandum submitted to the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee in Britain, the Hindu Forum publicised their ‘warm working relationship with the Jewish community through the Board of Deputies (BOD) and the CST [Community Security Trust]’ (Home Affairs Select Committee, 2005). The Forum’s submission went to describe ‘close relationships on university campuses’, between the National Hindu Students Forum and the Union of Jewish Students, ‘where students from both communities have faced similar threats from religious fundamentalists’.¹²

The allusion here to ‘religious fundamentalists’ references the much broader ‘clash of civilisations’ narrative. Certain diasporic Hindu groups have felt drawn to this idea, feeling it affects them existentially in Britain or America, but has resonance for the Indian ‘Hindu community’ with which they associate (in much the same way that many Jews around the world feel that they have a stake in the politics of Israel). Domestically this perceived, or at least publicised, threat is seen in more murky expressions with the existence of Hindu and Jewish supporters, and even divisions, of the far-right, anti-Muslim protest group, the English Defence League. In America, there have been surprising instances of quid pro quo collaborations between radical Hindu groups and extremist Zionist organisations (Murphy 2001).¹³

Jewish and Hindu groups and leaders have also met regularly, sometimes in Israel and sometimes in India. Those representing Zionist and Hindutva organisations were prominent in the bilateral exchanges (Swamijyoti 2008). Prashad (2013) connects this Hindutva–Zionist dynamic to burgeoning diplomacy and strategic ties between India and Israel, particularly under the first BJP-led government from 1999. It may even be suggested that this desire to seek alliances with Jewish, in particular Zionist, factions relates to the mentality underpinning Savarkar’s proclamation that the ‘Enemy of our enemy is our best friend’,

coupled with his call to ‘Militarise Hindudom ... So long as the whole world is aggressive, we must be aggressive’ (Bhatt 2001, 103).

We might also link these emerging connections to those that developed between Hindu and Jewish groups in Britain. In February 2007, at an HFB-organised Hindu Security Conference, ‘a representative of the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) spoke about how Jewish and Hindu students had much in common, because India faced the same problem in Kashmir as Israel did in Palestine’ (RandomPottins 2007). Prashad has recently written on these reductive perspectives in the American setting, which closely ties into the aforementioned ‘model minority’ trope. His new book has a whole chapter which broadly analyses, and decries, ‘How the Hindus became Jews’ (2013, 61–99). We can see that this paradigm fits the outlook of the Forum; on the eve of the umbrella group’s creation, C. B. Patel, Chairman of the Patrons Council of the HFB, proclaimed the need to learn ‘how to defend ourselves, how to learn from the Jewish community, how to have national co-ordination’ (BBC News 2003).

Multiculturalism, outrage, and ‘struggles for recognition’

The British multicultural environment provides a space for, and even encourages, emergent forms of political representation and ethnic identity formation. These are often articulated in a shrill timbre of outrage and offence. In the case of the representation of ‘the Hindu community’, this often draws on the Hindutva rhetoric familiar from India. But it is also idiosyncratic, adapting in tone and delivery to both the British milieu and multiculturalism specifically. Spaces and policies intended to encourage dialogue and integration have had counterproductive repercussions. Responding to this has proved challenging for authorities. Developing Charles Taylor and Nancy Fraser’s now-seminal contributions to understanding new forms of ‘struggles for recognition’, Prema Kurien has identified that ‘an ironic and unintended consequence of multiculturalist policies is that they could promote the development of religio-ethnic nationalism’ (Taylor 1992; Fraser 1997; Kurien 2006, 736). Often this ‘unintended consequence’ goes unnoticed by a general public and government unversed in non-western political and cultural movements, and unaware of contentious essentialisms.

It is especially appropriate to understand public expressions of *neo*-Hindutva, constituting dynamic forms of political representation and ethnic identity formation, through the lens of ‘struggles for recognition’. A nexus of assertive Hindutva and multiculturalist rhetoric has helped forge an institutionalised diasporic Hindu identity. This identity is driven by a ‘politically “voicy” Hindu-*tva* concerned with regulating and disciplining public representations of Hinduism’ (Reddy 2012, 313). Policing the representation of Hinduism, amidst vocalised feelings of victimhood and a ‘siege mentality’ – crucial tropes for Hindutva *within* India – has particular resonance *outside* of India for marginalised, minority communities (Kurien 2006, 725–726; Jaffrelot and Therwath 2011, 44–57). This contributes towards the highly emotive forms of Hindu nationalist rhetoric and action, where ‘instigating, staging and managing this “righteous anger” is a crucial dimension in mobilizing “outraged communities”’ (Blom and Jaoul 2008, 7).

The public expression of outrage and offence has, I suggest, a discursive relationship with claims of hurt from other groups. This goes far beyond the aforementioned influences and connections between Hindu and Jewish groups. In the case of the Forum, it was evident when Ramesh Kallidai told *The Times of India* that

When it came to Prophet’s cartoons, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh personally condemned them. India was one of the first to ban Rushdie’s book, *The Satanic Verses*. Why should artistic freedom only be enjoyed by those who hurt and insult Hindus? (‘Media Watch’, 2006)

Public displays of hurt can be linked to fundamentalism, orthodoxy, authoritarianism, and essentialist notions of religion, with ‘leaders in all religions ... vying for control over the representation of their communities’ (Patel and Siddiqui 2010, 114–115). Whilst Muslim protagonists have been most prominent in recent years, we must not limit this narrative to any particular group, nor even just minorities. The violent response from Sikhs in Birmingham to Gurpreet Bhatti’s play *Bhetzi* in 2005 and the high-profile evangelical Christian campaigns and protests against *Jerry Springer: The Opera* in the same year indicate a wider trend in Britain.

The (re)emergence of the category of ‘blasphemy’ is increasingly noticeable and significant. Kallidai in his *Asian Voice* column (2004) wrote, in response to the *Om* symbol on a pair of sandals, ‘yet another blasphemy – will it ever end’. It is worth reflecting on the distinction between blasphemy and insult or offence. The use of blasphemy and defamation often implies a legal element. Ayatollah Khomeini issued Rushdie with a *fatwa* (an Islamic legal ruling). M. F. Husain was prosecuted under Section 153(A) of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalises ‘Promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion ...’ More recently, Penguin India were in court over Professor Wendy Doniger’s academic study of Hinduism (discussed in the following), charged under Section 295(A), which concerns insulting religion. It may then be argued that this represents another dimension by which the performative and instrumental expression of outrage is borrowed from or influenced by other groups or religious traditions (particularly Muslim and Christian). Regarding this instrumentalism, it is worth considering certain wording in the Indian Penal Code. Section 295(A), which Husain was also accused of transgressing, refers not to personal distress, but to ‘outraging the religious feelings of any *class* of citizens of India’ (emphasis added). This enabled anti-Husain activists to construct a collective feeling of hurt, reifying a trans-subjective public (Jain 2007, 296).¹⁴

In the UK, the Hindu Forum, as the country’s pre-eminent umbrella group, was able to leverage its influence and voice during the Asia House campaign to present an ostensibly monolithic Hindu community, which used both the rhetoric and methods borrowed from certain Muslim factions in Britain and abroad. Highlighting the contestation for resources and recognition that the multiculturalist state might provide, an online comment from 2006 bemoaned ‘rival fundamentalists egging each other on in a politics of competitive grievance’ (Billstickers 2006). In India, ‘fatwas’ to maim or kill Husain grimly paralleled other instances of protest, in particular those of the Rushdie Affair and Danish cartoon controversy. In 2006 Shiv Sena leader Bhagwan Goel ‘publicly declared that he would pay a half-million rupee reward for anyone who cut off one of Husain’s arms’ (Prakash 2006), and the obscure but official-sounding ‘Hindu Personal Law Board’ allegedly announced a 510 million rupee bounty for his murder (‘Hindu Law Board offers Rs 51 cr’, 2006). Another discursive relationship with Muslim protest is seen in a strange letter from the HJS to Christie’s in New York, demanding the withdrawal of Husain paintings from a sale of Indian art, arguing, ‘There has been news that infamous Denmark cartoonist is looking for someone to arrange auction of infamous cartoons. Your expression and love for artistic freedom can only be justified if you arrange this auction too’ (Purnima 2008).

The Asia House M. F. Husain incident suggests an increasingly global nature to a variety of political struggles which on first inspection might seem parochial. Aided by online spaces – in particular blogs and social media – Hindutva mobilisation has been able to transcend national borders and coalesce through the medium of outrage, with multi-directional, transnational influences. This worldwide dimension is highlighted by obstacles encountered when dealing with M. F. Husain artworks across the world. Outside India, this is perhaps most pronounced in the USA, with several examples of protests against Husain,

largely organised by the HJS and an affiliated fringe Hindutva group, Indian-American Intellectuals Forum. Various protests have been organised against auction houses selling his paintings, including the picketing of Christie's, New York, for a 2008 auction featuring works by Husain. In 2011, an exhibition of Indian modern art, on loan from Indian-American collectors in the San Francisco Bay Area, was displayed in the San Jose Museum of Art to the indignation of certain sections of the Hindu community ('Hindu Groups Protest', 2011). More recently, a curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts reported to me that they framed M. F. Husain works under glass, specifically because of the risk of vandalism. In Britain, Conor Macklin, owner of London's Grosvenor Gallery, spoke to me of 'pretty gross', violent threats being sent to him from both India and the UK, in relation to Husain, although never being followed up with any actions. Major auction houses in Britain were circumspect just talking to me about their experiences. In 2014, the Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition of Husain's final paintings was challenged – largely through online advocacy – by the Forum for Hindu Awakening (another organisation which we can best understand through the paradigm of neo-Hindutva). The strict bag checks and heightened security measures at the entrance of the exhibition indicate that even after the artist's death, displaying his works remains risky.

The transnationalism of diasporic struggles for recognition is not global in a uni-directional sense. In the Asia House affair, not only was Hindu nationalist rhetoric and strategy being imported from India, but the British incident was also widely reported in the homeland. This can be identified both in the mainstream press and from the Sangh's own publications. The *Organiser* published HHR's press release and an article quoting Ramesh Kallidai, as well as a rambling editorial piece (2006) mentioning the London M. F. Husain outrage as a segue to a more general polemic on Christian insults to Hinduism and India. At the other end of the political spectrum, *Tehelka* published an article looking back on the case the following year headlined 'Equal Opportunity Fundamentalism', highlighting the irony of an uncontested exhibition of sensual, nude Chola bronzes exhibiting concurrently at the Royal Academy, and referred to 'London's neo-hypersensitive Hindu community' (Tripathi 2007). In the recent case relating to the censoring of Wendy Doniger's scholarship (discussed in the following), this diasporic influence on India became even more pronounced.

The anti-Husain campaign is an important example of how outrage can be deployed for specific gains. For the Forum, it presented an opportunity to 'speak for the community', to reify their representative credentials, and to publicly articulate an assertive image of Hindus. We can draw various comparisons and influences of this instrumentalisation of outrage from India. Jaffrelot has written on Hindutva and 'the art of being outraged', arguing that during electorally significant moments 'any disrespect can be portrayed as blasphemy and lay itself to popular mobilizations – which may translate into votes' (2008, 2). However, this discourse of victimisation, which is so core to Hindutva, must not be read in purely instrumentalist terms, and 'cannot be understood irrespective of its psychological context' (2008, 2). Of course, the material and psychological returns that can emanate from moments of outrage are inextricable. Demonstrations of outrage in themselves challenge notions of Hindu weakness. These concerns have preoccupied Hindu revivalists and Hindutva ideologues for over a century, from Dayananda Saraswati and Lokmanya Tilak to V. D. Savarkar and M. S. Golwalkar.

The significance of outrage in fomenting political consciousness can hardly be overestimated. As Cefaï noted, 'there is no collective action without perceiving, communicating, dramatising and legitimising an experience of indignation' (2007, 163, quoted in Blom and Jaoul 2008, 2). We might also interpret the mobilisation of outrage in terms of Durkheimian

‘collective effervescence’, in which a community coalesces and establishes group unity in a stimulated, emotionally charged moment (Durkheim 1976). However, as seen throughout Hindu nationalist campaigns, what is framed as a ‘spontaneous’ outpouring of emotion and anger is in fact carefully orchestrated. The muddle of spontaneity/choreography explains the anachronism of Husain’s paintings only being objected to many years after their creation (also contingent on the chronology of Hindutva’s late-twentieth-century resurgence).¹⁵

Understanding the HFB’s position in the Asia House affair

The Asia House M. F. Husain controversy can be read as a critical moment in the recent history of diasporic Hindutva. It was a British expression of a key trope of Hindutva mobilisation, articulated by a mainstream representative Hindu umbrella group. Whilst some may have seen this as anomalous, and others may have not understood the political subtext to the Forum’s position, the sympathy with Hindutva and alignment with Hindu nationalist organisations were in fact consistent with much of the organisation’s positioning throughout its existence. Although it would be disingenuous to pigeonhole them as merely a thinly disguised unit of the Sangh, as Zavos warned, and there are indeed instances of the Forum taking moderate or even progressive positions on various issues, there also exists a clear link to both the ideology and organisations of the RSS family.

Despite their sense of British government unease, as explained earlier, in many ways the Forum’s leadership has not shorn itself of various Hindutva connections. In a recent interview, discussing the Sangh Parivar generally, and the RSS in particular, Swaminathan Vaidyanathan, then-Hindu Forum Secretary General, told me that ‘most of the people, including me, look at it as a patriotic and good organisation’. More surprisingly, Swaminathan asked me, ‘What is your opinion on the EDL [English Defence League]? The fact is, you know I’m not a supporter of EDL, but the fact is the points that they raise are not wrong.’ This appeared to be a statement of sympathy with the far-right, Islamophobic protest group, an acknowledgement that the EDL’s criticism of Muslims in Britain was justified.

We can observe a clear semblance with an earlier manifestation of the Forum’s mistrust, even demonisation, of British Muslims. In 2007, at an HFB-organised Hindu Security Conference, controversial allegations were made that Muslim males were forcibly converting vulnerable female Hindu students on university campuses in Britain.¹⁶ Ramesh Kallidai, Hindu Forum Secretary General, was quoted in the national press to have claimed, ‘extremist Muslims make life miserable for Hindu girls’ (‘Hindu Girls Targeted by Extremists’, 2007). This can be identified as the familiar, anti-Muslim ‘Love Jihad’ rhetoric of Hindutva exponents. The trope is commonplace in India, and predicated on a proclaimed demographic, existential ‘threat’ to India’s Hindu majority, by proselytising, predatory, and lascivious Muslim men. The Hindu Forum’s ‘othering’ of Muslims was also evident in their campaigns to end the use of the ‘Asian’ marker (the most common term in Britain to refer to anyone of South Asian ethnicity, and still prevalent in the media). This was raised by the Forum in the wake of press reports about crimes committed by British Pakistanis, for instance in the 2012 Rochdale ‘grooming’ case, enabling them to highlight negative comparisons (BBC News 2012).

These instances, and the M. F. Husain campaign, are not isolated moments of consonance with Hindu nationalism. In the first quarter of 2014, the Forum took two public positions which unequivocally reflected a stance consistent with right-wing Hindu conservatism. Firstly, it aggressively condemned Wendy Doniger’s book *The Hindus*.

Secondly, it vilified an anti-Modi lobby following the disputed invitation of the Gujarat Chief Minister to the Houses of Parliament.

A long-running campaign against Doniger took a dramatic turn in February 2014, when Penguin, the Indian publishers of *The Hindus*, agreed to withdraw and pulp the book, following legal action. The rhetoric against the Chicago professor fits into a long tradition of attacks against scholars by the Hindu right. But what was striking in the case of Doniger was that the crusade against her scholarship has been chiefly led from outside India. This was primarily driven by Rajiv Malhotra – an influential American-based former corporate executive, who now describes himself on his website as a ‘researcher, writer, speaker and public intellectual on current affairs’. Malhotra has spent well over a decade attacking a host of scholars of Hinduism, especially Paul Courtright, Jeffrey Kripal, and Doniger, for their ‘insulting’ psychoanalytical reflections on Hindu texts and practices, in particular targeting the perceived ‘eroticisation of Hinduism’ (Malhotra 2002).

The 2014 decision in India was a result of a legal notice from Dinanath Batra, the Sangh-loyal convenor of marginal Hindutva group Shiksha Bacho Andolan, which stated, ‘YOU NOTICEE has hurt the religious feelings of millions of Hindus by declaring that Ramayana is a fiction’ (Doniger 2014).¹⁷ Interestingly, it appears that Batra was in turn influenced by the American wing of the HJS. In an interview, he stated that they contacted him following their protest of the book’s inclusion in the 2010 National Book Critics Circle Awards in New York and encouraged him ‘to campaign to stop the book in India’ (Dasgupta 2014). Also noteworthy in the interwoven, transnational history of ‘outrage’ was the Sangh’s backseat role. Prakash Sharma, spokesperson of the VHP, said that ‘in the case of Wendy Doniger, the VHP is following as Batraji leads. Anybody who insults our tradition and culture will not be tolerated’ (Dasgupta 2014).

The HFB then weighed in, supporting Batra’s divisive position. Madhava Turumella, HFB Vice President, stated:

In the name of alternate thinking people like Wendy cast their evil and idiotic theories. Your freedom of speech should NOT be our Insult. We are becoming forced victims for this so called intellectuals who take the meaning of free speech to an absurd level. (Hindu Forum of Britain 2014a)

Turumella also said in an interview on CNN (14 February 2014) that ‘We Hindus have been extremely liberal. As a result, we Hindus have been taken for a task ... We have tolerated enough’. This mindset of Hindus as submissive and open to exploitation underpinned Hindutva’s creation, the Sangh Parivar’s rise from the late 1980s, and also is reflected clearly in certain HFB campaigns.

A second example of the Forum’s sustained role in promulgating a position consonant with the Sangh Parivar was their response to anti-Hindutva lobbying before the 2014 Indian general elections. In the wake of the ‘lifting’ of Narendra Modi’s *de facto* European travel ban, Barry Gardiner – long-time Modi supporter, Chairman of Labour Friends of India, and MP for Brent North – invited the divisive then-Gujarat Chief Minister to visit the UK. He did not accept the invitation, yet anti-Modi activists reacted passionately at a meeting hosted by John McDonnell MP at the Parliament on 26 February. Rather dramatically, the Hindu Forum chose to vocally oppose this meeting and, with a coalition of Hindu organisations, issued a press release branding the Modi critics ‘extremists who abused the privilege and desecrated the sentiments of a peaceful and harmonious British Hindu community’ (Hindu Forum of Britain 2014b). This is may be the furthest the Forum has gone in normalising Hindutva, in the sense that those who deign to *criticise* the Sangh Parivar are

ostracised and branded fanatics. From the Asia House incident to much more recent examples, it is argued here that the HFB, in many ways, represent an idiosyncratic form of neo-Hindutva, adapted to the environment of British multiculturalism.

Conclusion

The events of May 2006 were significant for involving a rare *act* of Hindutva militancy outside of India. Nonetheless, much of the discourse surrounding the Asia House controversy was consonant with quotidian expressions of Hindu conservatism in Britain. Whilst Reddy is correct in arguing that diasporic Sangh Parivar bodies provide ‘easily translatable arguments and the conceptual infrastructure – a culturally grounded lingua franca – for the assertion of Hindu rights in the diaspora’ (2012, 319), it appears that the rhetoric of Hindutva has outgrown the institutional margins of the RSS’s fold. This is seen especially clearly in the diaspora.

The concept of neo-Hindutva can help us to understand and categorise these new forms of Hindu identity, rhetoric, and organisation. Neo-Hindutva undoubtedly has strong family resemblance to more ‘orthodox’ Hindu nationalism. Yet it is important to identify the existence of Sangh-related ideology *outside*, or on the periphery, of the institutional (and sometimes ideological) boundaries of the RSS fold. In certain ways, this highlights the nebulous nature of Sangh influence. Neo-Hindutva is also, in many ways, a product of the digital revolution. Organisations use new technologies to develop and propagate dynamic identities and ideologies, with some groups even *exclusively* located online.

In its ‘soft’ form, neo-Hindutva can be understood as inflections of Hindu nationalist rhetoric which is keen to avoid explicit connections with Hindu majoritarian politics. ‘Hard’ neo-Hindutva, on the other hand, is less reticent about being associated with Hindu nationalism; still, for various reasons, there are often critical departures from the positioning and praxis of the Sangh. Because neo-Hindutva operates outside the Sangh Parivar (albeit sometimes overlapping), and represents a more nebulous and concealed expression of Hindu nationalism, it is especially well placed to perform an advocacy role in multicultural and multifaith contexts. This is evident from the way in which the HFB has been able to mainstream conservative and sometimes puritanical expressions of Hindu identity.

In HHR’s far-reaching web presence and substantial Facebook following, we can observe a truly transnational community, capable of global reach and engagement, and unrestricted by the remit, hierarchy, or doctrine of more traditional institutions. The HFB operates in a different, but overlapping space, shaped in important ways by Britain’s twenty-first-century landscape of multicultural interfaith relations. In both instances the influence of the Sangh Parivar – direct or indirect, domestic or international – is not always easy to establish. In moments when Hindutva can be identified, the presence of the Sangh might be obfuscated. In many ways we can also observe a distinctive dynamic, influenced by the compulsions and policies of multicultural Britain, which generates a new, organic, and nuanced inflection of Hindutva. Furthermore, whilst it is important to understand these vernacular expressions of Hindu nationalism in their diasporic context, we must also recognise the intrinsic discursive and strategic links to the homeland, as evidenced in the M. F. Husain case.

Although the mandate of Britain’s leading Hindu umbrella group is contested by some, it is nonetheless conferred legitimacy through its interactions with central government. The move from multicultural to multifaith/cohesion-based policies has further helped create space for ecumenical expressions of Hindu nationalism (perhaps ironic, given Hindutva’s

traditional insistence on being apolitical and areligious). Despite the government's worries about Hindutva, it appears that its understanding of this does not go beyond the institutions of the Sangh Parivar. Given the ways in which we have seen Hindutva permeating beyond these confines, if Whitehall is to continue to try and keep Hindu nationalism at an arm's length (which inevitably will be more difficult, and perhaps not desired, following recent attempts to reach out to Narendra Modi), a revised approach to Hindu organisations in Britain might be needed.

The Hindu Forum's conservative ecumenism both contributes towards and reflects an increasingly homogenised and puritanical strand of Hinduism. This is intrinsically linked, through a borderless, multidirectional network of transnational Hindutva activism, to the Hindu nationalist politics and ideology of the subcontinent. In this way, what quite recently might have been considered radical, unconventional expressions of Hindu identity have now become the mainstream, even dominant, discourse in Britain's multicultural landscape (whether or not this represents the majority of British Hindus). These trends require us to reimagine 'Hindutva', in particular by rethinking the role of the Hindu diaspora.

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Notes

1. Over the 1990s, religious minority communities emerged as increasingly politically significant entities. This dynamic increased dramatically in the post-9/11, post-2001 race riots, 'community cohesion' era. In this context, many have referred to a 'faith relations industry'. Various institutional developments (in Home Office/Department for Communities and Local Government) created a framework for faith groups to be systematically consulted with, and religion became re-legitimised as a political language. See Cantle (2001). See also Home Office Faith Communities Unit (2004), an important document from the Race, Cohesion and Faiths Directorate.
2. Hindutva and the Hindu nationalist movement in India have been well documented from a variety of disciplines, with academic attention particularly focused following the controversial destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya by Hindutva militants in 1992. Key monographs include: Andersen and Damle (1987), Graham (1990), Basu et al. (1993), Van der Veer (1994), Jaffrelot (1996), Hansen (1999), Zavos (2000), Bhatt (2001), and Nussbaum (2007).
3. Letter from Amrita Jhaveri and Mallika Advani to Claire Hsu, 4 July 2006, Asia Art Archive (MON.HUM).
4. Guha-Takurta (2004, 356, n.23) has explained the subtext of Om Nagpal's article title, '*Yeh Chitrakar hai ya Kasai* [Is this an artist or a butcher?]' Qassab (plural of Qassai/Kasai) is a Muslim caste involved in butchery, a profession with contentious associations with cow slaughter.
5. HJS's name is a call to arms in itself. In relation to performative politics and cultures of Hinduism and Hindutva, Kaur (2005, 11) has written that:

Communicative strategies and connectivity with audiences often revolved around the metaphor of ‘awakening’ (as a verb, *jangruti* or *janajagruti*; as a command *jago!* or *uthao!*) was a resounding refrain in the early incidents of mass mobilisation against perceived colonial, and occasionally communal of class/caste-oriented, iniquities.

6. Various critics have also accused Husain’s work as depicting acts of bestiality. The Hindu Jana-jagruti Samiti (n.d.) interpret a picture of Durga and her lion vehicle as, ‘Goddess Durga in sexual union with a Tiger’, and the HFB statement mentions controversies and complaints over Husain in India, for his ‘offensive paintings of Hindu Gods and Goddesses in sexual poses’. Husain vehemently denied such intentions, and once said ‘Nudity, in Hindu culture, is a metaphor for purity. Would I insult that which I feel so close to?’ (‘In Hindu Culture’, 2008). Guha-Takurta (2004, 247) refers to the anti-Husain movement as indicative of ‘the degree of artistic illiteracy and art historical ignorance that prevail in the public sphere in contemporary India’. Another level to this sexual mania can be read in the Shiv Sena’s threats to publically ‘strip’ Husain (Swami 1998). Against this backdrop, one might consider the use of sexual violence in communal conflicts, outlined, for instance, by the recent report by India United Against Fascism (2013). For a more detailed art historical interpretation of Husain’s nude female deities, which in fact represent just a tiny fraction of his prolific oeuvre, see Juneja (1997, 155–157) and Kapur (2011, 33).
7. The case against Husain even reached the Supreme Court in September 2008, which also threw out the petitioners’ claims of hurt sentiment. Charges had in fact been brought against Husain (by the convenor of the Jamshedpur unit of the VHP), back in 1996 (Guha-Takurta 2004, 356). In 2004, the Delhi High Court had thrown out yet another case against Husain, in which complaints were filed under Section 153A, ‘promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony’, and section 295A, ‘deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs’, of the Indian Penal Code. [Maqbool Fida Hussain vs State of Bihar & anr. Crl. M(M) 420/2001]. For a detailed analysis of Bharat Mata iconography, see Ramaswamy (2010).
8. In the 2006 report *Connecting British Hindus: An Inquiry into the Identity and Public Engagement of Hindus in Britain*, the Forum state that they represent 270 organisations across the UK (Hindu Forum of Britain 2006, 74). The number of organisations the Forum say they represent fluctuates greatly, claimed at times to be as high as 420. Their *Diwali at Westminster 2011* brochure highlights the member organisations that have made financial contributions, numbering just 36.
9. Author’s interview with an anonymous civil servant (Cohesion and Faiths Unit of the Department for Communities and Local Government), 21 February 2014.
10. It is worth reflecting on the way in which these moments of essentialism are ephemeral. Are they just ‘moments’ (viz. Raj 2003, 82), before communities return to their more ‘authentic’, vernacular forms?
11. Author’s interview with Sunny Hundal, 18 January 2014. This reflects statements made by government officials, quoted elsewhere in this chapter. In addition, an anonymous interviewee, closely involved in anti-Hindutva activism, suggested that the lack of critical resistance to Hindu nationalists in Britain by authorities was linked to ‘political correctness’ and ‘postcolonial guilt gone mad’.
12. In the Home Affairs Select Committee on Terrorism and Community Relations Sixth Report of Session 2004–05, Ramesh Kallidai was called to give evidence in the light of a controversial claims made by Jagdeesh Singh, of the Sikh Community Action Network (Slough), regarding connections between BAPS (Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha) Swaminarayan temple in Neasden and the VHP (UK). Kallidai told the Committee:

The VHP is an organisation that works with social and moral upliftment of Hindus and the VHP UK is a totally autonomous body from the VHP India. ... the VHP has never had in any court of law any evidence proved or provided to link them to a terrorist organisation. So, on the basis of media reports, we should not quickly judge and label an organisation ... Most of the Hindu community in the UK and the world consider the VHP to be a peaceful organisation.

13. HinduUnity.org – the ‘official site’ of the Bajrang Dal, which was run from the USA by Rohit Vyasmaan, the leading figure in the American Bajrang Dal – was shut down by its US host server in 2001, following complaints about hate speech towards Muslims. It was subsequently ‘rescued’ by Zionist extremist Rabbi Meir Kahane’s group. This led to quid pro quo support, with Hindus marching in the annual Salute to Israel parade in New York City in 2001. One month later Jews joined a protest outside the United Nations against the treatment of Hindus in Afghanistan by the Taliban (Murphy 2001). It is no longer available online.
14. This occurred when Pramod Navalkar, Maharashtra’s cultural affairs minister and member of the Shiv Sena, filed a police case against Husain under Section 295(A) (Jain 2007, 296).
15. We can further understand the instrumentalism and arbitrary chronology of expressions of outrage by differentiating between ‘pre-emptive’ and ‘reactive’ anti-defamation discourses (Chaudhuri 2012, 332).
16. The Hindu Security Conference of 2007 was co-organised with the National Hindu Students Forum and the Metropolitan Police Hindu Association. Kallidai was also reported in ‘Hindu Girls Targeted by Extremists’ (2007) to have estimated that, ‘hundreds of girls had been targeted’ with ‘recruiters ... paid £5,000 for each success’. In a later statement, the Forum denied Kallidai had given figures for the numbers converted. Significantly, the conference featured Sir Ian Blair, Metropolitan Police Chief Constable, as keynote speaker, and also hosted Tony McNulty, Home Office Minister for Policing and Security. The conference was also reported in a controversial *Evening Standard* exposé written by Andrew Gilligan (2007). Elsewhere in the article, Gilligan mentioned Kallidai’s praise for M S Golwalkar - the RSS’ second *Sarsangchalak* (Supreme Leader) and leading ideologue. This ‘homage’, made at an RSS function, was also noted in an *Organiser* article at the time (“Shri Guruji Birth Centenary Celebrations in UK, 2007”, 2007).
17. Dinanath Batra has subsequently become a familiar figure in the Indian press, particularly following the election of the BJP-led government. Batra has authored a number of didactic books, which have even become recommended readings in Gujarati schools, despite their much-criticised content ranging from assertions about Vedic aeroplanes to vastly expanded redrawn maps of India. Batra is another example of a hard neo-Hindutva advocate, with various newspaper articles reporting that he denies association with the RSS. Despite this, an elegy to Batra from Narendra Modi is quoted in the foreword to one of his Gujarat State Board of School Text-books-approved publications (‘Historians Slam Dina Nath Batra’s Books’, 2014).

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