WELFARE, PATRONAGE, AND THE RISE OF HINDU NATIONALISM IN INDIA'S URBAN SLUMS

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

Despite the recent electoral defeat of the Hindu nationalist party, the BJP, Hindu nationalist organizations led by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) remain a dominant force in several parts of India particularly as most of them operate outside the electoral arena as charitable NGOs providing welfare services such as education and healthcare to poor urban communities. In fact, economic liberalization in India has been accompanied by massive welfare projects initiated by Hindu right-wing organizations. There seems to be a deliberate shift in their strategy with violent tactics being increasingly accompanied by more accepted forms of civil society activities notably among urban slums and tribal populations. This is significant because their successes in co-opting the urban poor through welfare have more often than not also been accompanied by rapid worsening of inter-group relations, increase in religious violence, victimization of minorities and electoral rewards for the BJP down the line, which in turn uses its authority to further facilitate the smooth operation of such organizations through favorable laws and regulations. The literature has failed to answer two important questions about these Hindu nationalist welfare organizations: why there was a shift in strategy in the 1990s and why, despite similar tactics, these organizations do not succeed everywhere. This project seeks to answer these questions.
This dissertation explains both spatial and temporal variation in the success of Hindu nationalist groups. Temporally, economic reforms since the 1990s have caused deindustrialization, pushing the working class into the insecure unorganized sector or creating a huge class of unemployed youth, easy targets for recruitment by welfarist NGOs run by the Hindu right wing. RSS affiliates are well-positioned to take advantage of this situation because they have always organized at the neighborhood level and it is now easier to reach out to the informal work force that is available to be mobilized within neighborhood associations as opposed to the workplace. Reaching out to the lower caste/lower class sections through religious and ideological appeals alone has been a major hurdle in the past. However, the increasing need for welfare among these sections of the population has made it easier for these organizations to target them through service provision. Yet, not all places experiencing economic reforms turn to Hindu welfarist NGOs. I argue that support for them in urban slums varies based on pre-existing patterns of associational life and whether or not these function as efficient and effective political patronage networks, inducing state political parties to meet welfare needs of the people. Slums turn to non-partisan NGOs only when there is an absence of structured political access facilitated through associational networks with political links. When existing associational networks fail to create channels of political access, there is more space for the Hindu welfarist NGOs to establish themselves. It is neither the mere presence of prior associational networks nor density of associational networks that determines whether or not the Hindu nationalists are able to penetrate civil society. The key is the strength of political connections between associational networks and political parties. It comes down
to whether or not the existing associational networks are able to guarantee welfare provision through clientelistic patronage ties.

I test my hypotheses at the macro-level using national elections survey data, as well as in two states in South India: Tamil Nadu and Karntaka. The nature of associational networks varies significantly in these two states, thus producing the variation we observe in the success of the Hindu national organizations. In terms of associational networks, Tamil Nadu represents a case where strong local associations mediate between the urban poor and political party representatives, whereas Karnataka is a case where political patronage ties linking the parties and poor voters are very weak. With regard to the outcome of interest, that is the dependent variable, Karnataka is a case where the Hindu right has been on the ascendant since the 1990s and has successfully entrenched itself at the local urban level through extensive welfare efforts, and their local presence has already resulted in polarization and violence among Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities in several places. Tamil Nadu, in contrast, is a case where the Hindu nationalist efforts have not paid off at all. My primary source of data consists of 75 interviews conducted with civil society organizations including the Hindu nationalist NGOs, politicians, bureaucrats, academics and journalists who have been studying Hindu nationalism closely. These findings are supplemented and confirmed by the analysis of national elections survey data.

The data analysis indicates support for my hypotheses. The urban working class in Tamil Nadu is linked clientelistically through inclusive associations to state parties whereas Karnataka’s economy has come to be dominated by the white-collar service
sector, which creates networks that expressly ignore the urban poor in their governance agenda and deliberately bypass political bodies/representatives to link up with technocratic bureaucratic elite. Thus, even though Karnataka has witnessed a proliferation of civil society associations in metropolitan areas, this has failed to thwart the Hindu nationalist affiliates from establishing themselves in urban spaces. On the other hand, Tamil Nadu, there are very well entrenched patronage links between local associations and political parties that consciously strive to keep new entrants out.
Dedicated to my parents,

V. Chidambaram & Prema Chidambaram
Writing a dissertation is like riding a rollercoaster. It is both exciting and terrifying at the same time, and one tends to be somewhat dizzy at the end! This journey would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of a number of people. I wish to take this opportunity to thank them for their help and for making this one thrilling ride!

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Glossary of Indian words used in the text

1. Hindutva: (lit. Hindu-ness): It is the term used by Hindu nationalist organizations as well as understood by others to signify a nationalist political ideology deriving from Hindu values and culture, especially the notion of India as a Hindu state (or Hindu Rashtra).

2. Bhartiya Jana Sangh (lit. Indian People’s Association or Federation): This was the political party that contested election in India from 1951 to 1980. It was ideologically very close to the RSS, deriving most of its workers, activists, members and candidates from the ranks of the RSS. In the 1977 elections, the first to be held after the end of the Emergency era, the Jana Sangh merged with several anti-Congress parties such as the Bhartiya Lok Dal, the Socialist Party, and the Congress (O) to form the “Janata Party” (People’s Party). They won the elections decisively. However, the really poor showing in the 1980 elections combined with controversy over the dual membership of Jana Sangh members (since all of them were also members of the RSS) led to the disintegration of this alliance. The Jana Sangh members abandoned the Janata party and went ahead to form a new party called the Bhartiya Janata Party.
3. Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) (lit. Indian People’s Party): As mentioned above, this was a party formed in 1980 by the former Jana Sangh members closely affiliated with the RSS. It became the new political arm of the RSS. It is the second largest national party, and held power at the centre from 1998 to 2004 in alliance with several other parties.

4. Kisan: (lit. farmer): This is term used to denote a farmer or agricultural worker. The Bhartiya Kisan Sangh (Indian Farmers’ Union or Federation) is the farmers’ union affiliated with the RSS and the BJP

5. Mazdoor: (lit. Worker): This is term used to denote the working class population, particularly those employed in the formal sector. The Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (Indian Workers’ Union or Federation) is the right-wing labor union affiliated with the RSS.

6. Mutt (Also written as Matha or Math): These are Hindu monastic establishments that are headed by religious Gurus.

7. Ram Janmabhoomi (lit. Birthplace of Lord Rama): This refers to a site in Ayodhya city in Uttar Pradesh, where allegedly Lord Rama was born. Hindu nationalists have claimed that the temple that existed at this site was destroyed by Muslim invaders and a mosque (Babri mosque) was built in its place. The VHP and other Hindu nationalist organization, in conjunction with the BJP that used this as an election campaign issue, launched a mass movement in the 1980s to reclaim this site and rebuild the temple. In December 1992, a mob of Hindus calling themselves kar sevaks (volunteers dedicated to the religious cause of rebuilding the temple) stormed the mosque and demolished it.
it. A government commission set up to probe the event submitted its report after almost 17 years, but its reportswere never made public. Several Hindu nationalist leaders, including BJP leaders, had to stand trial for their role in the demolition of the mosque on the court’s orders. On 30 September 2010, the Allahabad High Court ruled that the 2,400 square feet disputed land will be divided into three parts, with both Hindu and Muslim groups receiving a part.

8. Rashtra (lit. nation)

9. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (lit. National Volunteers Corps): It is considered the parent body of the Hindu nationalist ideology in India. It is a Hindu all-male organization that was founded in 1925 by Dr. K. B. Hedgewar as a socio-cultural organization. It is not a registered organization; it denies any political ambitions, does not contest elections, and claims to be a purely cultural organization. However, there are several affiliated organizations that in fact draw their personnel, office bearers and volunteers from the ranks of the RSS, and have similar organizational structures and ideological direction. These usually operate as registered non-profit organizations working in various areas such as electoral politics, social welfare, education, and organizing unions. Together these have come to be characterized as the “Sangh Parivar”. There is evidence of strong links between these organizations and the RSS in terms of operational, financial and leadership decisions. The top leadership of the different organizations is allegedly chosen by the RSS and the top leaders of each organization are also members of the national policy making council of the RSS and attend the annual meetings. However, the RSS has tended to deny this linkage vehemently in recent years due to strategic considerations.
and claims that it has nothing to do with these organizations except that they broadly reflect similar goals and visions for India’s future.

10. Sangh Parivar: This is a term used to signify the *parivar* or family of organizations associated and affiliated with the RSS.

11. Sewa or Seva (lit. service): This term is used by the Sangh Parivar organization to denote their service to the Hindu community in the form of social welfare, education, healthcare, and self-reliance projects/vocational training. The affiliate organizations such as Seva Bharati are dedicated to initiating projects in the areas of social welfare to reach out to the backward and disadvantaged sections of Hindu society. *Sevakarya* is the term used to denote the welfare projects undertaken by the affiliate organizations of the RSS.

12. Seva Bharati: This is a registered non-profit organization that coordinates welfare projects in the area of education, healthcare, social organization and self-reliance, particularly among urban slums. This is an organization closely allied with the RSS.

13. Shakha (lit. branch): This is the basic organizational unit of the RSS. It is a term used to denote the daily gathering of all Swayamsevaks of a particular neighborhood at a common meeting place for one hour. The daily programs of a Shakha consist of physical exercises, patriotic songs, group discussions on various subjects, particularly related to politics and Hindu nationalism.

14. Swayamsevak: This term is used to denote volunteers that work for the RSS and affiliated organizations.
15. Vanavasi (lit. forest dwellers): This is the Sangh’s choice of term to denote tribal people in India. It is a conscious departure from the generally accepted term *Adivasi* (first settlers) or indigenous people. The idea is to emphasize that these are people or tribes that do not necessarily have a different way of life and worship; they are essentially Hindus who have chosen to live in the forests. They may have forgotten the Hindu way of life, which is why it is necessary to reeducate them to protect them from the threat of Christian missionary organizations. VHP’s reconversion programs and Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram’s welfare and education programs are based on this premise.

16. Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (lit. Forest Dwellers’ Welfare Organization): This affiliate organization operates primarily in tribal districts among India, providing schools or non-formal education centers for the children in backwards districts where the government welfare provision is weak, poor or non-existent. This is accompanied by the VHP’s activities to prevent conversions to Christianity and reconvert them to Hinduism through the introduction of Hindu rituals and festivals, mobilization against Christian missionaries and churches and sects that have converted to Christianity.

17. Vidya: (lit. education)

18. Vidya Bharati: This is an affiliate Sangh Parivar organization established in 1977, which works in the area of primary and secondary education. It runs several fulltime schools as well as kindergarten centers called *Saraswati Shishu Mandirs*. It claims to operate over 25,000 institutions all over India. It also has its own publication division, which brings out several textbooks that have been used to supplement the national or state prescribed curriculum. The organization has often courted controversy because
of allegations regarding their educational material, particularly relating to history, being incorrect or manipulated to exclude or defame religious minorities.

19. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (lit. World Hindu Council): This is the religious wing of the Sangh Parivar that was started in 1964 to protect and propagate Hindu values and religious practices not just in India but also among the diaspora community the world over. It is an organization known for taking a strident aggressive stand on Hindutva, particularly with respect to demands about creating a Hindu rashtra (nation), banning cow slaughter and religious conversions, implementing a Uniform Civil Code that applies to citizens irrespective of religion, and construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. It has been very active among the diaspora community and has succeeded in getting large donations for its welfare, religious and other activities in India. It has organized several “reconversion” initiatives especially amongst the tribal districts to bring the tribal population back into the Hindu fold so to speak. It also organizes Dharma Sansads or Religious Parliaments that bring together Hindu seers, priests and scholars to interpret Hindu texts and rituals. It has been seen as an attempt to “semitize” and unify the various regional and cultural practices of Hinduism that has tended to be very diverse and not very hierarchically organized historically. In recent years, it has frequently criticized the BJP, the Hindu nationalist party, for moving too slowly on some of the above mentioned goals, with the RSS often stepping in to mediate between the two organizations. It has an all-male youth wing associated with it called the Bajrang Dal, which is known to be militant. It often operates in tandem with local Shakhas, imparting para-military and self-defense training for the young and old males attending the shakhas.
CHAPTER ONE
THE PUZZLE OF UNEVEN SAFFRONIZATION

SUMMARY:

This chapter introduces the central puzzle of the dissertation, the spatial variation in the success of the Hindu nationalist organizations in India. Specifically, it demonstrates the nature and magnitude of change in tactics of the RSS since the 1990s to expand its support base among the marginalized urban poor through the use of welfare service provision, as well as the concomitant change in the electoral fortunes of the affiliated Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in national as well as state-level elections. Though the post-1990s phase has been identified as a period of major success of the Hindu nationalist organizations and their divisive ideology, this success however has not been uniform across India. Their strategies to capture local urban spaces and dominate electorally have been very successful in some states but have come to naught in others. Why was this strategy employed predominantly in the post-1990s period? Why did it succeed only in some states? The chapter outlines this empirical puzzle in detail.

Extant literature about Hindu nationalist organizations tends to address only one or the other of the above questions, thus providing only a partial answer. I present a theoretical framework that explains both types of variation. The major shortcoming of the literature on the Hindu Right has is its oversight regarding the role of the RSS and its affiliated organizations, and their extensive welfare work in education and healthcare among the marginalized urban poor, which has helped consolidate the credibility and appeal of the BJP gradually yet firmly in several places. Though this widespread welfare work functions seemingly informally at the neighborhood level, it is coordinated and monitored by a hierarchical structure of command. It has far more impact than the BJP’s efforts because it is far more connected to the community and is positioned strategically to mobilize the marginalized lower caste Hindus more effectively. More puzzling is why some communities have been able to resist their appeal and activities more than others. This has not been answered adequately in the literature. In particular, there are no comparisons across cases, thus precluding any kind of generalization about why their success varies. This is the gap that this dissertation seeks to rectify. My theory about the nature of associational networks in civil society and the kind of political linkages they develop between parties and the urban poor helps explain why in some states they are able to act as strong pressure groups closing entry to other welfarist organizations while
in others their weakness facilitates the entrenchment of the Hindu organizations within 
the urban space. I also examine what induces political parties and associational networks 
in certain states to develop strong clientelistic linkages that enable inclusive welfare 
service provision.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Defying dominant expectations, economic reforms and globalization have been 
accompanied by the revival of the radical religious right wing in several regions across 
the globe. When and why are these groups successful in gaining popular support? Using 
India as a test case, my research examines the cluster of Hindu nationalist organizations, 
headed by the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) [translated as National Volunteers 
Corps], and their use of welfare service provision such as free education & healthcare to 
advance their exclusionary nationalist agenda. This dissertation addresses the question of 
reasons for the success of sectarian Hindu charitable NGOs at the local level in urban 
spaces. Furthermore, it seeks to explain why this success is not uniform across India. 
Three questions are pertinent when it comes to the extensive welfare provision efforts of 
the Hindu right wing organizations across Indian states: Why have the RSS and its 
affiliate organizations, which became prominent because of their militant religious 
mobilization tactics, changed tacks to implement such a vast welfarist strategy across 
India? Why has this strategy particularly gained momentum since the 1990s? More 
importantly, why has this strategy worked only in some states? While the extant literature 
has answered the first question to some degree, it has not adequately addressed the latter 
two. This dissertation seeks to answer precisely these questions. Firstly, this dissertation 
discusses the timing of the welfare strategy in the context of the economic
transformations that have affected the poor informal sector working class populations in urban spaces. More importantly, this dissertation explains the spatial variation in the success of the Hindu nationalist organizations’ welfare provision strategy.

To address the issue of timing, we need to take into account the nature of the economic reforms initiated by the Indian government in the 1990s. The changes in labor laws such as “flexibilization” of the labor markets have led towards the informalization of labor, breakdown of working class solidarity by divorcing workers from the workplace, thus contributing to the economic impoverishment of the urban poor. These changes in turn created the space for radical nationalist groups to entrench themselves through much needed welfare service provision. However, I argue that Hindu social service NGOs fail to entrench themselves in those urban slums where preexisting local associations function as efficient political patronage networks, inducing state political parties to meet welfare needs adequately. When strong neighborhood networks are also well linked to local party officials, the urban poor are able to bargain collectively for better service provision from political parties, thus decreasing their dependence on all other non-state social service groups. It is the microlevel associational dynamics that explain the spatial variation in the success of Hindu nationalist welfare organizations. To test this, I focus on an organization called the Seva Bharati, a key constituent of the Hindu nationalist movement led by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which works exclusively among urban slum neighborhoods to reach out to the poor working class Hindu population through welfare provision. My theory can thus explain variation in the influence of right-wing groups across space, something that previous theories fail
to do, while also explicating some reasons for the expansion of such initiatives particularly in the post-reforms period.

This dissertation utilizes a small-N study comparing Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, which together provide good cases to understand the causal mechanism. Choosing two states from the southern part of India, which have similar colonial histories, demographic and linguistic features that set them apart from the northern Hindi heartland of India, and similar trajectories of economic and social development outcomes, allows us to design a paired comparison that minimizes or controls for systemic differences. Thus, the study follows what is known as the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) [Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Gerring, 2007], or the Most Similar with Different Outcome design (MS-DO) (De Meur and Berg-Schlosser, 1994). This design follows the logic of Mill’s Method of Difference: “If an instance in which the phenomenon under investigation occurs, and an instance in which it does not occur, have every circumstance in common save one, that one occurring only in the former; the circumstance in which alone the two instances differ, is the effect, or the cause, or an indispensable part of the cause, of the phenomenon” (Mill, 1875). Since we compare cases that are similar in as many respects as possible, the common factors can be excluded as causes of the effect observed. This method helps us focus attention to the way in which these cases differ, thus allowing us to identify the explanatory variable or in other words necessary and sufficient conditions for the variation in the outcome of interest. While both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have experienced similar levels of economic reforms and economic growth [both are
categorized as middle-income states\textsuperscript{1}], this study finds that the variation in the nature of associational networks explains the variance in the success of the welfare work of the RSS and its allied organizations.

Right-wing Hindu organizations are not able to mobilize support equally in all places. Within South India, their ability to polarize communities is much weaker in Tamil Nadu (TN) compared to Karnataka (KA). I study the variation in the success of sectarian service provision in these two states to test my causal mechanisms. Six months of fieldwork [July-December 2009] in three Indian cities, which yielded 75 (elite & non-elite) interviews, enabled me to observe closely the strategies of the RSS when it tries to embed itself in local neighborhood networks in urban slum communities. I observed its education projects in Chennai city (capital of TN) and Bangalore city (capital of KA), variation in their success across these cities, as well as the links between the parties and local communities. Using this primary source of interview data as well as secondary sources, I analyze the variation in the success of welfare service provision by Hindu nationalist organizations in slum neighborhoods in two cities each in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Primarily, I analyze the functioning of associational networks in these neighborhoods and their party linkages in order to understand the reasons for the spatial variation in the success of the Hindu Right. I find that, in Tamil Nadu, the RSS’s welfare service provision through its affiliate organization is unsuccessful and its influence quite weak because of the strong clientelistic ties between the regional state parties and local organizational networks. In Karnataka, in the absence of such links, the RSS-led affiliates

\textsuperscript{1} In terms of Gross State Domestic Product per capita, Karnataka ranks 6\textsuperscript{th} while Tamil Nadu ranks 5\textsuperscript{th}. This is according to the 2001 National Human Development Report (NHDR).
find more connection with unorganized poor urban voters through service provision and have managed to become embedded in the community life and informal networks of several slum neighborhoods.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. First, I establish the empirical puzzle in detail. I explain the temporal trend that has characterized the emergence of the welfare service organizations, as well as the spatial variation in the success of these welfare organizations across India. I also illustrate specifically the variation in the extent of welfare activities as well as the electoral support for the BJP in the two states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. This is followed by a brief outline of extant literature that analyzes the rise to prominence of the Hindu nationalist groups in India and points out why these explanations fail in terms of explaining both the temporal trend as well as the subnational variation in success. In the next section I elaborate the theoretical framework and hypotheses of the dissertation. I make some observations about reasons for the temporal trend. The main focus of the dissertation however is the spatial variation, and this section explicates the theoretical framework for understanding the variable success of the RSS’ welfare work across space. This is followed by a brief discussion on case selection, enumerating the reasons why Tamil nadu and Karnataka constitute a meaningful paired comparison. I then discuss the significance of the project and its implications and contributions to the broader literature in general. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of the plan of the dissertation.
1.2 THE PUZZLE: WHO ARE THE HINDU NATIONALISTS AND WHERE ARE THEY SUCCESSFUL?

There is a consensus among scholars that the leadership of the Hindu nationalist movement lies with the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), which is the parent body of most other prominent right-wing organizations that have increasingly monopolized the public sphere in several Indian states. The RSS, founded in 1925, is an all-male, tightly knit, highly disciplined, hierarchical organization that seeks to “organize” Hindu society and incorporate increasing segments of the public into its ranks (Damle and Andersen, 1987; Curran 1951; Lambert 1959). Its primary strategy of operation was to work at the grassroots level and transform society from bottom up. Hindu unity has been the cornerstone and objective of almost every project the RSS has taken up and every affiliate organization has emerged with a very specific vision of how to achieve this. In fact, with the realization that its popularity was confined to upper caste Hindus in North India came the initiative to create separate organizations with the purpose of reaching out to different sections of the Hindu population through different types of strategies and messages. The wide network of affiliated organizations that it has helped establish, guided ideologically, funded financially, and continues to share personnel and organizational structures with, are referred to as the “*Sangh Parivar*”, i.e. the Family [See Figure 1.1 below for organizational chart of the RSS].

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2 The chart lists only the most prominent affiliate organizations, based on various sources. There are several more that have been created by or are closely associated with the RSS operating in various states. A more complete historical background and details will be provided in the next chapter.
There is no doubt that Hindu nationalist ideology has transformed itself from its pariah status in Indian politics, and managed to seize mainstream political space in India in the last two decades. However, most studies attribute the success of the Hindu nationalist organizations since the 1990s to provocative mobilization around cultural/religious wedge issues in a fragmented party system, focusing on either their electoral successes coming on the heels of sustained mobilization around religious issues and symbols (such as the Ram temple movement) or their alleged involvement in several instances of religious rioting and violence in the last couple of decades. Several scholars, human rights groups and concerned citizens’ associations have particularly condemned the role and involvement of the Hindu Right groups in the brutal genocidal violence that occurred during the Hindu-Muslim riots in 2002 in Gujarat state, where the state government at the time was controlled by BJP, the Hindu nationalist party. For instance Jaffrelot (2003a) enumerates some of the serious accusations that have been made against the RSS and its affiliates in the Gujarat riots case, some of which are currently under investigation or being heard by the Supreme Court of India:

“The clashes in Gujarat could not have spread so quickly and taken on such proportions unless they had been orchestrated by well-organized actors and the attackers’ plan had been prepared prior to the events in Godhra. The evening of 27 February, two of Modi’s ministers, Ashok Bhatt and Prabhat Singh Chauhan, along with 50 other Sangh Parivar officials, organized a rally in Lunawad, a village in Panchmahals, of which Gohad is district headquarters, to plan “reprisals”… Actually, everything went according to a military-like plan in Ahmedabad and
elsewhere. The troops were perfectly disciplined and incredibly numerous: groups of attackers often included up to 10,000 men. These squads generally arrived in the Muslim neighborhoods by truckloads. They wore a basic uniform — the RSS khaki shorts and a saffron headband — and carried daggers and pitchforks as well as bottles of water to quench their thirst en route. The lists that the ringleaders had in hand attest to the premeditated nature of the assault: these indicated Muslim homes and shops, some of which bore Hindi names, thereby proving that investigation had actually been undertaken beforehand to ascertain the owner's identity. These lists — on computer print-outs — had partly been drawn up on the basis of voter registration lists, as a former VHP member himself explained.” (p. 5)

While many scholars acknowledge the divisive potential of the brand of mobilization that the RSS and its affiliates promote, it is also true that the electoral defeat of the BJP in the last two parliamentary elections and the absence of nationally widespread large-scale religious violence since the 1992 riots have begun to be taken as evidence of the retreat of right wing Hindu forces in Indian politics. However increasingly since the 1990s, Hindu nationalist organizations involved in social service, outside the electoral arena, have succeeded in capturing civil society and associational space, and establishing themselves firmly in poor urban neighborhoods through their welfare provision initiatives. As Panikkar (2009) lucidly argues:
“There is hardly any area of social and cultural life in which the Sangh Parivar has not made its presence felt. Educational institutions have received particular attention because of the role they can play as channels of ideological dissemination. Over the past 70 years, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) has set up thousands of schools…it is difficult to ascertain how many educational institutions are functioning under the aegis of the Sangh Parivar, but the number is large enough to mould the outlook of a substantial section of the young generation. The importance of the work of these institutions is that they function as conduits for the recruitment of young children to the communal fold. The influence thus gained enables communal organizations to expand their activities even in the absence of political power. That is why during the past five years, when the political influence of the communal forces declined, as evident from the reverses of the BJP in elections, the social and cultural fronts, such as the VHP and the RSS, not only held their fort, but actually expanded their sphere of influence…In fact, the political discomfort did not mean a decline in its ideological influence. On the contrary, the past five years marked the spread of communal ideology to new sections of the population, particularly Dalits and Adivasis.” (para. 10)

While scholars have studied the role of Hindu nationalism in electoral politics or sectarian violence, there is much less attention on the broader movement and its organizational structure, particularly its activities through civil society to reach out to marginalized communities. Hindu nationalism is a social movement that has determinedly
attempted to increase its grassroots presence and strength. Extant literature has tended to focus on the more visible aspects or manifestations of this movement, but we need to look at its activities in civil society to understand how the movement extends its influence and constructs local support for its ideological agenda.

To comprehend the mass appeal of the Hindu nationalist movement, I argue that we need to widen our focus beyond the electoral arena and study the capture of civil society space in urban India by the social welfare organizations of the Hindu Right so that we can better understand the nature and functioning of Hindu nationalist organizations as well as the long-term implications it has for inter-ethnic relations and religious violence. We also need to understand the puzzle of sub-national variation in the success of Hindu social service organizations across Indian states since the 1990s, and why these organizations have not succeeded equally in all places.

A detailed background on the Hindu nationalist movement, as well as its growing emphasis on welfare provision is provided in the next chapter. The trajectory and nature of welfare provision activities specifically in the two states being studied – Tamil Nadu and Karnataka – is addressed in the next chapter as well as in the respective case study chapters [Chapters Three and Four] in detail.
Figure 1.1: Organizational chart of the Hindu nationalist movement. The RSS is the parent body, which in turn has created several affiliate organizations to cater to different social groups, including those that exclusively provide social services and welfare to targeted groups (Jaffrelot, 1996; 2007).
1.2.1 TEMPORAL TREND

Let us first begin by discussing the temporal trend that has characterized the emergence of the RSS’s extensive welfare provision initiative. What is often ignored in the literature about the RSS is that temporally not all its affiliates were equally active at all times. If we look at the Sangh’s strategy in the post-independence era, it has clearly prioritized different organizations and corresponding tactics during different periods. While the 1950s and 1960s were a period of building organizational presence at the local levels simply by setting up more branches and making some limited electoral headway through the BJS, the 1970s and 1980s (following the veritable failure and subsequent marginalization of Jana Sangh members because of their links to the RSS) saw the emergence of an aggressive ethno-religious mobilization strategy spearheaded by the VHP to counter the “threat” of religious conversions to Islam and Christianity among the marginalized groups (lower castes and tribal populations). This strategy was appropriated by the BJP during the late 1980s in its provocative election campaigns revolving around religious wedge issues that provoked a spate of Hindu-Muslim riots in several parts of India. While this paid dividends in terms of increased vote and seat shares for the BJP (Wilkinson, 2004), it also created a backlash in some places and a dilemma for the RSS.

In the 1990s, the BJP, aspiring for “national party” status and its hands tied due to coalition partners, had to moderate its radical posturing and became unwilling to push

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3 The Election Commission of India grants official recognition to political parties on a state-by-state basis. Parties are groped into three categories: Recognized State Party – has won at least 4% of the parliamentary seats in a state or 3% seats in a state assembly and has received at least 6% of the popular vote in a state; Recognized National Party – a state party that has been recognized in four or more states; Registered (Unrecognized Parties) – all others.
the radical Hindu agenda publicly. This is when there was a demonstrable shift in RSS strategy as well. To achieve the unified homogenous Hindu society it envisioned, the RSS realized it could not rely on its political arm alone (Jaffrelot, 2003b; 2005b). The Sangh at this point was still perceived as a Brahminical upper caste organization that valued the Hindu caste hierarchy, and was opposed to affirmative action policies for the lower castes such as job and education quotas (reservations) that would help these marginalized sections achieve social and economic mobility. Jaffrelot (2003b) quotes from the Organiser, the weekly English language publication closely affiliated with the RSS, explicating the RSS position on the reservations issue in the 1990s when it became the focus of national debate; he notes that the official RSS stance was to counter the backward caste mobilization, argue for a reduction in job quotas, and instead initiate to promote social harmony amongst the various sections of (Hindu) society [p.454].

However by the mid to late Nineties, the RSS began to realize that it needed to change its grassroots strategy and transform its image from being an upper caste/upper class organization opposed to lower caste mobilization to one that seemingly cared about the aspirations of the lower caste Hindus in order to make the movement more broad-based. It began to look for a new strategy to reach out to these sections. It started to invest in welfare projects targeted at the poor needy lower caste sections of the population, particularly in the urban areas, in order to bring about social assimilation and harmony. To quote Jaffrelot (2003b, p. 455): “Beyond these laudable aims, Sewa Bharati’s ideological purpose is to divert the Dalits, who are naturally appreciative of charitable work, away from egalitarian ideologies and to assimilate them into a ‘Hindu nation’.”
However, the strategy succeeded in terms of reach and influence not only because of the efforts of the RSS but because of the conducive atmosphere created by the economic reforms that were in full swing by this time. The strategy was adopted at a time that India had initiated economic reforms. It took off in a big way and started becoming successful in urban areas when the economic adjustments and policies began creating an increased need for welfare, which was met inadequately by a state apparatus that was shrinking social welfare spending. One of the unintended consequences of the nature and impact of the reforms was that they opened up a window of opportunity for the RSS to establish itself in poor urban areas with much valued welfare services. It particularly benefited from the weakness of the public sector and decreasing public expenditures in health and education.

Though increased welfare provision by the RSS was not a planned strategic response that responded to the implications of market reforms for urban slums, in the last couple decades the organization has recognized the acute need for service provision among the slums. Hence, welfare provision activities have definitely received a boost, and are considered a means to segue into the local neighborhood dynamics and reach out to previously unreceptive communities. Bhagwat’s (RSS’s leader since 2009) public speech in 2006 highlighted this trend:

“Since the Sangh work has registered its presence in various spheres of social life, the nature of workers’ training has also witnessed a slight change during the last few years. Earlier, the main focus used to be on the Sangh shakha. But now other activities like training for service
activities, *prachar* (publicity), *sampark* (contact) and yoga have also been included in the OTC curriculum. The participants also visit a nearby *sewa basti* for establishing contact and also to become familiar with the problems of the people living in such colonies...” (Kumar, 2006, para. 10)

*Seva Bharati* thus became a crucial organization in the Sangh Parivar’s strategizing to reach out to urban slum communities comprised usually of lower caste/lower class populations. The projects of the *Seva Bharati* (known as *sevakaryas*) range accordingly from health and education to economic development/self-reliance and what they call “social organization/social harmony” (Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh, 1995; 1997; 2004). Most of the projects initiated in urban areas are concentrated in “*sewa bastis*”, that is urban slums. Comparing the statistics for just three years - 1997, 2004 & 2009 - one can observe how the number of welfare projects initiated by the Seva Bharati has almost quadrupled [See Figure 1.2 below]. In fact, it was in 1990 that the RSS created a new department called the *Seva Vibhag* specifically to coordinate the various welfare projects initiated by all its affiliates including the Seva Bharati, even though these organizations had been dabbling in welfare much before that. This crucial change in priorities by the RSS has not been discussed in detail in the literature. Moreover, the biggest share of the projects is in the education sector followed by the social organization, healthcare, and self-reliance, a fact that again remains unexplained. This section demonstrates that temporally there was not just a change in the prioritization of organizational strategy by the Sangh in the 1990s, with Seva taking a lead in how the RSS and the affiliate organizations reached out to their target audiences, but also that this
strategy was particularly more successful in making an impact in several region across India in this period than ever before.

![Trends in Welfare Projects Implemented by the Seva Bharati](image)


**Figure 1.2:** Seva Bharati’s welfare projects for the years 1997, 2004, and 2009. The number of projects has almost quadrupled from 15,063 projects in 1997 to 25,131 in 2004 and finally 59,076 projects in 2009. This is just the number of projects overseen by the Seva Bharati. If we take into account the welfare projects initiated by all Sangh affiliates, the numbers are even more staggering. [See Figure 5.3]
Correspondingly in this period, the BJP, which had been a political pariah until the 1990s, suddenly became a force to contend with on the national scene, at least some of that success being attributable to the grassroots mobilization tactics of the RSS [See Figures 1.3 – 1.5 below]⁴. What is particularly interesting about Figure 1.5 is the fact that even though the BJP might have ended up losing to the Congress in 2004 and 2009 in terms of seats, its vote share has not declined much, which is indicative of the continued popularity of the party. It is therefore wrong to write off the BJP, just as it is foolish to dismiss the Hindu nationalist movement as irrelevant. Thachil (2009) demonstrates how the efforts of its 'social service' organizational affiliates have helped the party succeed electorally among the poorer Hindu population, even though they are not seen as the upper-caste party’s traditional vote base. Similarly, journalistic reportage on Hindu nationalist groups and election campaigning has explored this link as well. For instance, *Frontline*, in its cover story about the rise of Hindu nationalism in Indian states since the 1990s, observes: “Hindutva has percolated to the nooks and corners of South India, and the routes taken have often been socio-cultural and educational rather than political” (“The Spread in the South,” 2004⁵). Reporting specifically on the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Orissa, the story states: “The Sangh Parivar's strategy to establish Hindutva in the tribal belt across central India is apparently succeeding, and the political

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⁴ There is thus reasonable justification for examining BJP’s electoral performance in conjunction with RSS’s welfare service provision strategy. While BJP’s vote shares are not entirely determined by RSS’s welfare work, recent literature as well as journalistic accounts have demonstrated the link between RSS’s welfare work in local communities, particularly among urban sums and tribal populations, and increased vote shares for the BJP, thus making it possible to draw some inferences about popularity and success of the RSS based on BJP performance at the local level.

⁵ Interestingly this article examines the activities of the Sangh Parivar in the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka, and notes that their welfare activities have not really expanded the space for the BJP here except in Karnataka.
beneficiary of this will be the Bharatiya Janata Party” (“Saffronising the Tribal Hearland,” 2004).

In interpreting Figures 1.3 - 1.5, it is important to keep in mind that the BJP was called the Bhartiya Jana Sangh (BJS) until 1971 (See Glossary entry at the beginning). When we interpret the figures, we need to keep in mind therefore that the 1977 results are not just seat shares for the BJP. The party did not contest independently in 1977. It merged into a broad anti-Congress multi-party coalition called the Janata Party, which won a landslide. However, due to disputes of the BJS members with other alliance partners over the question of membership in the RSS, the BJS members quit the alliance to form the BJP in 1980. In 1980, when the new party, the BJP, contested elections for the first time, it did not do very well, as is seen in the figures below.

**Figure 1.3**: Seat shares of the BJP as compared to the Congress in national parliamentary elections, 1951-2009

**Figure 1.4:** Seats won by the BJP as a proportion of the total seats contested by it in national parliamentary elections, 1951-2009

**Figure 1.5:** BJP vote shares in national parliamentary elections, 1951-2009.⁶

1.2.2 SPATIAL VARIATION

The main empirical puzzle that informs this dissertation is that the RSS’s success with respect to welfare provision has been highly uneven. There are some states where

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⁶ Again, we need to ignore the 1977 results for reasons explained above. The most significant turnaround in the electoral fortunes of the BJP has occurred since the late 1980s. As we can see, the vote shares in the 1990s have remained constant. The vote share for the BJP has remained high in 2004 and 2009, but the plurality electoral system does not reflect that in terms of seats won. This fact is important to keep in mind when we discuss BJP’s defeat and the Congress’s rise in the last two elections.
the Seva Bharati’s reach and spread have been much higher than others. This spatial variation is clearly visible in the figures used in Chapter Five [See Figures 5.4 and 5.5]. This trend carries over to the performance of the BJP as well. Despite coming to prominence nationally, the BJP has not performed well electorally in all regions of India. The biggest gap for a long time was between the north and the south, with the BJP/RSS being perceived as a north Indian Hindi heartland political movement. Chhibber and Nooruddin (1999) demonstrate how the BJP has gained votes as a result of the decline of the Congress and increasing party fragmentation since the 1990s, but this trend has been particularly stark in the Hindi belt states (Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) where the BJP has been the biggest gainer. This is easily gauged by comparing BJP’s seats shares in the north and the south [See Figure 1.6]. For instance, as Figure 1.6 illustrates, the BJP only won 2 seats in all in the national elections of 1984, one of them in a southern state. By 1989, even though it started improving its seats tally nationally, the contribution of the southern states in this was very low. In 1989, the BJP did not win any seats in the south though it won 85 seats nationally. In 1991, the south accounted for 5 seats out of 115, and in 1996, it accounted for 6 seats out of 155 that the BJP won. Since then, the BJP has improved its performance in the south, with 20 seats out of 162 coming from the south in 1998, 18 out of 164 in 1999, 18 out of 120 in 2004 and 19 out of 97 seats in 2009.

The most surprising aspect of the BJP’s recent successes has been the successful penetration of Southern India, where traditionally the Hindu nationalist organizations have tended to be much weaker in terms of visibility, organizational presence and electoral success. Interestingly, its successes in the south can be accounted for by its
performance in Karnataka, where it has had the most success. For instance, for elections from 1998-2009, the BJP’s Karnataka seat tally was 13, 7, 18, and 19 respectively. In fact, in the 2004 and 2009 national elections when the BJP was defeated nationally, Karnataka accounted for all the seats it won in the south.


**Figure 1.6:** Combined number of seats won by the BJP in the four southern states (Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala) as a share of the total seats won by it from 1984-2009.
If we further disaggregate the results for the southern states, interesting patterns emerge. Within the South, the BJP has fared increasingly well in the state of Karnataka since the 1990s. By decisively winning the state legislative elections in 2008, it formed its first stand-alone government (without alliance partners) in Karnataka, its first ever in the southern part of India. In contrast, its electoral outings in Tamil Nadu for the same period have been unsuccessful [See Figures 1.7 & 1.8]. Figure 1.7 shows how the BJP has consistently increased its seat shares in Karnataka since the 1990s leading up to the victory in 2008. In contrast, Figure 1.8 shows that the BJP won just one seat in 1996 and 4 seats in 2001 in its entire history of contestation in Tamil Nadu Assembly polls.
Karnataka State legislature elections seat shares data calculated from various reports on state assembly elections results 1951-2009 generated by the Election Commission of India, available at: http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp

**Figure 1.7:** BJP’s performance in state legislature elections in Karnataka, 1957-2008. It contested as the BJS until 1972 and then as the BJP since 1983. [See glossary entry for details].
Within South India, politically, the BJP has had unparalleled electoral success in Karnataka, even though it remains a marginal force in Tamil Nadu. Hindu right wing organizations have been extremely successful in Karnataka as compared to their impact on society and politics in Tamil Nadu. More importantly, looking beyond political achievements at the movement’s broader presence, the Hindu Right’s social service affiliates have not succeeded in establishing a firm presence in urban spaces in Tamil Nadu as compared to Karnataka through their welfare provision initiatives. When we

Figure 1.8: BJP’s performance in state legislature elections in Tamil Nadu, 1967-2006

Tamil Nadu state legislature election seat shares data calculated from various reports on state assembly elections results 1951-2009 generated by the Election Commission of India, available at: http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp
compare welfare projects in Karnataka to Tamil Nadu across the four categories, Seva Bharati has a better performance record in terms of number of successful projects in the former as compared to the latter [See Figures 1.9 - 1.12], again allowing us to make some comparisons between success of welfare provision and BJP’s electoral performance in the two states. It has to be kept in mind that the statistics presented here are based on annual reports published by the Seva Bharati. No independent organization tallies or verifies these numbers at the aggregate level on an annual basis. While actual numbers may represent some errors, the purpose is to understand the broad trends. As is clear, Karnataka has a greater number of projects in each of the welfare categories as compared to Tamil Nadu, except in social organization. While these total figures reported for the two states cannot be independently verified, my interview and fieldwork data presented in the following chapters supplements and expands on these statistics, particularly with respect to Bangalore and Chennai cities. My data indicate strong support for the overall trend depicted through these figures. These data and interviews are discussed in detail in the respective case study chapters. The category of social organization is quite interesting, because here the RSS seems to have had a better performance record in Tamil Nadu than Karnataka from 2004 to 2008. However, in 2009, as seen in Figure 1.12, this record gets reversed and Karnataka comes out on top. The reasons for this particular pattern are explored further in Chapter Four. The trend in many ways is consistent with my causal narrative. I argue that in Tamil Nadu the service gap has never been huge because of the nature of associational life and their clientelistic linkages. Hence, the space for the Seva Bharati to establish itself through service provision has been quite narrow as compared to Karnataka. Since the ultimate objective of the RSS welfare efforts has always been to
promote and create support for their ideology, hence the Seva Bharati has tried to implement social organization projects more aggressively in the state where service provision by non-state actors is monitored by the regional state parties. However, most citizens choose not to support the political issues raised by the Seva Bharati because their clientelistic linkages through associational networks tie them to the regional state parties and their agendas. Hence, social organization initiatives by the Seva Bharati also seem to be floundering in the state as visible from the 2009 statistics.


**Figure 1.9:** Comparing Seva Bharati’s welfare projects in education across Karnataka and Tamil Nadu

**Figure 1.10:** Comparing Seva Bharati’s welfare projects in healthcare across Karnataka and Tamil Nadu

**Figure 1.11:** Comparing Seva Bharati’s welfare projects in self-reliance across Karnataka and Tamil Nadu
While more in-depth descriptions about the projects and welfare efforts of the Seva Bharati in Bangalore and Chennai are discussed in Chapters Three and Four respectively, I present a brief summary here. When evaluating the success and impact of Seva Bharati’s welfare work in the two states, my interviews in the two cities clearly indicated that these efforts had not made much of a mark in Chennai, whereas it had been a huge success in Bangalore. The senior RSS cadres in Chennai city conceded that the RSS attempts at penetration of local communities had not been successful. Out of the 25
elites that I interviewed (including members of parliament and the state assembly, leading journalists and political correspondents, political science scholars writing on Tamil Nadu politics, officials from other NGOs operating in the city) only one outright refuted the claim that the RSS-BJP combine was a marginal force in Tamil Nadu politics.\(^7\) Bangalore was the exact opposite in terms of what the outlook about the RSS activity was. The senior RSS cadre member overseeing the welfare initiative was very upbeat about the performance of the projects initiated by the organization. Most of the senior journalists, academics, social activists in NGOs concurred stating that the RSS had entrenched itself firmly within various slum communities in Bangalore and more broadly in Karnataka.\(^8\)

This description of the spatial and temporal variation in the nature of welfare work undertaken by the RSS brings us back to the two questions that inform this study: Why was the welfarist strategy successful predominantly in the post-1990s period? Why did it succeed only in some states? More specifically, despite similar efforts and projects, why did Karnataka become a notable success for the Sangh Parivar, whereas Tamil Nadu remained untouched by it? This dissertation argues that even though welfare projects had been initiated by the various RSS affiliate organizations since before the nineties, they started having an impact only in the post-1990s period. In fact the organization itself started consolidating and coordinating its efforts in this sphere on a national basis only in the nineties. I argue that the implementation of economic reforms and restructuring,

\(^7\) The senior BJP party official in Tamil Nadu who insisted that the good work done by the BJP party cadres through their involvement in RSS welfare projects has been contributing to the legitimacy and credibility of their ideology at the grassroots level. Interview conducted in the state BJP party office in Chennai on November 17, 2009.

\(^8\) A more detailed analysis will be presented in respective empirical chapters dealing with the two cases.
particularly with respect to labor laws, made the working class not just more vulnerable economically and socially but in fact pushed many of them into the informal sector devoid of social protections. This, coupled with the state’s receding role on welfare, left the field open for non-state actors to step in to provide the services that were lacking. The seva activities of several RSS affiliate organizations, such as the Seva Bharati, therefore were much valued by disadvantaged sections of the population particularly in this period, when other state intervention was lacking. However, the other aspect of this is also the fact that this seva strategy only succeeded in having a huge impact in some region and states. I argue that seva succeeded in becoming entrenched at the community level only in places where other institutionalized channels of political party access and upward political mobility were missing and the RSS organizations were seen as the best way of not just gaining access to welfare but as an opportunity for political and economic advancement. This part of the explanation will be elucidated in detail in the section detailing the theoretical framework below.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Why does the RSS’s welfare initiative succeed in Karnataka but not in Tamil Nadu, even though it seems to be adopting the same strategy with the same objectives in both places? What enables the RSS to entrench itself successfully in the local spaces in some cities/states more than others? The extant literature does not have a very good
answer for this. Literature on the Hindu Right has been biased towards the electoral success of the BJP since the late 1980s, attributing it principally to the organizational decline of the Congress party. Most scholars discuss the BJP as having been the most viable alternative at the time to the Congress in a system that was tending towards multi-party competition, a party that was able to speak to the rising aspirations of the upper/middle-class as well as big business by defining a new sense of nationhood. But this is precisely the problem. Since the Hindu nationalist movement is often understood narrowly as the electoral success of the BJP, the defeat of the BJP in the last two national elections has begun to be seen as the decline of the movement itself. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The literature has tended to ignore the fact that Hindu nationalism is a social movement with a wide network of organizations that have a significant presence beyond the electoral sphere, and it is in these spaces that the ideological agenda is promoted aggressively and used to construct deep-rooted support bases that can withstand the fickleness of electoral politics. Winning elections is not the only way to influence politics. This is precisely why the RSS has always been hesitant to explicitly endorse electoral politics as the route to achieving a Hindu nation, and has tended to label itself as a cultural organization, even though its objectives have always been inherently political. The literature on the Indian right-wing tends to ignore the proliferation of the Hindu nationalist organizations in local spaces through extensive welfare work in education and healthcare among the marginalized urban poor. Though seemingly operating informally at the neighborhood level, it is usually a well-planned strategy, coordinated and monitored by a hierarchical structure of command. The RSS is far more connected to the community than the BJP and is positioned strategically to mobilize the
marginalized lower caste Hindus more effectively than the party. How these organizations insert themselves into community life at the local level, and how they use welfare to become legitimate, and transform the social consciousness of the Hindu community are aspects that have not been studied in detail. The more glaring gap in the literature concerns the puzzle of why some communities have been able to resist the Sangh’s appeal and activities more than others, particularly since there are no comparisons across cases. Below I consider some of these extant explanations and highlight their shortcomings in greater detail.

Most scholars who track the trajectory of the rise of Hindu nationalist politics attribute it to the breakdown of the “Congress system” since the 1980s (Kothari, 1964; Weiner, 1987; Rudolph, 1987). It is argued that as the Congress declined in its capacity and capability to accommodate the various social divisions/interests and in its ability to govern, it gave way to a new party system in India that was fraught with fragmentation, reflected in the hung parliaments of the late 80s and 90s. In this scenario, the BJP emerged as the single most viable party to replace the Congress, particularly by using religious appeals to target the Hindu vote bank (Hardgrave and Kochanek, 2008; Kohli 1990). Ludden (1996), in this vein, argues: “The death of Congress hegemony brought down an institutionalized system of rules and roles; and a new set of tactical options have entered the political game that are deemed illegitimate by public consensus. In this climate, Hindutva has emerged as a solid competitor for popular loyalties and the RSS

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9 This term is associated with Rajni Kothari’ work (1964). It was used to describe the Indian party system at the time as a competitive system characterized by one-party dominance. The Congress party was the party of consensus, which absorbed and internalized all political competition, thus effectively operating as an amalgamation of factions or a coalition of state parties but nevertheless assimilating a lot of diverse group interests in its fold.
and BJP have increased their power, in good measure because they have successfully used non-parliamentary means, including violence, to win elections” (p.18-19). In agreement with Ludden, many concur that the activities of the RSS can have a divisive effect within the communities targeted, but most of the focus is on militant religious polarization leading up to communal riots, particularly using the 2002 riots in Gujarat as an example (Mahadevia, 2002; Shah, 2002). In fact the links between riot-affected districts and the BJP’s increasing vote shares in these areas has also been closely studied (Prakash, 2003). While the decline of Congress argument partially explains timing of the rise of the BJP, it does not explain how the decline of the Congress necessarily turned into support for a religious nationalist party. Perhaps one could argue this about the rise of the BJP in the Hindi belt, but the Congress has mostly lost ground to strong regional parties in several states (Chhibber and Nooruddin, 1999). So I argue that the decline of the Congress, while coinciding with the growth of Hindu nationalism, does not fully address the timing issue because it ignores the economic backdrop against which the change is occurring.

Then there are scholars who attribute the rise of Hindu nationalist politics to a change in mass ideology. They argue that the party has used longstanding Hindu-Muslim grievances, particularly in the wake of the 1992 Ayodhya crisis, to advance its sectarian agenda. However, this view is untenable as well because it still does not answer the question of timing. How did the BJP, which did not appeal to any significant proportion of Hindus until the 1980s, manage to suddenly enlist people’s support for their religious nationalist claims in the 1990s? Why did grievances, dormant until then, suddenly become politically divisive and decisive in the 1990s?
The second shortcoming in the literature is the neglect of the welfarist strategy adopted by the RSS since the 1990s. Scholars have studied the BJP’s electoral success in the nineties in various states (Hasan, 1994; Chaterji 2009; Hansen and Jaffrelot, 2001; Heath 1999). Though the rise of the BJP from being a political pariah in the 1980s to a viable national party in the space of 15 years certainly merits study, the exclusive focus on the BJP’s tactics often grossly underestimates the extent and threat of RSS’s activities. Even when the BJP is not in power, it is business as usual for the cadres and affiliates of the RSS. Where they entrench themselves deeply into the public sphere, the Hindutva movement/ideology becomes difficult to destroy or defeat. While the Seva Bharati ostensibly works for the welfare and social development of backwards castes in urban slums, most of the efforts are lauded by the RSS and Seva Bharati office bearers for the change that they have brought about in attitudes and patriotic consciousness among the community, the Hindu values they have managed to instill in children and the way Hindu culture and practices have been revived.\(^{10}\) As Panikkar (2004) writes, “The legitimacy Hindutva has managed to garner is the most decisive development in contemporary Indian politics. A marginal force until about 10 years ago, it is now in a position to dictate the political and cultural agenda of the nation. Yet, the rise of Hindutva was neither sudden nor spontaneous. It owes much to the slow transformation in social consciousness as a result of sustained interventions in the cultural and religious life of the people.”(para. 17) Alluding to how this process has unraveled in the state of Gujarat, which saw the worst case of Hindu-Muslim violence in 2002, Yagnik and Sud (2004)

\(^{10}\) Various interviews conducted between July and December 2009 with RSS and Seva Bharati officials. This is also reflected in RSS publications that evaluate the impact of the Seva Bharati projects such as Seshadri (2001), which I was asked to read by a RSS official in Bangalore during one of the interviews to understand the mission of Seva Bharati.
argue, “Despite electoral storminess, Hindutva has grown beyond its original core constituency of upper caste middle class Hindus and has been able to expand and appeal to a larger section of Hindu society including Dalits, Adivasis and OBC. This they have achieved by systematically constructing a Hindu ‘we-ness’.” (p.8)

The strength of the RSS and its affiliate organizations really lies outside of the electoral arenas where they play a catalytic role in exacerbating tensions and divisive forces present in society, but the exclusive focus on the BJP often understates the extent and objectives of RSS activity at the local neighborhood levels. The RSS has a vision that is much broader than just short-term electoral gains. Its aims are to consolidate Hindu identity across India in its pursuit of its goal of creating a Hindu Rashtra. “Our programmes and activities are but the outer form of our Seva-karya. The ultimate object of all these endeavors is Hindu Sangathan – consolidation and strengthening of the Hindu society” (An excerpt from a speech made by H.V. Seshadri, then All India General Secretary of the RSS, when addressing an all-India RSS meet in New Delhi, India on February 1, 1998; As cited in Singh, 199811, p. 1). However, in the literature, not enough attention has been given to this aspect of the work of the RSS and Seva Bharati. Militant religious mobilization has been accompanied by quiet yet unrelenting grassroots social welfare work since the 1990s that often plays an important part in establishing the credibility of the RSS in local communities and moulding the ideological consciousness of the people vis-à-vis other religious communities.

11 The title of the book itself suggests (Seva-Patha: Transformation through Seva – Inspiration, Experiment and Result) that Seva is not viewed by the RSS as an end unto itself, but rather a means of achieving social transformation goals with respect to Hindu society.
The focus on the BJP’s electoral fortunes and its recent defeats fails to take into account this grassroots social welfare work among urban communities since the 1990s. The RSS and its affiliates constitute an exceptionally strong organizational network in India, which is otherwise characterized as having weak associational life (Chhibber, 2001). However, we still need to explain how the RSS becomes successful in establishing an organizational base through welfare service in some areas but not others, instead of simply focusing on sporadic incidents of violence. While there are several studies of the RSS (Andersen & Damle, 1987; Jaffrelot, 1996; Basu, Sarkar, Sarkar, & Sen, 1993; Kanungo, 2002; Jaffrelot, 2005a, 2005b), some of them are focused on the origins and organizational structure of the RSS and others on RSS activity in a particular state (Spodek, 1989; Shani, 2005; Yagnik and Sheth, 2005). Some works do provide a description of how these welfare projects are executed (Beckerlegge, 2004; Jaffrelot, 2005b), but they are not comparative and do not explain spatial variation in success. One recent exception is Thachil’s (2009) research which focuses on the RSS welfare activity among tribal populations, demonstrating that there is a link between the Sangh’s social service activities in tribal districts and increasing political support for the BJP in elections in these places. He tests this in the state of Chattisgarh, which has become a BJP stronghold in recent years. He also shows that the link does not hold in the case of Kerala, (an outlier because of the strong Sangh presence but smaller political impact of the BJP), the reason being that strong lower caste mobilization coupled with a powerful leftist movement creates strong public service provision, thus weakening the demand for similar services offered by the RSS. My work extends Thachil’s research by focusing on
the nature of associational life in the urban spaces in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, thus specifying the causal mechanism in much greater detail.

Some studies have alluded to spatial variation in broad regional terms. They tend to note that these groups have been generally more successful in the north than the south. Jaffrelot (1999) offers an explanation by looking at the genealogy and success of lower caste mobilization. He argues that the north-south divide that defines Indian studies is due to different land settlement/ownership systems introduced by the British coupled with the fact that these regions have always had a different caste composition. This affected the way in which lower caste mobilization has taken place in these two regions. While lower caste movements were very successful very early on in the south in empowering these sections of society, they did not make a deep impact in the north. In fact mobilization in the North has been in the “Sanskritisation” mould to a large extent, where the lower castes try to move up the social ladder by emulating the upper castes. This is in contrast to the south, where the lower caste groups have tended to oppose the upper caste groups by organizing against them as a distinctive ethnic group (Jaffrelot, 2003b). Hansen (1996) has written about the phenomenon of “vernacularization” of Hindutva by the Sangh Parivar and BJP in order to appeal to people in states where it has struggled to develop a social base by introducing regionally specific variants of Hindu nationalist themes or trying hard to highlight the local relevance of broad national themes. Yet, as Hansen argues, the obstacles to vernacularization have been the greatest in the south and the east. This common history shared by southern states makes the selected cases – Tamil Nadu and Karnataka - more comparable, controlling for differences that may confound the explanation otherwise. However, given that the literature predicted that the Hindu
nationalist movement would likely fail to establish itself in southern India, the puzzle becomes even more interesting. Why has Karnataka since the nineties become a case of success or the RSS and its welfare efforts, whereas Tamil Nadu has managed to resist their advance?

On the subject of backward caste mobilization, a somewhat related argument that is often made is that since the RSS uses its welfare strategy to contain the mobilization of the lower castes, this strategy is bound to fail when there is already a strong lower caste party to represent the aspirations of this section. This would explain why Tamil Nadu is able to resist the RSS efforts, because the two regional parties in the state, the DMK and the ADMK, have their origins in the lower caste anti-Brahminical movement, and do not allow any space for the RSS and its social engineering strategies. Karnataka has a weaker history of lower caste mobilization as compared to Tamil Nadu, which might explain why the Hindu Right, and its Sanskritisation agenda, has been more popular here. I argue however that the success of the DMK and the AIADMK lies not so much in their sustained lower caste mobilization or ideology [neither party has hesitated joining an electoral alliance with the BJP at the national level to gain advantages], but rather because they are able to deliver what the lower caste constituencies need at the state level. In fact, Karnataka too was dominated briefly by the Janata party, a party that emerged from a social movement to advance the interests of the backwards castes and classes, when the Congress’s electoral presence began to decline in the 1990s. However, the Janata Party was not successful in preventing either the BJP’s electoral wins or the spread of right wing ideology throughout the state through welfare projects and religious mobilization in the same way that the DMK was able to in Tamil Nadu. The argument I
would make is that regardless of the professed ideology of the state-level parties, what matters is whether or not they are able to deliver what the lower caste sections need, which is services such as affordable education and health care, land tenure, and community-based facilities. One can argue that both states are similar in that they share a legacy of backward caste mobilization as well as parties that were constituted through backward caste movements. However, the key is not ideology but rather tangible achievements with respect to welfare provision. Where satisfaction with the state’s delivery is high, the presence and spread of RSS will be lower. Jaffrelot (2003b) argues that the RSS’s welfarist strategy can essentially serve the purpose of building clientelistic networks among some Scheduled castes where government intervention is inadequate. For instance, he points out that the Seva Bharati’s “Sanskritisation” strategy has worked with the Valmiki caste community in the city of Agra in Uttar Pradesh state, who also tend to vote massively for the BJP, whereas it has not had the same effect amongst the Jatav community, who tend to vote for the party that represents the Scheduled Castes (p. 461). The jatavs, who have developed a great degree of political consciousness, upward social mobility and economic prosperity, did not depend upon the Seva Bharati. In fact, in most places they have developed linkages with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a party that represents the lower caste groups, whom they support in return for services such as roads, houses, water pumps and land tenure (Pai and Singh, 1997, p. 1358). How the urban poor induce the state to become responsive, and how they are able successfully to make demands for social welfare, depends on their own ability to organize and bargain through informal neighborhood level associations. Whether or not the parties respond to it effectively depends on the nature of electoral competition in the state.
In fact, choosing two southern states also gets around another alternative explanation that it was the political and social rise of the backward castes in the 1990s (owing to implementation of new reservation quotas for the backward castes in employment, and education, which not just created channels of economic advancement for these previously disadvantaged groups but also prompted them to demand commensurate political space) that prompted countermobilization by the Hindu nationalists and the need to develop a strategy that accommodated the rising aspirations of this section without threatening upper-caste/upper-class hegemony. The south, where extensive reservation quotas for the lower castes had been in place long before it became a political flashpoint in the northern Hindi belt states, was largely unaffected by the violent protests and mobilization that occurred around this issue in the 1990s. Thus, we can rule out the role of differential caste quotas as an explanation for the trajectory of the welfarist strategy of the Hindu nationalists in the two selected states.

Chandra (2004) takes a different perspective on Tamil Nadu politics. She argues that the prominent regional party, the DMK, has been characterized by internal competition that has allowed for representative opportunities for all social subdivisions within the society. Subramanian’s (1999, 2002) explanation overlaps with this, whereby he pinpoints the “organizational pluralism” of the DMK in Tamil Nadu as the reason for why the Hindu Right has not been successful in violent polarization of the religious groups in the state; he states that DMK constructed “cohesive partisan subcultures incorporating networks linking various castes and religious groups” that impeded the spread of Hindu nationalism in Tamil Nadu. Both scholars make an argument about party organization and structure. Inclusive parties that consciously allow for political
incorporation of all marginalized subsections preclude the space for the Sangh Parivar, which also targets these very groups through welfare services but promises no political representation in return. The underlying premise is similar to my theoretical argument but it does not specify the actual mechanisms through which this comes about. One needs to explain why party politics in Tamil Nadu developed thus whereas politics in Karnataka came to be structured differently. What induced both regional parties in Tamil Nadu to be responsive to needs of local communities? My theoretical framework thus fills in the gap by answering these questions. I argue that the difference is in the nature of associational networks in both states. In Tamil Nadu, such networks have become institutionalized and entrenched in the local politics of the region, providing linkages between citizens and political parties that work to the advantage of both. On the other hand in Karnataka, these networks either do not exist or where they do, they cater only to the elites leaving the vulnerable sections of the population open to the influence of sectarian welfarist groups.

To summarize, while most studies attribute the success of the Hindu nationalist organizations since the 1990s to provocative mobilization around cultural/religious wedge issues in a fragmented party system, none of them analyze why welfare service delivery tactics are being utilized increasingly whereas religious mobilization has taken a backseat. How can we explain sub-national differences in the success of the RSS? What is the political/economic context that explains this variation? What is lacking is a theory that can explain variation across space and time, one that explains subnational variation in the success of the RSS but also explains why the 1990s were a turning point and why the RSS has given so much prominence to the service provision strategy since then. This study aims to make an important contribution by explaining both types of variation
through the investigation of linkages between local associational networks and political parties against the backdrop of regional political-economic contexts in two states in South India.

1.4 THEORY

I argue that, given the economic dislocations caused by liberalization particularly among the working class population in cities, support for the RSS in urban areas should vary based on how efficiently political parties in a state are able to distribute patronage to meet service provision among these sections. This in turn depends on what kind of associational networks define urban life, what kind of citizen-state linkages they create and what the level of political competition in the state is.

The basic causal story here is that the poor sections of the population, particularly people most vulnerable because of economic restructuring such as the workers employed in the informal sector or employed on a casual/temporary/contract basis, have a critical need for publicly provided goods and services. With the growing privatization of such goods and services and the state increasingly withdrawing from its welfare provision responsibilities under economic pressures in a globalizing arena, the poor often have no option but to turn to non-state actors or alternative service providers for their needs. However, in places where associational networks among the urban poor tend to be strong and well networked with the local politicians and party workers, the state can be induced
to provide services for the poor. However, in places where such associational networks are weak and lack political linkages, there is space for sectarian organizations such as the Seva Bharati and other RSS affiliates to fill the vacuum.

Temporally, the success of the welfarist efforts of the Hindu nationalists since the 1990s onwards can be explained by the timing, nature and impact of economic reforms on the urban poor. Economic liberalization tends to increase the economic vulnerability of certain sections of the population. Economic reforms do not necessarily alleviate poverty; in fact they may end up increasing urban inequalities and disproportionately affecting the livelihoods of the urban poor. In India too, reforms particularly affect the job security, and consequently the social security, of the lower class/lower caste populations in urban centers. They have caused economic disruptions and created huge wage gaps between occupational groups. Urban unemployment rates have increased with jobs in the formal sector shrinking considerably and being replaced by a fast growing informal sector, characterized by job insecurity, lack of steady employment, less than minimum wages, and absolutely no social protection [Mitra 1994, Patel 2002, Appadurai 2000, Patnaik 2010, Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000, Hensman 1996 & 2001]. This means more workers increasingly having to shift to the unorganized informal sector. While this puts them outside the protection net of several trade union and minimum wage policies, the rules governing the informal sector such as contract labor laws have remained weak, full of loopholes, and misused by employers particularly in the post-reforms era in a bid to employ cheap labor (Hensman, 2001). Membership in organized sector trade unions, that once used to create class solidarity among the working classes, is now on the decline, putting them in a weak position to bargain with the state in a
globalizing economic arena (Chowdhury, 2003). Moreover, these unions have remained restricted to the formal sectors and never really attempted to mobilize the workers in the growing informal sector at all. Papola and Sharma (2004) note that even within the organized sector, jobs are beginning to resemble those in the unorganized sector as a result of the increasing labor market flexibility in the wake of globalization. “A comprehensive survey of about 1300 firms, scattered over 10 states and nine important organized manufacturing industry groups (consisting of both public and private sectors), undertaken by the Institute for Human Development (sponsored by the Ministry of Statistics, Government of India), shows that between 1991 and 1998 although the total employment increased by over 2%, most of the increase was accounted for by temporary, casual, contract and other flexible categories of workers.” This is the space that is increasingly being sought to be occupied by NGOs of various sorts, including the affiliates of the RSS that operate as registered NGOs/charitable trusts.

It is often argued that the living conditions in urban slums produces a citizenry that is vulnerable to and welcoming of radical ideologies because of urban alienation, and ideological anomie. However, I argue that the expansion of Hindu nationalism in these spaces is a lot more straightforward. It is driven more by survival politics at least initially rather than any real ideological commitment to religious radicalism or nationalistic fervor. It is a survival strategy where the urban poor support the movements or organizations that are able to provide them the security and the social provisioning they desire and need. Economic reforms have produced social and economic dislocations in the labor sector in India, particularly in the unorganized sector that comprises of daily wage contract workers who have little to no access to social insurance or job security and
safety. With the state retreating from its welfare responsibilities, and the market failing to have any trickle down benefits as promised, this section needs the state even more crucially today than it did before. Citizens often respond to this crisis by turning to any available non-state providers, including Hindu nationalist organizations, which they hope will solve their problems of material deprivation and uncertainty though welfare assistance, service provision, and political intervention. As my interviews indicate, the incentive for many of their staff in the tutoring centers for instance is not religious obligation so much as professional opportunity. They are pragmatic and instrumental about supporting these organizations. For instance, my interviewees in Chennai were appreciative of the free education provided to their children by the Seva Bharati center and often attended other religious and community initiatives that the RSS organized not because they had bought into its ideology or political agenda but because they felt that their children might stop receiving the services if they did not acquiesce. They were also however sure that the Seva Bharati would not be able to provide their neighborhood with all the services that they required. Their informal networking with the local councilors and party workers would do that. Hence their consumption of the services provided by the RSS has never been converted into any long-term political attachment for the RSS or the BJP.

Neoliberal policies, decreasing labor market regulations, and shrinking of welfare state have thus created a political opportunity structure for Hindu nationalist organizations to tap into urban spaces using service provision. The welfarist strategy of the RSS was not conceived as a response to neoliberalism or globalization, but has certainly benefited from it. For instance, Breman (2002) observes that closure of textile
mills in Ahmedabad city in Gujarat resulted not just in massive unemployment but also the total collapse of social infrastructure and breakdown of working class solidarity. Affiliates of the RSS were able to mobilize mercenaries from this former working class milieu to assist in the large-scale killing, burning and looting that occurred in the 2002 Gujarat riots. “It is certainly not a coincidence that the orgy of violence that has taken place in Ahmedabad since the end of February seems to have reached a climax in ex-mill localities populated by social segments from which a major part of this industrial workforce used to be recruited…” (p. 1485)

It is not hard to imagine why these marginalized sectors would be easy targets for recruitment by the RSS. This is primarily because it is easier to organize and mobilize informal, casual, self-employed workers on a neighborhood basis, since they do not always have a permanent job or workplace, and very poor access to public services even though they have much greater need for it than the non-poor. This is quite convenient for the RSS which has always organized its branches and activities around neighborhoods. Seva Bharati, the affiliate organization that coordinates the welfare projects of the RSS uses the same organizational strategy, and in fact often operates in tandem with the local RSS Shakha (branch) within neighborhoods. This is one of the major reasons why the RSS has been particularly successful in penetrating local communities since the 1990s. With informalization of the economy but decline of formal organizations representing the huge informal sector labor force, the RSS finds it easier to target this section at the neighborhood level (slum communities usually) and offer them much needed welfare services such as education and healthcare to gain credibility and legitimacy. This opportunity is then used to shape the political and cultural consciousness of the
community, orient them towards a Hindu vision of India, as well as create a sympathetic vote bank for the BJP.

The RSS and Seva Bharati have devoted immense time, effort and resources to create a huge welfare service network since the 1990s, targeting precisely these communities. While these organizations had been dabbling in welfare projects since before the 1990s, the fact that these came to be valued by the target populations much more in the post-reforms phase has been the impetus for a large-scale expansion in scope and coverage of these welfare projects. However, not all areas experiencing economic dislocations necessarily turn to the right-wing. Why is this? The main explanatory focus of this dissertation is to explain the spatial variation in the success of the RSS’s welfare initiatives across India. I argue that the role of associational civic networks/organizations unrelated to the RSS is crucial in determining whether or not the RSS can flourish in local communities.

There has been a tremendous movement of people from the organized to the unorganized sector. This is a trend that the organized labor union movement has failed to keep up with or represent. This has definitely affected the nature of collective representation and action for the unorganized informal working class that occupy urban slums. However, while the urban labor sector does not have access to professional networks based around the workplace, it is often mistaken as the end of collective action. While they may not share a workspace any more, there is still a shared space at the neighborhood level. This creates spatial solidarity and engenders collective action at the neighborhood level. Often, collective action emerges in the form of informal
neighborhood level associations such as residents associations, micro credit groups, and women’s self-help groups. These networks play a very crucial role at the neighborhood level, not only creating social capital and trust amongst the residents, but also creating linkages with the local political actors, thus ensuring representation even if it is not through conventional formal channels. Either these informal networks are never counted as associational life, or the relationships they build are dismissed as clientelism that is associated with negative outcomes. However, these clientelistic networks are often important conduits between the voters and an otherwise unresponsive state, with the latter channeling much needed services, resources, and even redistributive programs through these networks. It is these networks that are able to resist welfarist Hindu nationalist organizations by creating linkages between the state and the citizens. Therefore, to understand how Hindu nationalism spreads and how it is countered, we need to pay attention to how these neighborhood associational networks operate.

Varshney (2002) has highlighted the role of such networks in building trust between communities. He argues that associational civic engagement is necessary for peace in interethnic urban settings. He concludes that it is the presence of inter-ethnic civic associations (such as voluntary and professional associations, trade unions, film and reading clubs) that account for why some cities manage to remain peaceful even in the face of provocative triggers.

My explanatory framework builds upon Varshney’s conceptualization of associational networks, and his analysis of the critical role of preexisting local networks of civic engagement in preventing ethnic violence in urban neighborhoods. However, I
argue that there is a crucial missing link. The density of local associational networks is certainly a necessary but not sufficient condition. Merely having these networks is not enough. For instance Bangalore has been experiencing a vibrant associational life in the past few years, yet the urban spaces in the city have increasingly been occupied by the Sangh Parivar affiliates. I argue that the key is political linkages. Poor slum dwelling communities often rely on vertical patronage channels to gain access to political institutions/actors to solve their daily problems. They have much greater need for the state than middle classes who can simply opt for private services. Chhibber, Shastri and Sisson (2004) find that the higher the level of education/class status, the lower the probability those citizens will assign sole responsibility for the provision of public goods to the government. For slum dwelling communities on the other hand, political contact is crucial to gain access to public amenities such as water, sanitation, education, as well as legal status, land tenure or voter identity cards (Edelman and Mitra, 2006; Harriss, 2005: Both of these studies are based on surveys conducted in slums in New Delhi.) When there are civic networks/associations that can guarantee such political access systematically, that are linked to higher political levels such as local councilors or state Assembly representatives (MLAs) or national Parliament members (MPs), that can create channels for upward political mobility of members, and deliver the services they want, there would be less need for these communities to turn to the RSS. It is close to the notion of “political society” that Chatterjee (2004) describes - a space in which the marginalized people, even though not able to access formal or legal democratic channels, are still able to make legitimate claims on the state. In a similar vein, I argue that slum communities often turn to non-partisan alternative service providers/NGOs only when they are left
with no other option, when there is an absence of structured political access facilitated through politically linked associational networks. Most accounts treat slum dwellers and the urban poor as weak, powerless, and incapable of effecting change. They fail to take into consideration that urban poor can have agency acting through informal social networks and can use it to make claims on the state effectively. Thus, what is important is whether there exist informal community-based associations with institutionalized linkages with political parties and politicians.

The first question that arises is what would motivate parties in a state to cultivate such links with civic networks? The obvious incentive is the nature and intensity of party competition in a state. Here is where local associational networks fit in. As clients delivering the “vote banks” that parties need in a system characterized by high competition, they encourage and reinforce patronage ties and are also able to pressure parties for increased social expenditure in return for electoral support. In fact, one could argue that the nature of associational networks and their linkage to politics can shape the course of liberalization in a given area. Where dense networks of associational networks are able to act as pressure groups, they might be able to force the state not just to make favorable redistributive decisions but also make favorable decisions with respect to nature of economic activity privileging the inclusion of the informal labor sector. This arrangement works out well for both the patrons and the clients and no one sees a need for alternative service providers/NGOs/voluntary associations that may or may not deliver political rewards in the near future. On the other hand, in areas where such strong associations are lacking, the government has no interest necessarily in paying attention to distributive needs and demands of the lower class/caste section because they do not see it
as a guaranteed “vote bank” in the absence of organized channels of mediation and capable leadership. These areas suffer from under provision of welfare services. They also face adverse effects of liberalization because the state’s view on stimulating economic growth is not necessarily in accordance with what these sections want. This is where the RSS is able to penetrate much more easily, where there are no other established entrenched associations linking the communities to the government or political parties. It is able then to appeal to the people and establish credibility through its own seva activities such as education, healthcare, and assistance with self-help groups, and employment training. It also often uses this social capital and trust covertly or explicitly to appeal for the BJP, promising the people the political patronage they desire if the vote the right way. Thus, where the state is able to facilitate adequate and inclusive service provision through these institutionalized patronage ties, the maneuvering space for the RSS should decline considerably.

But the second possibility is the entry of other charitable welfare organizations/NGOs providing similar services where the state fails and patronage networks are absent. To assume that the RSS and its affiliates might be the only charitable organizations waiting to swoop in and fill the vacuum might be erroneous. Vanaik (2001) offers an interesting insight related to the recent increase in anti-Christian violence perpetrated by the Sangh Parivar organizations. “The temporary shift in focus from Muslims to Christians is deliberate; there is more behind it than competition between the Sangh and Christian churches for converts in tribal areas” (p. 60). Most of the religious violence in recent years, particularly in which sangh parivar organizations are allegedly involved, has been directed against Christians as opposed to Muslims.
Vanaik points out that some 25-30% of all NGO charities are Christian. They too operate in the fields of education, healthcare and welfare and are therefore perceived as direct hurdles in the RSS’s way of realizing its “Hindutva” vision, by thwarting their potential support base among the urban poor. Equivalent Muslim charities are very few and confined to the Muslim community usually. This fits in well with evidence from my interviews where the RSS cadres, known traditionally to be opposed to Muslims, consistently identified the Christian minorities as the biggest threat to Hindus and the Hindu way of life both in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The point is, where state service provision fails, the Sangh Parivar might not find an easy way in necessarily. In fact trying to displace the competition in such areas might actually force the RSS to resort to violent tactics before its own affiliates can take over. There might be a spike in anti-minority violence before the RSS and its affiliates become established. This seems to fit in with patterns of violence observed recently in states like Chattisgarh, Orissa, and Karnataka where the RSS and its affiliates have very specifically attacked churches and charitable Christian NGOs providing welfare services among the very audiences that they are trying to target too. Thus, religious violence may not be a tactic to “prime” the target audience for electoral rewards necessarily or at least that may not be the sole motivation. Vanaik’s argument is that the Sangh Parivar may be resorting to violence to pave the way for future dominance of its welfarist organizations. In fact, increase in religious violence may be a precursor to the Sangh Parivar’s attempts to penetrate local neighborhoods whereas tapering off of such violence may be an indicator of successful entrenchment of RSS networks within the community. There are other reasons why other non-profit organizations fail in establishing themselves in local communities as well as the RSS and
its affiliates do. These are explored further in the discussion of the Karnataka case in Chapter Three.

To summarize this section, specifically, I advance the following hypotheses. States with higher density of politically connected associational networks will be able to facilitate better service delivery and hence tend towards lesser success of the RSS. States with higher levels of electoral competition will tend to promote and utilize associational networks to distribute patronage for votes, thus ensuring better service delivery, and therefore reduce the space for the RSS.

1.5 CASE SELECTION

Tamil Nadu and Karnataka provide good cases in terms of testing the causal mechanism specified above. As mentioned earlier, these are states that are in the southern part of India and hence share many demographic, cultural and historical characteristics. Choosing states that share similar characteristics helps eliminate potential alternative explanations about the variable success of the RSS. For instance, scholars have argued that the northern Indian states have experienced more communal polarization between religious communities and high levels of support for the RSS/BJP because they experienced the partition of 1947 first hand as well as the violent riots that ensued. Many were rendered homeless or endured personal and property losses, embittering a whole generation. This explanation can be eliminated in the case of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka,
both of which were geographically far removed from the partition and not as much affected by it as the communities in the northern part of India.

Similarly, it is argued that the RSS has tended to be more successful in several northern Indian states because it is essentially a North Indian movement in its values, representation, and core ideology. Northern Hindi heartland states tend to identify more easily with the RSS ideology of “one language, one religion, one nation” since the RSS promotes Hindi as the common national language, and its version of Hinduism is a very Brahminical Sanskritised one that is rooted in north Indian tradition. Many of its key ideological issues such as the construction of the Ram temple are issues that are more relevant to the north Indian Hindu population. Again, one can eliminate this as an alternative explanation for why the RSS flourishes in Karnataka as opposed to Tamil Nadu because both of these southern states have official languages other than Hindi, and have religious and cultural traditions that are much different from the north Indian traditions of Hinduism. In fact, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, scholars have pointed out that the RSS and the BJP have faced their toughest obstacles in “vernacularizing” themselves and building support for their ideology and organizations in southern India. This is what makes the empirical puzzle even more interesting. According to what the literature predicts, both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu should have remained unaffected by the forces of Hindu nationalism. Yet, the Hindu right organizations have successfully established themselves in the urban spaces in Karnataka while they have not in Tamil Nadu. The BJP has achieved tremendous electoral success in Karnataka since the nineties while it has not achieved anything comparable in neighboring Tamil Nadu.
I have argued that the timing of success of the Hindu rightwing organizations, particularly their welfare initiatives, depends on the nature and impact of the economic reforms in a state. Yet, that cannot be the explanation for the divergent outcomes with respect to the success of the RSS in these states because both have been at the forefront of implementing economic reforms in the post-liberalization era, and have experienced similar growth outcomes (Bajpai and Sachs, 1999). Both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu fall in the middle-income states and are very comparable in terms of growth outcomes.

If in fact if we compare the levels of urbanization and proportion of the population living in slums in both states, it is Tamil Nadu that ranks higher on both these indicators. As per 2001 estimates, around 28% of India’s population was urban. Karnataka’ level of urbanization was higher than the national average, with 34% urban population. It ranks fourth in the degree of urbanization, after Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Gujarat. (Urban development policy for Karnataka, 2009, p.3). According to the NSSO\(^\text{12}\) (1997) survey of slums, there were 56311 slums located in the urban sector. Around 36 % of the urban slums were specified as "declared” or “notified” slums by appropriate civic authorities. The declared slums are the ones that have official recognition, and therefore at least in theory are eligible to receive services and amenities from government authorities. The undeclared slums have no land ownership/tenure proof, live in fear of eviction, and have no official claim on any state provided services. According to the survey, Karnataka had a total of 6007 slums in 1993 in the urban areas, of which only 4685 were declared. Tamil Nadu reportedly had fewer slums, only 4065.

\(^{12}\) The NSSO or National Sample Survey Organization is an organization in the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation of the Government of India. It is the largest organization in India conducting regular socio-economic surveys
However, only 594 of these were notified slums. According to the NSSO (2003) survey of urban slums, 51,688 slums were estimated in the urban areas. The number of slums in Karnataka was estimated to be 1983; 1178 of these were notified. Tamil Nadu had 3165 slums, but only 935 of these were notified. The total number of estimated slums in urban areas was reportedly 48,994 according to the NSSO (2010) report on the survey of slums. Karnataka now has an estimated 2250 slums, of which 1118 are notified. Tamil Nadu has an estimated 3374 slums, of which 1711 were notified. The 2001 census data indicates that there were more towns reporting the presence of slums in Tamil Nadu than Karnataka [See Figure 1.13].
According to the data discussed above, again the prediction would be that the window of opportunity for the RSS and its affiliates was greater in Tamil Nadu than in Karnataka. Yet, it is Karnataka that is a case of success for the Hindu nationalists. The point is that, though the timing of the economic reforms did indeed play an important role in creating a political opportunity structure that could enable the success of RSS’s welfare efforts, this cannot be an explanation for the spatial variation in their success. Many states experienced a fast pace of economic liberalization and were affected by similar economic transformations, yet not all of them were states where the RSS and its
affiliates were able to establish themselves through welfare initiatives. While Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are comparable on several indicators, the timing of economic reforms can be eliminated as an explanation for the variation in these cases.

In fact, where the two states interestingly differ is on human development indicators, indicating perhaps that the quality of welfare provision differs in these states. Though Karnataka has been characterized by high economic growth, there has not been a commensurate reduction in poverty. Tamil Nadu has been more successful in integrating economic growth with substantial poverty reduction [Report by the Karnataka State Planning Board, 2008, p.13]. The urban poverty ratio of 32.6% in Karnataka is also higher than that of several other states as well as of all-India levels as can be seen in Figure 1.14 (KAR denotes Karnataka; TN denotes Tamil Nadu). A report by the Karnataka State Planning Board (2008) notes that Karnataka fares poorly in respect of another dimension of poverty, Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) [See Figure 1.15], particularly among Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes, Muslims and Other Backwards Castes (KAR denotes Karnataka; TN stands for Tamil Nadu). In fact as the report of the Karnataka State Planning Board (2008) points out, the absolute number of persons in the bottom four MPCE classes in the State has actually grown from around 1.97 crore in 1993-94 to 2.39 crore in 2005-06.

To summarize, the literature predicts that Karnataka and Tamil Nadu both should be unaffected by the politics of the Hindu nationalist movement. The similarity of economic reform and growth trends again predict that both states should be immune to

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13 HDI rankings put Karnataka in 6th place while Tamil Nadu ranks 2nd. This is also 2001 NHDR data.
the welfare efforts of the RSS. If anything, Tamil Nadu, with a higher level of
urbanization and a greater number of slums, should be more receptive to the welfare
initiatives of the Hindu right wing. Yet, this is not the case. Both states in fact differ on
several human development indicators and social outcomes. This indicates that despite
many similarities, the quality of welfare provision in the two states differs. We need to
understand what explains this difference. I argue that the variation in the nature and
functioning of associational networks can help us understand why welfare provision
amongst poor communities across urban spaces tends to vary, in turn explaining where
and why the welfarist strategies of the RSS tend to fail or succeed, inspite of similar
trajectories of economic liberalization. Thus, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are perfect cases
to test my causal hypotheses about the nature of associational networks and clientelistic
linkages. Based on the principle of Mill’s Method of Difference or what is also known as
the Most Similar Systems Design, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka constitute a paired
comparison that allows us to exclude common factors as causes of the outcome observed.
Instead, it helps us focus our attention on the way in which these cases differ, thus
allowing us to identify the explanatory variable.
1.6 SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTION TO LITERATURE

This dissertation analyses the conditions that facilitate the success of radical sectarian organizations. In doing so, it emphasizes two important counterintuitive results that can contribute greatly to the extant literature on civil society as well as clientelism and patronage politics.

The idea of 'civil society' has achieved a lot of prominence in political and developmental discourse over the past couple of decades. Civil society is often perceived as a key factor in strengthening democracy, empowering citizens by enhancing political
accountability, and improving the quality and inclusiveness of governance. The most famous argument is this genre has been made by Putnam (1993, p. 182), who says: “Democratic government is strengthened, not weakened, when it faces a vigorous civil society”. However, this notion disregards some of the problems inherent in real civil societies. As Berman (1997a, 1997b) demonstrates, it was not weak associational life but in fact a dense network of highly organized civil society associations that facilitated the rise of Hitler and Nazism in post-World War I Germany. Similarly in the case of India, the form of civic engagement that Hindu nationalist organizations have promoted successfully can and has produced disastrous results for democracy and intra-state conflict. In India not only has religious violence been a serious problem [See Figure 1.1] but also the involvement of the RSS and its affiliates in provoking andorchestrating such riots has been well documented (Jaffrelot, 1996; Hansen, 1999; Brass, 2003; various fact-finding reports compiled by the government as well as non-governmental human rights organizations after major instances of riots). The frequency of violence has often covaried with increasing vote shares for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Prakash, 2003)14. Basu (1997) argues: “Hindu nationalism seeks objectives which are inimical to democracy - Hindu domination, the elimination of safeguards for minority rights, and the

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14 Prakash’s study does a detailed analysis of the State Assembly elections in Gujarat that were conducted in 2002 soon after the state experienced one of the worst incidents of Hindu-Muslim violence. The riots were termed as “genocide” by several independent organizations not only because of the intensity and brutality of violence that was directed against the Muslim community but due to serious allegations about the riots being planned and executed by top functionaries of the RSS and state authorities with the sanction of the BJP government in power at the time. The study points out how the BJP seems to have significantly benefited from the rioting, increasing its vote and seat share in precisely the districts that were affected most severely by the riots. In fact the Chief Minister of the state who continues to be in power has been recently summoned by a Supreme Court appointed Special Investigation Team to answer questions regarding allegations about his involvement and the party’ complicity in the violence.
abrogation of the constitution. That the BJP has been inconsistent in its commitment to these principles reflects its strategic character rather than a durable ideological transformation. This position is currently more expedient than a militant one. The BJP is likely to revive periodically its militant stance.” (p. 395) These results extend to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka as well. While Tamil Nadu has experienced very low levels of communal violence, Karnataka has seen a sustained increase in communal polarization and violence since the 1990s, a period that also coincides with increasing electoral success of the BJP in the state [See Figures 1.17 & 1.18 below].

**Figure 1.16:** The bar graph depicts the number of riots calculated yearwise for 1950-1995. The line graph depicts the average vote share for the BJP in national elections from 1951-2009.

Figure 1.17: BJP seat shares in Karnataka & Tamil Nadu state legislature elections, 1980-2008.
More importantly, what this dissertation demonstrates is that violence is only the end of a long process of sustained mobilization by Hindu nationalist organizations among local communities. As Kalyvas (2006) has argued, we need to differentiate between “violence as an outcome and violence as a process” (p. 21). To assume that support for religious radicalism and militancy is almost a natural tendency of the urban poor and dispossessed is absurd. Support for radical religious organizations amongst urban poor communities comes about not because of anomie, alienation, or any natural ideological...
affinity for radical politics but because of pragmatic choices made to improve their existence. It is argued that Hindu organizations use temples and public spaces in slums to disseminate their ideology, organize activities that stress their exclusivist outlook, and recruit new members to build their support base. However, the urban poor support such organizations often because they provide medical care, education, vocational training classes, employment assistance, and other welfare services in areas where the state is absent or inadequate. Of course once these communities are introduced to the ideology through everyday practices, these ideas might have a long-term impact and cause them to support the movement/organization for reasons beyond the service provision. However, this argument needs to be analyzed more carefully and a full treatment falls beyond the scope of this dissertation. To conclude, the RSS and Seva Bharati’s strategies are definitely structured to effect a long-term transformation in the target audience and ensure sustained support. Their interest in service provision, as will be argued in later chapters, is not necessarily to bring about a true transformation in social hierarchies but rather to co-opt previously alienated sections of Hindus to come closer to their ideal of a Hindu state. However, what this dissertation indicates is that there is hope that sectarian exclusivist social movements can be displaced and their strength diluted if there is adequate state provisioning, and radical ideology can be countered through material tangible services.

While recognizing that many civil organizations can play a number of potentially positive roles, we also need to remember that poor and socio-economically disadvantaged groups such as informal sector workers, urban slum dwellers are usually much less able to exercise influence over public policy merely by becoming members of associations. It
is important to understand the socio-economic and political conditions under which grassroots organizations do become effective. This study aims to answer precisely this question. I argue, as opposed to the conventional view that treats the urban poor as weak and powerless, that the urban poor can indeed exercise agency and make claims on the state if they can form informal community-based social networks and create linkages through them with political parties.

This brings us to the second counterintuitive result of this study. Most literature that looks at clientelism argues that patronage networks are exploitative, corrupt and inefficient, undermine democracy and economic development, and detract from equitable rights and redistribution to citizens. However, under certain circumstances, patronage networks are not only efficient in providing inclusive welfare services to the marginalized sections but indeed can deter sectarian organizations. In recent literature emerging on clientelism, these different perspectives and debates about the impact of clientelistic mediation on democracy and party politics have sought to be incorporated. For instance, Auyero (2000) analyzes the clientelistic networks among shantytown dwellers in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This ethnographic analysis deviates from usual studies of patronage networks by constructing a narrative of the practical aspects and uses of clientelistic relationships from the point of view of the “clients” and “brokers” at the grassroots level. Auyero shows how for the shantytown residents, such political mediation is a preferred and necessary means of getting access to services they need. More importantly, a crucial point that the author illustrates is rather than being short-term electoral arrangements, these networks often come to be viewed as long-term problem-solving networks that go beyond just distribution of material benefits. I build upon similar themes in my own
theoretical framework, where the functioning of clientelistic networks in Tamil Nadu, similar to the case of Buenos Aires, has been nurtured by the patrons and clients. Thus, this study makes an important contribution by not just analyzing how citizen-politician linkages work in India but showing how they can have positive consequences. Clientelistic networks can produce inclusive distributive outcomes for the marginalized sections of society depending on the relative strength of the “clients” vs. the “patrons”, and can help keep more sectarian forces out.

1.7 PLAN OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter Two provides a detailed background on the evolution of the Sangh Parivar, and the evolution and trajectory of the welfare effort, as well as the emphasis placed on education in particular. Chapter Three is the first case study chapter. It examines the RSS welfare service provision strategy in Karnataka which has worked very successfully since the mid-1990s. I examine the proliferation of associational networks against the backdrop of economic reforms, and explain how the nature, focus and functioning of these associations in fact facilitates the entry of Hindu nationalist NGOs into urban slum communities. Chapter Four, the second case study chapter, examines Tamil Nadu, a state where similar welfare service provision efforts by the RSS have failed to make a mark among the urban poor. The different trajectory of the evolution, nature and functioning associational networks here is examined in detail in order to
explain the failure of Hindu nationalist organizations. Chapter Five corroborates the findings of the two preceding chapters by using national elections survey data in support of the causal mechanism. Finally, Chapter Six concludes the dissertation by discussing the broader implications of the project and its theoretical framework, as well as some important questions for future research looking ahead. Particularly, it examines the subject of potential generalizability of the causal mechanism within India as well as the possibility of cross-national comparisons with countries that have seen the rise of similar sectarian welfare organizations. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks about the state of the literature regarding informal associational life.
CHAPTER TWO

THE SAFFRON BRIGADE: ORIGINS, IDEOLOGY, ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONING

SUMMARY:

This chapter provides a background on the evolution of the Sangh Parivar, that is, the network of right-wing organizations led by the RSS [often known as Saffron organizations because of the saffron color of the RSS flag]. It analyses explanations about the correct classification of the RSS and its affiliates. It examines the mode of operation of the RSS and its affiliates, and demonstrates not just the prominence of welfare activities and service provision but also their prioritization of education as a way of propagating their ideology. I use interviews with leaders of the welfare affiliates of the RSS, as well as scholars and commentators who have analyzed the movement in detail to explain the workings of the movement that aims to transform the Indian polity slowly steadily and secretively.
2.1 INTRODUCTION: CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE SANGH PARIVAR

Civil society has achieved considerable prominence in political and developmental discourse over the past couple of decades. Many scholars, often rightly, argue that civil society can enable true representation of people and articulation of their concerns in an age where there is increasing alienation of citizens as reflected in declining voter turnouts and participation and loss of trust in public institutions. Civil society, the autonomous space separate from the market, the state and the family, which flourishes through voluntary associations, is posited to have a positive influence on democratic institutions. Putnam (1993), who revived the interest in civil society as an analytical concept, has argued, “Democratic government is strengthened, not weakened, when it faces a vigorous civil society” (p.182). Civil society organizations, argues Putnam (1995), generate what is called social capital, defined as “networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”. (p. 67)

However, there are various problems with such a conceptualization of civil society as well. The first problem is regarding the purported positive impact of civil society. For instance, Berman (1997) has notably shown how civil society can easily be subversive rather than supportive of democracy. If civil society denotes associationalism and proliferation of voluntary associations, then this space includes all kinds of organizations that represent different ideas and ideologies. We cannot selectively pick some organizations that may further civil society and strengthen democracy, while ignoring those which use this very space to undermine democratic representation, or misuse it to produce social capital that may be used for undemocratic ends. In the case of
India, right-wing sectarian extremist organizations also emerge and operate in this civil society space, constantly undermining democratic secular foundations of the Indian state while coordinating action amongst the local communities for negative outcomes. The second problem is with the way the concept is studied or operationalized, which is by focusing on formal associational life. Particularly in the case of India, several surveys and studies point out the weakness of associational life and low levels of associational membership amongst citizens. One of the biggest shortcomings of the literature on civil society is the neglect of informal networks that can equally create social trust, and facilitate cooperation and coordination amongst people for mutual benefit just as much as formal voluntary associations. This is an aspect of civic engagement and social capital generation that is often overlooked in favor of more formal measures of civil society. For instance, even though Varshney (2002) recognizes that civic engagement can exist in a quotidian everyday form as well as a more formal associational form, he posits that it is the more formal associational activity that is instrumental in preventing ethnic violence in Indian cities. While this may have validity, particularly when it comes to riots, the fact of the matter is that most literature tends to ignore the fact that informal networks can also be instrumental in collective action.

The third problem of course is this notion that civil society can and should necessarily operate outside the realm of politics to make a positive impact on the lives of people. To speak of the idea of civil society as separate from its political efficacy is erroneous. If in fact the goals of civil society are political, can it really achieve these objectives by insulating itself from the political sphere? Civil society for civil society’s sake does not have much use or significance for any citizen group, but more so in the
case of the urban poor. While social capital may enable collective action, to use this capital to achieve their interests necessitates engaging with the political actors. While social capital is important, it cannot be an end in itself. While most surveys, conducted in India and across the globe, recognize that political channels exist that connect civil society and the political institutional framework, they are often considered to be a perversion of civil society, or features that decrease the effectiveness of collective action. Linkages with the political structures are seen as undermining the legitimacy of civic life. The concept of civil society is more often than not held up as a normative ideal rather than a theoretical construct, and the actual nature and performance of civil society is ignored or evaluated against an idealized notion that neither reflects reality nor captures the positive nuances of these syncretic relationships that can enhance the efficiency of social capital. But the reality is that many of these civil society organizations operate at the level of creating social trust and at the same time also operate in the political sphere for political ends.

In this chapter, I focus on the origins and workings of the Sangh Parivar, the cluster of organizations led by the RSS, which operate as voluntary associations in civil society. I elucidate the role played by the Hindu right wing organizations in influencing people and propagating their ideology through civil society. In the process, I address the lacunae associated with the study of civil society enumerated above. Firstly, by demonstrating the exclusivist sectarian divisive potential of the work of the Sangh Parivar organizations, I argue that ignoring this darker side of social capital and civic life would be a mistake if we want to use civil society as a valid concept. Similarly, I demonstrate that even though civic engagement might not necessarily be reflected in formal
membership figures, this does not always mean an absence of social bonds. For instance, the RSS and its affiliate organizations often operate informally in local communities and neighborhoods. Even though they are registered as charitable trusts, their various branches and local units do not operate as formal membership-based associations. Yet their service provision activities are structured to bring together Hindu communities in these urban spaces, regularize contact and interactions amongst the people, and produce bonds of trust and reciprocity. In places where the state is weak and no other forms of associational networks exists, these organizations are able to entrench themselves firmly and create dense networks of social capital, which is often used to strengthen and disseminate an exclusivist notion of identity and statehood that undermines inter-ethnic harmony and democratic stability. Thirdly, I use the example of the RSS to demonstrate that it is neither realistic nor theoretically sound to treat civil society as separate from the political sphere. While the RSS has always insisted that it is nothing more than a cultural association, neither the “cultural” message that it tries to spread amongst the local communities nor the modes that it uses to achieve its objectives are merely cultural; its core ideology, objectives, and vision are inherently and explicitly political. To construct the concept or civil society as a non-political one, or to dismiss the political linkages of the organizations operating within this space as irrelevant, unnecessary, or subversive, would be to prop up a concept that is flawed and disjointed from empirical reality.
2.2 THE RSS: ORIGINS AND IDEOLOGY

The origin of the RSS is well known and well documented by various sources [Andersen, 1972; Basu et. al. 1993; McDonald, 1999; van der Veer, 1999; Jaffrelot, 2007]. The RSS was founded in 1925 to spread the Hindutva ideology as well as to strengthen the physical ability and presence of the Hindu community in order to enable it to defend itself against the perceived Muslim threat in the wake of pan-Islamic movements and Hindu-Muslim riots. The core principles and objectives of the RSS have remained constant over the years. While the RSS has added on various affiliate organizations over the years to target specific sectors as discussed in Chapter one, each organization is a cog in the wheel that is the Sangh Parivar, and each organization exists to advance these core objectives and principles in its own unique ways. While several new projects and activities have been added to the Sangh Parivar's repertoire, the RSS even today promotes local Shakhas as a means of recruiting, uniting, and consolidating Hindus within neighborhoods, while providing them physical and intellectual training to achieve their objective of a Hindu nation that is created from the bottom-up.

Jaffrelot (2007) reports that the RSS grew from 40,000 members and 500 shakhas in 1939 to having a membership of 600,000 [the majority of whom were concentrated in north India; Uttar Pradesh alone accounted for 200,000 members, while ther are 125,000 in Madhya Pradesh, and 125,000 in Greater Punjab] members post-partition in 1948. By 1979, the Sangh boasted 13,000 shakhas and one million members. By 2004, it claimed to have doubled its membership to two million members and 33,758 shakhas. Jaffrelot (2010) reiterates that the RSS has developed a strictly codified ideology of Hindu
nationalism that is political to the core, yet the movement represents itself as non-political and interested only in the mere cultural enlightenment of the Hindus across the country. Andersen (1972) has argued that the one of the reasons for this, as well as the creation of various affiliates, was the fear of repression and shutdown of its operations by the state, following the ban imposed on it in 1948 after it was revealed that the person who shot Gandhi had close links to the organization. It has also been argued that the creation of a students’ union, a women’s wing, a religious wing, a labor union, a welfare wing, and education wing, is aimed to streamline the operation of the organization by creating a division of labor whereby each organization targets a particular sector or niche group in order to consolidate its position amongst these groups. Jaffrelot (2005) argues:

“In fact there are two routes to the Hindu Rashtra. The Shakha-based one, which relied on the socio-psychological reforms of the individuals and the Sangh Parivar one, which intends to reframe fully constituted groups and to incorporate them in a new socio-political arrangement. This project calls to mind the corporatist model followed by authoritarian regimes such as the regime of Salazar in Portugal. Here unity does not derive from the transformation of individuals along a systematic and standardized pattern, but from the integration of complementary groups in a fixed social structure. This corporatist arrangement has strong affinities with the organicist overtone of the Hindu nationalist ideology.” [p.19]
Andersen (1972) argues that it is as much a strategic decision in order to create what are legitimate yet separate organizations that cannot be easily undermined in a democratic polity as it is an efficient way to spread its message effectively to disparate sections. Kanungo (2006) on the other hand has a slightly different take on the creation of such an extensive network of affiliate organizations. While he too perceives it as a strategic decision, he argues that while *Shakhas* created a disciplined cadre, these satellite organizations were needed to operate through the sphere of civil society in order to promote Hinduization from below. The other reason that the RSS has promoted and created these allied organizations is in order to accommodate the growing cadres, who the RSS feared would start looking for alternatives if they were not given due recognition. Since the RSS could not have absorbed everyone, these organizations were outlets to engage the newly trained cadres. [Kanungo, 2006, p. 54].

In any case, most scholars, despite vehement denials by the RSS, dismiss the claims of the RSS to be a merely cultural organization. To define India as a Hindu nation, to organize the Hindus in order to create a politicized Hindu identity and community in order to achieve a Hindu state, are inherently political objectives even if the RSS believes that using electoral means is not the only route to achieving this vision. Many of its contemporary goals such as the demands for revoking preferential treatment of the minorities, or the opposition to the perceived appeasement of the minorities by secular political parties, the demand for the imposition of a uniform civil code on all religious groups, are aimed at the transformation of the legal-political institutional structure and the core principles of the secular constitution itself. The RSS may not contest for political power directly, yet its every intervention in the social sphere, every activity, every allied
organization, is a means to organize society at the grassroots to implement its political vision for the country.

The other big question that has animated discussions about the RSS, its ideology, and organizational structure, is about how to classify the organization. Should the RSS be called a religious reviverist organization or even a religious fundamentalist organization? Some scholars have tended to group the RSS and its affiliates with other religious fundamentalist movements [Almond, Appleby and Sivan, 2003]. This confusion arises because of the Hindu right wing’s doctrinal ideology of Hindutva or “Hinduness”, its reactionary and militant tactics to propagate this ideology, as well as the emphasis on religious symbols and myths. The VHP, created in 1964, for instance, was created specifically to revitalize and modernize Hinduism, eliminate internal differences in beliefs and practices among Hindus, organize religious assemblies to popularize Hindu causes, “reconvert” and bring back into the Hindu fold people who are believed to have been forcibly converted to Islam and Christianity, as well as use provocative intimidatory tactics to threaten minorities and minority groups that are seen as impeding the spread of Hindutva. However, I argue that it would be a mistake to characterize the RSS as a fundamentalist or even a reviverist organization. At the end of the day, Hindu nationalism is not a movement about Hinduism. While there is no doubt that it advances its ideology primarily through religious rituals and myths, and a glorified religious past, none of these is aimed at codifying religion per se. These symbols are used primarily to further its broader political vision, which is justified and made relevant using beliefs and rituals that have familiarity and resonance with the masses.
So, what type of an organization is the RSS? Scholars have tended to characterize the organizational structure and functioning of the RSS, and its core ideology as fascist [Basu et.al. 1993, Jaffrelot, 1996, Vanaik, 1997]. Its cultural nationalist vision for India is sectarian, majoritarian and exclusionary, and the RSS and its allied organizations have not been shy of using militant mobilizational tactics to propagate this vision. The RSS defines Indian culture as synonymous with Hindu culture; the minorities are considered to be outsiders who must adhere to these values to be considered part of the nation, they are to be assimilated into the Hindu state if and only if they pay allegiance to the symbols of this majority culture. This core ideology of Hindutva is aptly summed up in the following motto: Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan [One religion/culture, one language, one nation]. V.D. Savarkar, the famous 20th century Hindu nationalist thinker, wrote the book *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923), which inspired the establishment of the RSS. It is considered to be the foundational text of Hindu nationalism even today. His book advances the following definition of Hindu: “A Hindu means a person who regards this land of *Bharat Varsha* as his fatherland as well as his holy land, that is, the cradle of his religion” (p. 4) (as cited in Jaffrelot, 1996). Golwalkar (1939), another key Hindu nationalist thinker [he headed the RSS from 1940 for about three decades until his death] was even more explicit in his view on minorities:

“…The non-Hindu peoples in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture i.e. they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ungratefulness towards this land and its agelong traditions
but must also cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead – in one word, they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizen’s rights. There is, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation; and let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with the foreign races, who have chosen to live in our country.” [as cited in Mukherjee, Mukherjee, and Mahajan (2008), p. 83]

The RSS is also a fascist organization in the organizational sense. The RSS is a hierarchical disciplined all male organization that demands complete loyalty and obedience. The cadres of the RSS, or swayamsevaks, are full time dedicated workers. A chosen few become pracharak, or organizers, who renounce family life and as lifelong bachelors work selflessly and without any remuneration towards realizing the objectives of the RSS. The RSS dislikes its characterization as the “Sangh Parivar”, a term that implies that the RSS is the head of this family of allied organizationsm, and that it controls and directs their activities. The RSS tends to insist that the affiliate bodies, while sympathetic to Hindutva, are separate and allowed to function independently. However, reality is quite different. Kanungo (2006) states:

“After creating an affiliate, the RSS appoints a few trusted and tried pracharak in key posts of the new organization. Almost every affiliate has the post of a general-secretary and an organizing secretary, which are usually occupied by the RSS pracharak. While the strategic
organizational positions are reserved for the pracharaks and whole-timers, the ceremonial ones are left to the trusted sympathizers and notables. The president, though invariably an eminent person, enjoys only nominal powers leaving real power with hierarchy of secretaries, manned by the pracharaks. The RSS not only appoints these pracharaks, it also reserves the right to transfer them to another affiliate or bring them back to the parent organization…Thus the RSS ensures organizational harmony and coordination by manning crucial organizational positions of various affiliates with its committed pracharaks.” (p. 255)

There is also a strong emphasis on physical training and intellectual training to inculcate patriotism and cultural pride. The aim since the very beginning has been the revitalization and unification of a Hindu society that traditionally has been fragmental by social divisions of caste, and variation in rituals, beliefs, and practices. The goal is to unite this disparate community and promote the belief that their political destiny lies together. The way to do this has been through the use of religion as a unifying tool. Thus, religion is not an end but a means to an end. Organizationally, unity is emphasized through the use of the Shakha, which not only creates a common meeting place for Hindus irrespective of their social differences but also teaches physical activities to promote the principle of coordination and cooperation, and is a means of imbibing an aggressive masculinist mentality (McDonald, 2003). Politically, this Hindu unity is promoted by using “the other”, Muslims and Christians, as a focal point. Most scholars agree that the Hindu nationalists’ political strategy cannot succeed without a real or imagined threat to the Hindu community and its way of life. The construction of such a
threat has been the cornerstone of the Hindu nationalist movement (Hansen, 1999; Jaffrelot, 1993).

2.3 EMPHASIS ON WELFARE

The RSS has promoted several allied organizations from the beginning to work through civil society to promote Hindutva at the grassroots level. Many of its affiliate organizations have been encouraged to take up welfare initiatives at the neighborhood or Shakha level. Formally the welfare wing known as Seva Bharati was established in 1979. However, the greatest expansion in the projects and work that it performs has come only in the Nineties. It has been argued that the Sangh Parivar views service and welfare, particularly since the 1990s, as a means to expand the base of its political movement much more effectively than just depending on the electoral route. Realizing that electoral success is transient, the RSS attempt is to build loyal support base among sections of the Hindu population such as the lower castes that were not traditionally part of the Hindu fold. As Jaffrelot (2005b) argues:

“The Hindu nationalist movement obviously owes its recent successes not only to the radical and populist mobilization strategies it has deployed, but also to its excellent local roots linked to its network of activists and its social welfare strategy, regarding schooling especially. …In spite of certain limitations, this strategy seems to be sound for two
reasons. Firstly, it facilitates an approach to families whose culture is not Hindu nationalist. When the organizations concerned are distinctively not RSS, the BJP, or any other well identified offshoots of the RSS, the project’s affiliations are concealed, prominence being given to its right-thinking Hindu aspect alone, notably via emphasis on Samskar.” (p. 221)

The RSS began to realize that it needed to change its grassroots strategy and transform its image from being an upper caste organization to one that was willing to incorporate the aspirations of the lower caste Hindus in order to make the movement more broad-based. It started to invest in welfare projects targeted at the poor needy lower caste sections of the population, particularly in the urban areas, in order to bring about social assimilation and harmony (Jaffrelot, 2003b, and 2005b. The reason for this change in priorities of the RSS was discussed in Chapter One).

As I have argued earlier, welfare work by the RSS and its allied organizations began much before the economic reforms of 1991. However, the major expansion in the number of activities and projects as well geographical spread has occurred since after the 1990s because of the conducive atmosphere created by these reforms by impoverishing the lower caste populations living in urban spaces. As reflected above in Jaffrelot (2005b), in the last two decades the organization has recognized the acute need for service provision among the slums. Hence, welfare provision activities have definitely received a boost, and are considered a means to influence local neighborhood dynamics and reach out to previously unreceptive communities.
While welfare work has been a useful tool to reach out to Hindu sections not previously part of the traditional mass base of the RSS, the objective is not merely building credibility and legitimacy through these initiatives. These projects and initiatives are also essentially treated as means of dissemination of core Hindu nationalist ideas and ideological values in a subtle fashion. For instance, as my interviews and personal observation of the functioning of tutoring centers indicate, educational centers introduce children to Hindu religious heroes, customs, and notions of nationalistic pride and patriotism. These ideas are reinforced over and over again in everyday interactions not just with children but also with parents and other Hindu residents because welfare projects are structured to form linkages with the entire community through various activities. While the all-male Shakhas are often perceived as spaces where exclusionary ideas are communicated aggressively, welfare projects often refrain from overt ideological statements or chauvinistic ideas about nationhood. Religious ideas and symbols are incorporated in small but regular doses along with other non-ideological activities. It is an effective way of establishing credibility and expanding the movement’s base. Nationalist rhetoric by itself has no value or meaning for the marginalized sections, but when accompanied with legitimate welfare and service provision it is likely to be more easily absorbed by the people. I argue that these projects serve the purpose of enabling the RSS to legitimize its agenda and ideology transforming popular consciousness, eliminating the social differences amongst Hindus, and unifying them by communitarian activities.
A policy analyst at a well-known advocacy group, who at the time of the interview had recently returned from villages in Madhya Pradesh where the group is trying to encourage awareness about local governance initiatives, said this:

“Amongst the tribal communities residing in many of the villages of the state, RSS organizations such as the Bajrang Dal and the VHP have made strong inroads. We find it very hard to go into these areas and encourage associational life. Attendance at our meetings is very low. The problem as to why other NGOs fail to succeed or even engage at people to the same extent as the RSS groups because the latter are deeply involved at the local level; they live, breathe and sleep there, they work through Shakhas, they play an important role by engaging with local communities where the government is absent. Service delivery becomes an entry point for ideology.”

2.4 EMPHASIS ON EDUCATION

While different allied organizations have targeted different sectors/issues, education has always taken an important place in RSS activity. Jaffrelot (2007) states: “The Seva Bharati dispenses healthcare on occasion, but is mainly involved in education work. This line of action, to some extent, overlaps with that of the Saraswati Shishu Mandir, which since 1952 has formed a network of schools with a highly ideologized and

15 Interview conducted in New Delhi in the analyst’s office on July 21, 2009.
Sankritised curriculum” (p. 207). The same could be said about the Vidya Bharati, set up in 1977, which was established to coordinate educational efforts at the all-India level, and to devise curriculum and even special textbooks that would supplement the RSS pedagogy and ideological content. Of course recognizing that not everyone can afford to go to these formal schools, the RSS began to establish non-formal educational centers to reach out to children living in poorer urban neighborhoods under the aegis of the Seva Bharati.

These informal tutoring centers are referred to often as Samskar Kendras (cultural education centers), revealing the true purpose of these centers. While they are usually packaged and presented as after school centers to aid children with homework and learning, the real objective and emphasis is on teaching them the correct moral values and attitudes (samskar). Lessons consist not only of religious values, patriotism, nationalism but also emphasis on virtues such as cleanliness, purity, vegetarianism, correct clothing, and religious markers. Scholars argue that this is not merely an attempt to Hinduize children living in slums and poor neighborhoods, but also an attempt to promote a Brahminized version of Hindu culture in an attempt to homogenize and Sankritize the meaning and practice of Hinduism across social categories (Jaffrelot, 2005b). The other marked feature of value education imparted through such centers is the lack of distinction between religious myth and actual history on the one hand, and the selective dissemination of historical events on the other. Mythological events and heroes are projected as historical events, from which to derive inspiration or whom to model their lives upon, in order to recapture the past glory of the Indian civilization [the narrative promoted at the centers and through various activities is that the Indian civilization was
thwarted and subverted primarily due to unwanted violent Muslim and Christian invasion, and that the need of the day is to reclaim this glorious past by subordinating or expelling these foreign invaders]. Many of these are ideas are conveyed in a children friendly format through oral story telling techniques, which makes it accessible, interesting and effective. On the other hand, special culture textbooks generated by the RSS glorify stories and achievements of Hindu heroes, while portraying all other religious influences on Indian culture as a perversion and Muslim rulers as invaders who subjugated Hindu peoples and practices (Sundar, 2004, p. 1609). Physical exercise is promoted aggressively by encouraging teenage boys to attend Shakhas. Both at formal schools and informal tutoring centers, many of the government sanctioned religious festivals (particularly Muslim and Christian festivals) are not formally celebrated while several additional Hindu festivals not on the government-approved list of holidays are nevertheless observed through special assemblies and cultural activities (Sundar, 2004, p. 1609. Interviews with RSS officials and schoolteachers employed at Vidya Bharati-administered schools supported this observation). Close interaction with parents and encouraging their participation in various activities such as religious worship or cultural events are means to engage with the larger community. Educational centers are the best way to gain a foothold amongst these poor neighborhoods, where parents value free education. The broader objective for the RSS however is really to form close linkages with communities at the grassroots level, and entrench themselves amongst these communities both physically and ideologically.

Whether it is the formal school, the tutoring centers or even orphanages set up by the Seva Bharati for young children, the symbols that are displayed and distributed are
those of the Hindu religious figures, glorification of Hindu warriors who fought against the invading Muslims, the ubiquitous map of India depicted as a goddess to be revered and protected against traitors, emphasis on learning Sanskrit texts and imbibing Brahminical values. All of this happens in addition to the government approved course materials through special textbooks published by the Vidya Bharati. My interview with a senior functionary of the Karnataka branch of Vidya Bharati provided interesting insights into the pedagogy and content that is promoted by the RSS both at Vidya Bharati schools and at non-formal tutoring centers. Of particular interest is this notion that the the borders of India and the geography of India are inherently Hindu, implying that all other cultural markers and influences are foreign. He said:

"We insist on religious prayers, shlokas (Sanskrit religious chants), worship of Hindu gods at our educational centers and schools. Our philosophy is that teaching only school subjects is not enough; emotional grounding is needed. We do not just teach geography, we emphasize religious geography. We want children not just to be able to mark the river Ganges on the map of India, but truly understand why the Ganges is sacred to Hindus. We want to create amongst children an emotional attachment to the land. Some communist organizations and media people allege that what we are doing is ‘Saffronization’ of education. To such skeptics, my answer is yes; we are in the business of providing religious education because we believe that education should be spiritually rooted and because this is giving us success."16

16 Interview conducted in Bangalore at the organization office on August 12, 2009.
The notion of defending the national territory, national values, and Hindu culture is imparted both subtly and often explicitly by taking children and parents to hear speeches and discussions by senior RSS members. For instance, during my fieldwork in Bangalore, a RSS *swayamsevak* that I had interviewed invited me to attend a special RSS meeting organized in Bangalore. The occasion was the visit of Mohan Bhagwat, the current RSS chief. Around 15,000 RSS activists, including hundreds of children, all of them wielding *lathis* (long wooden sticks used in para-military training at RSS *shakhas*) and wearing the traditional military style RSS uniforms (White shirt, Khaki shorts, military boots) attended the meeting held at one of the largest public grounds in Bangalore. The RSS volunteers had arranged buses to transport activists, *Shakha* regulars, children belonging to RSS schools/tutoring centers, and their parents from different parts of the city to the public meeting. I traveled to the meeting with one such contingent of mostly male volunteers and activists from a Bangalore suburb. The buses were festooned with the trademark RSS saffron flags. I noticed that whenever the bus passed a mosque or a church, the *swayamsevaks* became very loud, aggressive and vocal, and started shouting frenzied slogans about Hindu unity [“We are all Hindu, we are all united”]. Particularly near the mosque, there was a slogan that had a reference to Pakistan [The RSS rhetoric often alleges that all Indian Muslims are traitors and their real loyalty lies with Pakistan where they should return]. This is very close to the description of RSS-organized processions in the literature, where procession routes often deliberately pass through Muslim/Christian areas and provocative slogans are used with the objective of instigating a reaction from the minority communities and provoking violence. Many such processions have resulted in Hindu-Muslim clashes. Fortunately, since this was a
bus ride, there was not enough time to manufacture a riot. There were elaborate arrangements such as road blocks, traffic diversions to accommodate the meeting, with state police in attendance to help marshal the crowds [The BJP controls the state government in Karnataka, one reason why the meeting was provided such elaborate arrangements. The Chief Minister of the state, along with senior BJP leaders, was present at the meeting]. The RSS swayamsevak who had extended me the invitation assured me that though there was a huge crowd gathered for the meeting, it would be managed in an orderly manner because they had their own well-trained \textit{suraksha vibhag} (Security Department) taking care of things. When the RSS chief commenced his speech, not surprisingly, despite the usual reiterations about the RSS’s cultural endeavors, he talked at length about several political issues, including foreign policy advice such as India’s response to the Chinese threat. Attendance at such meetings is a crucial aspect of activities promoted by the Seva Bharati through their educational centers, whereby children, parents and community residents are actively pursued to attend such meetings in order to hear about the organization’s ideas about nationalism, politics, and ideology.

Sundar (2004), who has researched formal RSS schools run by the Vidya Bharati, analyses the deleterious and divisive potential of RSS educational content. This could very well be applied to the non-formal tutoring centers operating in urban slums too. She states:

“The Sangh’s appeal lies in its ability to conceal its own warped and petty version of Hinduism within Hindu culture at large. Non-RSS parents need to realize, however, that the RSS pedagogical project is distinct from all
other schools in the harnessing of pedagogy to a clear political end. In RSS schooling, curricular and extra-curricular messages such as uniforms, functions or cultural knowledge exams all serve to remove non-Hindus from the discursive space of the nation. When they appear it is only as insoluble ‘problems’ for the Hindu body politic. Coupled with the emphasis on militarism – physical training in knife and stick wielding, the repeated exhortation to ‘defend’ the ‘nation’ – the stage is set for internal civil war. The tragedy is that, imbricated in the banality of exams and results and the middle class desire for service jobs, this is legitimized as just an alternative form of education.” (p. 1611)

Not only is the content and pedagogy imparted at the RSS run centers insidious and divisive, the RSS has also tried, whenever possible, to influence the educational curriculum of the country and the textbooks used by government schools. One of the biggest controversies that the RSS was involved in was the alleged attempt to change and rewrite history textbooks prescribed by the government to reflect its own rhetoric and present the minorities in a negative light. This campaign was attempted when the BJP was in control of the national government and a BJP leader, who had a strong loyalty to the RSS as a former swayamsevak, headed the education ministry. This event generated a lot of controversy in the media and there were campaigns launched by several concerned secular groups to prevent the “saffronization” of textbooks and school curriculum [Delhi Historian’s Group, 2001]. When the BJP lost the elections in 2004, much of what had been done by the previous government was revised.
2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated not just the RSS’s emphasis on social service and welfare provision, but also its prioritization of educational projects as part of its welfare initiative. This dissertation seeks to answer why this welfare initiative has not succeeded in all places equally. The actual empirical puzzle has been described in detail in the preceding chapter. The chapters on Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, which follow this one, discuss in detail the specifics of how welfare provision is implemented in these respective states. They also describe the nature and functioning of the non-formal tutoring centers in both these places, the pedagogy and content adopted by these centers, as well as the other activities that are promoted through these centers and the impact they have on the communities in which they operate.

What I have demonstrated in this chapter is that welfare provision by the RSS has broader political aims beyond just satisfying the needs of the poor marginalized Hindu population living in urban slums. Education in particular is perceived by the organization as an effective way of transmitting the Hindu nationalist ideology not just to schoolchildren but also to the community as a whole. With its emphasis on ideas such as Hindu superiority, denigration of religious minorities, and physical and ideological defense of the notion of a Hindu India, it promotes a communal understanding of history and contributes to an atmosphere that increases the likelihood of inter-ethnic hate and violence. While many such educational centers and welfare activities are perceived as harmless compared to the more militant forms of mobilization that the RSS and its affiliates have been involved in, what I have tried to show here is that the ideological
content that is disseminated through these welfare activities is equally insidious, and needs to be analyzed in detail. If it is in the realm of the civil society that these ideas take root, it is in here that policy solutions to prevent the spread of such rhetoric should be found. I have argued in the preceding chapter that it is indeed pre-existing associational networks operating informally in these neighborhoods that have the potential to resist the onslaught of Hindu nationalist welfare organizations, particularly when they are able to link to political channels to demand and receive goods and services. The next two chapters will test these hypotheses in detail through case studies of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
CHAPTER THREE
FROM SILICON VALLEY TO SAFFRON HUB: THE RISE OF THE HINDU NATIONALISTS IN KARNATAKA

SUMMARY:

Karnataka, my first case study, is a state where the RSS welfare service provision strategy has worked very successfully since the mid-1990s. It is also where the BJP has experienced electoral success in state-level politics, something that it has not been able to achieve in any of the other southern states. I trace the impact of economic reforms on urban labor and the transformations that have come about with respect to economic activity and welfare provision. Following that, I describe RSS’s welfare service provision in Karnataka, particularly the nature and extent of its activities in Bangalore city. Interviews with RSS cadres and volunteers, as well as close observation of tutoring centers in two urban poor slums help me understand the operation of the service provision initiatives of the Sangh organizations. I then examine the proliferation of associational networks against the backdrop of economic reforms, and explain how the nature, focus and functioning of these associations in fact facilitate the entry of Hindu nationalist NGOs into urban slum communities. Interviews conducted with other NGO officials, political commentators, and academics, help provide a mapping of associational life in the city. They also illustrate the disconnect between these organizations and local neighborhood level politics, thus helping us understand the causal linkage between associational life and the success of Sangh Parivar welfare organizations catering to the urban poor residents of the city. The elitist middle-class nature of associational networks, its avoidance of politics and neglect of issues of concern to the urban poor, results in the space for the Hindu organizations to fill the welfare gap. The interviews also point to the mutually reinforcing linkage between electoral success of the BJP and the RSS’s welfare work. While most of the primary interview data is predominantly based on a study of Bangalore city, I use secondary data sources to examine the success of the Hindu nationalists in the coastal Karnataka belt where not only has the Sangh Parivar influence been very strong but in fact there has been widespread anti-Christian violence perpetrated by the Hindu community, allegedly involving RSS affiliates, in recent years. The causal mechanisms observed in Bangalore city manifest themselves in more exaggerated ways here, adding further credence to the causal narrative. This chapter takes stock by examining how the causal narrative helps eliminate alternative explanations and concludes with thoughts about why associational life in Karnataka evolved along this particular trajectory.
“Today the saffron brotherhood is running the largest number of successful schools, has the highest number of service projects in slums and tribal areas across the country from Port Blair to Leh and Naharlagun to the Nilgiris, runs centres to train Scheduled Caste youths as priests and computer engineers and provides the nation the sinews it needs during any crisis. None will see these elements of fire and light but will only comment frivolously on the electoral underpinnings and caste-religion equations. The saffron we see blooming over the Vidhan Saudha in Bangalore is the result of a collective will engulfing the grand Indian picture we worship as mother incarnate.”\textsuperscript{17}

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses in detail the first case study of the dissertation. It tests the hypotheses enumerated in the first chapter in the case of Karnataka using fieldwork data.

\textsuperscript{17} Tarun Vijay, “Why Kaveri Wears Saffron”, \textit{Times of India}, May 28, 2008, accessed at; \url{http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-3080819.f1stry-1.cms}

Tarun Vijay, a senior member and leading spokesperson of the Sangh Parivar in the Indian media, wrote this opinion column in the national newspaper on the heels of the BJP electoral victory in the Karnataka State Assembly Elections. His statement indicates several things at once. He uses the term “saffron brotherhood” to signify not only the gamut of organizations and projects affiliated to the RSS but also the role of the BJP in it. Moreover, while electoral victories are important, his statement also indicates that this is but one aspect of the scope and vision of the Sangh Parivar. Finally, his statement also illuminates very specifically the important place that is accorded to welfare provision activity as well as the audience this work is targeted at (slums, target areas, Scheduled Caste youth), which is highlighted as the base through which electoral success has been achieved. Vidhan Saudha is the vernacular name for the Karnataka State Assembly building.
The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since the 1990s has emerged as an important actor in Karnataka politics, consistently increasing its vote and seat shares both in the national as well as state assembly elections. It established its electoral dominance by securing an independent win (sans coalition partners) in the 2008 state Assembly elections, going on to form its first government in southern India since independence. Many observers have argued that this period has also been characterized by increasing entrenchment of the organizations of the Sangh Parivar, which use welfare projects such as education and healthcare, within the urban poor populations in the state. Karnataka has been the one southern state that in the post-1990s period has experienced significant ethno-religious riots, including violence against Christian institutions as recently as 2008, as well as several polarizing communal incidents that have become flashpoints between religious communities in cities and towns across the state. During this time, Karnataka has also been a forerunner in implementing economic liberalization policies that have transformed the nature of economic activity in the state while arguably increasing the gap between the middle classes and the urban poor significantly. In this chapter, I analyze the relationship between the consequences and implications of this economic transformation and the success of the Hindu nationalist movement in Karnataka, particularly among the urban poor population.

To reiterate the empirical puzzle, Karnataka has been a case of success for the Hindu Right. The Sangh organizations have been able to expand significantly and strengthen their welfare provision activities at the grassroots level in urban spaces, and have also been able to convert it into electoral success with the BJP winning power at the state government level. In fact both these trends have mutually reinforced each other to
some extent, as some scholars would argue. In stark contrast, in Tamil Nadu, the *Sangh* has neither been very successful in maintaining its welfare initiatives at the local level nor has the BJP experienced much electoral success in state-level politics. What are the factors that have contributed to the Hindu nationalist movement’s success in Karnataka? The Karnataka case shows that while the nature of economic dislocations and inadequate welfare provision by the state creates a need among the urban poor for alternative service providers, it is in fact the nature and functioning of the associational networks and their failure to cater to the needs of the urban poor that pushes them decisively into the Sangh Parivar fold. While the urban spaces in the state have seen a proliferation of formal civil society organizations, the informal patron-client networks that used to service the urban poor communities have declined in importance and influence, in part due to the state government’s deliberate policies to bypass this local institutional level in favor of appointed bodies that are not electorally accountable or responsive to the needs of the urban poor. This has compelled these communities to seek out alternative organizations that can provide the kind of economic and political mobility and advancement they seek, thus strengthening the Hindu nationalist organizations and their welfare provision activities in these spaces.

I argue that urban poor communities can resist the Hindu nationalist onslaught only when they have strong community based associations that are linked to local political structures. Associations by themselves, even when they are inclusive, may not be sufficient to keep the Sangh Parivar out. Without links to political officials, who provide mediation between the poor and the government, welfare needs are likely to remain unaddressed, creating the space for organizations such as the Sangh Parivar to
Intervene. This causal narrative is demonstrated through in-depth interview data collected in two separate trips to Bangalore city as part of fieldwork conducted from August-December 2008. The data particularly highlights the causal mechanism in action in urban Bangalore, where Hindu nationalists have had significant success. Secondary sources supplement these data by highlighting similar mechanisms at work in the coastal belt of Karnataka.

In the first part of the chapter, I introduce the state of Karnataka. The important point to note is that while the Sangh Parivar has been fairly active in the state and has drawn many senior cadre members from here, it did not have much of a mass appeal until after the 1990s. This issue of timing in terms of appeal of the welfare strategy of the Sangh Parivar thus needs to be explained. The second section seeks to address this question by analyzing the impact of economic reforms and the liberalization process, especially the socio-economic consequences for urban labor. This provides the backdrop against which the welfare provision by Hindu nationalist groups begins to become important for impoverished urban slum communities. The third section thus retraces the success of the Sangh Parivar organizations in Karnataka since the 1990s following economic liberalization, and the divisive polarizing effect they have had in the state. However, timing alone does not explain why the Hindu nationalist groups have been immensely successful in entrenching themselves among these urban spaces in Karnataka, particularly urban Bangalore. Section four first elaborates the theoretical framework that I construct to understand the success of the RSS in urban poor neighborhoods. Following this, I use interviews and secondary sources to understand the transformations that have occurred in the nature of urban associational life in the state, by studying the case of
Bangalore city in detail. The decline of community-based associational networks that are well-linked to local party officials and power structures creates a vacuum in many communities, facilitating the entry of welfarist NGOs to cater to their needs. The proliferation of elite-dominated NGOs that cater to the middle class, facilitated by the centralization tendencies of the state government, is examined in order to analyze how the local power structures have been overridden in the governance process. The next section then correlates these dynamics to the successes achieved by the *Sangh Parivar* organizations at the local level. The final section concludes by briefly looking at the case of coastal Karnataka, where the *Sangh Parivar* has been known to dominate every level of politics right from the local civic networks upto state ad national level politics. I explore whether the same causal mechanism discussed above operate in this region as well.

### 3.2.1 KARNATAKA: A POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Karnataka has a population of 52.9 million (Census 2001), making it India’s ninth most populous state. The state is divided into 29 districts, with Bangalore (now officially known as Bengaluru) as the capital city. Hindus constitute nearly 83% of the population. Muslims are the most significant minority group, comprising 12.23% of the population, with Christians coming in at 1.91%. 33.9% of the population resides in urban areas as per the 2001 census (Department of Planning and Statistics, Government of Karnataka, 2006).
Karnataka ranks fourth in the level of urbanization among the major states in India after Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

**Figure 3.1:** A map of the state of Karnataka. Retrieved from: [http://karnatakaonline.in/Maps/district/](http://karnatakaonline.in/Maps/district/)
Among all the southern states, Karnataka is the one state where the BJP has consistently done well since the 1990s [See Figure 3.2]. The Congress party dominated politics in Karnataka, since the creation of the state in 1956 up until 1983. With the Janata Party’s victory in 1983, the politics in the state evolved into a two-party system with power alternating between the Congress and the Janata Party. The Janata Party, however, began disintegrating by the late 1980s. The factions within the party began forming independent parties, which usually revolved around a prominent leader and tended to be concentrated in a particular state. Accordingly in Karnataka, the Janata Party gave way to the Janata Dal (Secular) or JDS that began to gain ground since the 1989 election. The seat share in Figure 3.2 for the 1989 election is the JDS seat share. The BJP meanwhile slowly started becoming an important third actor, with improving electoral performances from the 1990s onwards, starting with the 1994 assembly election.  

18 The Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the predecessor of the BJP, contested elections from 1957-1972. In 1978, the first elections to be held after the nationwide emergency era imposed by Indira Gandhi came to an end, the BJS had joined several anti-Congress parties to form a broad alliance called the Janata Party that contested the elections. Even though the alliance won a resounding victory at the national level, owing to the anti-Congress wave, surprisingly Karnataka was not affected by this trend. Some people have argued that the political leadership of the Congress party unit in Karnataka, particularly the incumbent Chief Minister Devraj Urs, ensured that the excesses of the emergency era were never carried over into state politics, ensuring a Congress victory in 1978 in the state elections. By 1983, the BJS had broken away from the Janata Party and formed the new BJP, which began contesting the elections at the national and state levels.
In 2004, for the first time, the state experienced a hung state assembly. It was a breakthrough for the BJP, which ended up with the most seats in the assembly elections. Out of a total of 224 seats, the BJP won 79, the Congress got 65 and the Janata Dal (Secular) won 58 seats. However since none had enough seats to form a government on its own, the JD(S) entered into a coalition with the Congress, which lasted up to 2006. But JD(S) then withdrew support from the Congress government and decided to enter into an alliance with the BJP. They worked out a power sharing arrangement where each
party would control the Chief Ministership for 20 months each. This was the first time that the BJP had been part of the governing coalition in any south Indian state. Following a dispute between the two parties in 2007, the alliance broke down and President’s rule was imposed. New elections were held in 2008, in which the BJP won a decisive victory, garnering 110 seats. Thus, it finally formed its first independent government in a south Indian state since independence.

Many people tend to think of the expansion in RSS activities as having occurred after the BJP came to power here. This is an incorrect perspective. While it is hard to track the exact trajectory of the RSS and its affiliate organizations since the 1950s, there is ample evidence that these organizations have been active in the state since early days and a close linkage exists between these organizations and the BJP party unit in the state. For instance, on the eve of the victory of the BJP in the 2008 Assembly elections, *The Organiser* (a weekly newspaper owned and run by the RSS, and regarded as the “mouthpiece” of the RSS) in an editorial proclaimed:

“Karnataka is one of the states where almost the entire BJP is essentially drawn from the RSS. The Sangh has one of its most vibrant and intellectually pro-active units in the state. A number of its top leaders have come from the state. This also played a major role in the BJP win. In fact this win is no fluke. It is the result of years of dedicated hard work. And that makes it clear that the BJP is here to stay.” (“The Karnataka Mandate,” 2008, para. 4)
Frontline, a prominent fortnightly news magazine, provides a similar perspective on the RSS’s presence in the state:

“The Madhwa mutts” in the coastal belt have been vehicles for the spread of Hindutva, both as an ideology and as an electoral force…The two most prominent mutts that have long been the standard-bearers of the Hindutva cause are the Pejavar and Adamar mutts. The pontiff of the Pejavar mutt, Sri Vishwesa Tirtha Swamiji, is a founder-member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and has been associated with the Ram Janmabhoomi movement from its inception. He was present in Ayodhya when the Babri Masjid was demolished in 1992 and is a prominent figure on all Sangh Parivar platforms both in Karnataka and elsewhere in the country.” (“The Spread in the South,”, 2004)

The article also goes on to quote the head of the Pejwara mutt emphasizing the role of samaveshas (mass meetings) and rallies, as well as healthcare and education as having spread the message successfully in Karnataka. This was confirmed by my interview with a prominent academic working on educational policy in the state: “Even before the BJP became part of the ruling coalition in 2004 in coalition, the education system was infiltrated by RSS members or sympathizers. They are the ones that have worked from inside to send the BJP to power. They have worked primarily through the mutts.”

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* See Glossary

19 Interview Conducted at the academic’s office on August 18, 2009.
These organizations have clearly expanded the scope of their welfare activity, and consequently their visibility and impact in the public sphere since the 1990s, much before the BJP became part of the ruling coalition. It was the *Ram Janmabhoomi* temple agitation and mass mobilization across India in the late 1980s and early 1990s that gave them an entryway into the state. While this initially involved mostly divisive communal polarization spearheaded by the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, the welfare strategy of the RSS took shape soon after that. Gillan (2007), analyzing the BJP’s performance in the south, states, “In spite of the fact that the party’s vote share increased by a considerable margin in a number of seats, it remained a marginal force throughout the region during the early 1990s. However, in organizational terms, there was notable growth and the general membership of both the party and the Sangh Parivar increased; by 1993, the RSS boasted having over 7000 shakhas in these states” (p.39).

While it is hard to get an accurate estimate of the trends in welfare projects initiated by the RSS before the 1990s, the fact that the Sewa Vibhag was established only in 1990 and came out with its first report in 1995, indicates how this strategy began receiving priority around this time. Accordingly, the scope of welfare activities in Karnataka has steadily increased since then [See Figure 3.3]. The Seva Bharati, the organization which specifically works in urban slums, initiates projects in the areas of education, welfare, social organization and self-reliance. The successful entrenchment of these organizations in Karnataka is supported by journalistic reports as well. Phillipose’s (2006) analysis of the success of the Sangh Parivar in Karnataka states:
“How did this happen in a state that had witnessed the Congress’s one-party dominance ever since its birth? The cynical and corrupt politics of the Congress certainly helped, but without doubt Karnataka was the most receptive among the four southern states to the passions unleashed by the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. The Sangh Parivar’s Rama Jyothi processions introduced a new dynamic into local politics as a string of riots, in towns like Ramnagaram, Channapatna, Kolar, Devangere, erupted in September-October ’90…Over the next decade the BJP consolidated its hold in three pockets of the state: the coastal belt, the Bombay-Karnataka and the Hyderabad-Karnataka regions.” (Para. 4, emphasis added)
Phillipose (2006) also makes an excellent observation with respect to the Sangh Parivar’s strategy, one she terms: “the exclusion-inclusion paradigm”. While “exclusion”, as in the process of villainizing, marginalizing and victimizing of religious minorities required the services of the “stormtroopers”, “inclusion” demanded intense community networking, she argues.

“It was along the coastal belt that attempts to construct a homogeneous Hindutva identity proved most successful. Two factors worked in its favour there. The first was the presence of a disciplined RSS
cadre. Ram Madhav, RSS spokesperson, is on record for having noted that the Dakshina Kannada district had become one of the strongholds of the RSS because in at least 300 places shakas have been running at least two programmes each. These included civic interventions like promoting village cleanliness, temple maintenance, water purification, the creation of self-help and knowledge dissemination groups. The powerful *mutts* and temples that dot the Mangalore-Udipi region were sites of community bonding around festivals, bhajan sessions, and locally convened Hindu Samajotsavas. In these activities, the lower castes — which in an earlier era had been kept at a distance — were consciously wooed. Such activities and institutions worked as force multipliers for the BJP. At the political level the party kept itself open to anyone willing to do business with it… This strategy of inclusion-exclusion has paid the party rich dividends in Karnataka, where surveys indicate that the party now enjoys considerable support from SC/STs and OBCs in the state‖ (para. 7).

This illustrates not just the success of the Sangh Parivar in entrenching itself in Karnataka since the 1990s, but also its target audience and the use of civil society organizations to reach out to them using welfarist activities. However, while it is important to note that Karnataka was “most receptive”, this does not explain the timing issue. Why did the Sangh Parivar’s attempts and messages not resonate with the target audience before the 1990s? This will be addressed in detail in the next section.
3.2.2 THE POST-REFORMS ERA: KARNATAKA’S ECONOMY SINCE THE 1990s

This section discusses how the neoliberal reforms have affected the trajectory of economic growth in the state since the 1990s, what consequences this has had for urban labor and the transformations that have come about with respect to human development and welfare provision for the urban poor. The economy of Karnataka, particularly Bangalore city, has experienced a major boom since the 1990s following the implementation of economic liberalization. However this growth has been highly skewed, uneven and inequitable, with disproportionate costs being inflicted on the urban poor who have become even more disadvantaged and marginalized than before.

In fact the economic growth has been led by the tertiary sector, which has an increasing share in Karnataka’s economy. The primary sector, which contributed about 60% of the GSDP in 1960-61 comprised only about 18.9% in 2006-07. In the same period, the share of secondary sector increased from 15.2% to 26%. The service sector boom since the 1990s has boosted the State’s economic growth. The share of the tertiary sector has more than doubled from 24.8% to 55.1% [Karnataka State Planning Board, 2008]. In 2008-09, the tertiary sector contributed the most to the GSDP amounting to US$ 31.6 billion (55 %), followed by the secondary sector, contributing US$ 17 billion (29 %), and the primary sector’s contribution amounted to US$ 9.5 billion (16 %) [IBEF State Report, 2010]. Growth in the tertiary sector has come about largely due to the development of the state, and Bangalore city specifically, as a hub for the services sector, primarily IT/ITES. Sanghvi (2005) argues, “These days the Indian middle class – now
around 200 million people according to some estimates – is the big story all over the world. Our economic growth has not been led by a surge in manufacturing, so relatively few new jobs have been created. Instead, we have grown on the basis of services, most of which enrich only the middle class. The two big Indian phenomena of the last few years – call centres and software providers – are middle class dominated.” (para. 6)

Since most of the expansion has come in the services sector, this growing disparity between the sectors has had its impact on the economy. While most of the industrialization has occurred in the Southern Karnataka belt, in and around Bangalore, the economic activity here is dominated by the high end IT and Biotech clusters, which are able to absorb only high skilled workers. However, with more and more migration of unskilled labor to these areas and not much job growth to accommodate them, there is increased competition within the lower end of the working class spectrum. The informal sector comprised of unskilled/low skilled workers drawn mostly from the lower, backward castes and Muslim population is getting crowded. It also ends up putting a lot of pressure on the city’s resources, reflected in the increase in slums and the decrease in basic infrastructure and lack of access to services and amenities in these areas, as will be demonstrated below.

Karnataka’s level of urbanization was higher than the national average, with 34% urban population. It ranks fourth in the degree of urbanization, after Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Gujarat. (Urban Development Policy for Karnataka, 2009, p.3). There is considerable imbalance in the distribution of urban population, with Bangalore city alone accounting for 10.5%. Though the state has been characterized by high economic growth,
there has not been a commensurate reduction in poverty. Neighboring southern states, notably Tamil Nadu, have been more successful in integrating economic growth with substantial poverty reduction [Karnataka State Planning Board, 2008, p.13]. The report notes that economic growth, while impressive, has not generated a corresponding growth in employment [See Figure 3.4].

**Figure 3.4:** Sectoral Composition of GSDP and Employment in Karnataka (1993-2005). Adapted from “Karnataka: A Vision for Development”, by the Karnataka Development Planning Board, 2008, p.14.
While these statistics give us some idea about how inequitable growth has caused the lower spectrum of the population to endure severe poverty, they do not reveal the full picture. Specifically, what they do not reveal is the systematic informalization of labor, often promoted by the government’s stand on labor legislation. Regular employment in the organized sector has fallen substantially, but there has been a substantial increase in casual informal labor (See Table 3.1), characterized by extremely tenuous job tenure, poor implementation of protections such as minimum wages or work hours as well as inability to meet basic needs. They are often forced to work under extremely oppressive conditions, almost as bonded-labor, and face extremely unsanitary and hazardous work environment. For instance, rag-pickers, construction workers, domestic workers, street hawkers/vendors, workers in small household industries constitute the informal sector workforce in most urban places. Ahsan (2008) reports that the use of contract labor has increased significantly, climbing from 12% of the organized manufacturing force in 1985 to 16.8% in 1995 and to 23.22% in 2002 (Ahsan, p.261).

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<td>Self-Employment</td>
<td>-1.72</td>
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<td>Regular Salaried Work</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>-8.8</td>
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<td>Casual Wage Employment</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
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Table 3.1: Changes in Employment by Category. Adapted from “The Indian economic reform process and the implications of the Southeast Asian crisis”, by C.P. Chandrasekhar and Jayati Ghosh, 1999, p. 18.
The rationale behind promoting informalization is that a highly regulated labor market will hamper private investments in the manufacturing sector. However, increasing labor market flexibility has not necessarily been accompanied by adequate implementation of a safety net. Breman (2002) argues that the New Economic Policy of 1991 has been accompanied by systematic dismantling of labor protections and increasing flexibilization of labor. Even though technically there are labor protection laws to safeguard the informal sector, there are huge loopholes in implementation and gross violations of protections such as minimum-wage payments (Hensman, 2002). Rajeev’s (2009) primary survey of contact labor in Karnataka reiterates this trend. Not surprisingly, labor union membership has also significantly declined in Karnataka during this period (Ahsan, p. 253). The Indian Labour Bureau in 2002 reported that Karnataka had 3953 state trade unions on the register with a total membership of 211060 (Interestingly, Tamil Nadu reports much higher unionization figures. It reportedly had 7232 state trade unions on the register with a total membership of 1101434, and 2525 central Unions with a total estimated membership of 712935 people) (Labour Bureau report, 2002).

Examining the retrenchment of organized labor from the textile mills to a situation of unemployment, underemployment and precarious work and life conditions in Ahmedabad, Breman argues that the reforms have taken a toll on the ex-organized sector workers who have been forced to move to informal casual forms of labor. While the plight of informal casual labor, even before 1991, was not very good, the problem has been exacerbated because of the movement from organized to informal sectors following economic liberalization, putting greater pressure on this segment.
Thus, while the economic reforms have achieved quite a bit by way of stimulating economic growth, most of the benefits have accrued primarily to the urban middle class, with no real trickle down effect for the majority of the urban poor. While the rural workforce has been targeted through various employment generation schemes initiated by the centre and state governments, the urban poor have often been completely neglected, even though urban poverty rates and deprivation often tend to be higher than in rural areas as seen in Karnataka above. This uneven growth is becoming increasingly apparent and visible in the proliferation of slums in highly urbanized areas such as Bangalore city, where there are huge development gaps between the top and bottom 5% of the population.

There are several different estimates of the number of slums, the level of impoverishment within these slums, and the lack of access to basic amenities. To take the case of Bangalore, in 2008, the Karnataka Slum Clearance Board (KCSB) estimated that the city had 473 slums, whereas the Bangalore Municipal Corporation (BBMP) put the number at 542 (CIVIC, 2008, p. 42). This illustrates how hard it is for the government even to begin to plan how to reach these communities and ensure access to welfare services particularly when they vary in their estimates of how many slums there are, what the number of households in each is, and what proportion of them are Below Poverty Line (BPL) [BPL is an economic threshold used by the government of India to calculate the proportion of population in need of government aid]. Government reports about access to basic services in the slums are also contested. While the NSSO surveys indicate consistent improvements in access to amenities such as taps, toilets, schools and health facilities, micro level surveys often reveal very different statistics. For instance, the
BBMP claims 100% coverage in terms of water supply across Bangalore whereas the CIVIC study reveals only 43% coverage in slums (CIVIC, 2008, p. 43).

3.3 **SANGH’S WELFARE PROVISION IN KARNATAKA IN THE POST-REFORMS ERA**

The neoliberal reforms and liberalization policies discussed above provide the backdrop against which the welfare provision by Hindu nationalist groups begins to become important for impoverished urban slum communities. Market oriented reforms, many scholars have pointed out, are associated with severe dislocations and hardships in the short-term, most of which are inflicted upon the increasingly impoverished urban poor. What is interesting however is not just the decreasing access to social protection and welfare provision, but rather the inability of the urban poor to respond to these problems and demand better conditions that goes along with this process. Kurtz (2004) describes this aspect in great detail in the context of Latin America:

“Indeed, the little-noticed consequence of contemporary economic liberalization has been in many cases to raise such severe barriers to collective action and expression as to render ordinary political participation, individual and via interest groups, difficult or even impossible for large strata of society. To make matters worse from a democratic perspective, when the barriers to participation rise, they may
do so to substantially varying degrees for different social groups. Peasants and the informal sector, for example, are typically more associationally disadvantaged relative to their peers in the middle and upper classes.” (p. 265)

This logic translates to the Indian case as well. The increasing level of informality of labor affects the lower caste/lower class unskilled segment of workers disproportionately, rendering them in crucial need of state provisions for social security. But at the same time, informalization, accompanied by decline or absence of unionization, leaves them less able to mobilize for collective protest. While moving from the organized secure sector to the informal economy is associated with severe disadvantages in terms of wages and safety nets, the associational fallout of this is barely emphasized to the same degree. Informality implies divorce from a permanent workplace or in other words, increased physical distance from fellow workers and lesser time and resources to organize. That combined with the trade union decline implies lesser interaction between different community members that was previously possible in an inclusive “class” environment provided by the union.

Breman similarly illustrates the two particularly worrying consequences of the “flexibilization” of labor. One is the political decline of the organized trade union movement, which has failed to act to organize the informal sector (Breman 2002, p. 4819). Secondly, this takes away a major bulwark against communal polarization by eliminating class consciousness and often replacing it with social kinship networks defined by religion and caste. Varshney (2004) has identified the decline in such types of
formal inter-ethnic engagement as one of the primary reasons for the increasing Hindu-Muslim violence observed in cities such as Ahmedabad in Gujarat. Labor union membership has declined in many states in India since 1990, Karnataka is no exception. Similar to Breman, I argue that in the absence of any organized collective action representing the urban poor workforce, the impoverished informal labor sector is often forced to depend on other social ties, thus opening up the space for exclusivist groups. As Kurtz (2004) argues,

“Changes to labor markets during the course of economic liberalization can have dramatic implications. Not only is the balance of formal sector to informal-sector employment typically shifted toward the latter, but the rules that structure formal-sector labor relations are generally loosened. Several consequences ensue. First, as an organized actor the union movement is typically strongest in manufacturing sectors (public or private), and with trade liberalization jobs in these industries are disproportionately made redundant…Second, if these moves are accompanied by loosening or "flexibilization" of the labor law, which historically helped solve collective action problems for workers (and sometimes peasants), then the ability of employees to organize declines still further.” (p. 272-273)

Kurtz’s argument is that under market oriented reforms, the threat to meaningful democracy comes not from polarization as is feared in conventional literature but instead from failures of representation because of the inability of social groups to form,
articulate, and sustain interests. While he makes this case for newly democratizing countries, I contend that neoliberal reforms can have equally severe social consequences for stable democracies too, particularly the marginalized groups at the lower end of the spectrum that have no voice and inadvertently promote the rise of sectarian organizations.

Breman hypothesizes that breaking out of such segmented social groupings requires people in the informal sector to find common rallying points and recognizing their common fate based on locality. Similarly, I argue that the fragile existence of the vast informal sector in urban India, and the absence of strong organized class-based mobilization revolving around the workplace, makes “everyday” networks of engagement based around the local neighborhood extremely important for representation and resistance. Where such community-based associational networks are strong at the grassroots level, they can engender inclusive collective action. When such networks are also rooted in local politics and have strong linkages to local administrators and party power structures, not only are they able to bargain collectively for better services and amenities, it removes the need for depending on social kinship based networks. Thus it reduces the space for groups that use “Hindutva” as a social cue for collective action and welfare.

The Sangh Parivar’s success in entrenching itself in urban spaces, especially slums, I argue is due to the consequences of market reforms not just with respect to access to welfare services but more importantly the need for collective action and representation among these marginalized communities. First, I attempt to demonstrate the first part of that causal chain. I track the success of the Hindu welfarist organizations in
Karnataka since the 1990s following economic liberalization, as well as the divisive polarizing effect they have had in the state. I look at the nature of welfare services provided in the absence of adequate government intervention. The second part of the correlation is addressed in the next section where I discuss the success of the Sangh Parivar in the absence of other associational networks or collective action enabling these slum communities to navigate in the globalizing economy.

The question is whether the Sangh Parivar recognizes the post-liberalization setting as conducive to their welfarist strategy. While I do not believe that welfare was a careful strategic response that grasped fully (and responded to) the implications of market reforms for urban slums, I would however argue that in the last couple of decades there has been a recognition of the acute need for welfare service provision in slums. Hence, the welfarist strategy has definitely received a boost. It is particularly seen as a way to reach out to otherwise previously unreceptive communities. It is seen as a way to segue into the local neighborhood dynamics, particularly to marginalize the minorities residing here and promote Hindu consciousness. Welfare is the first step to prepare the Hindu populace for more rigorous ideological immersion. Sitaram Kedilaya, the *Akhil Bharatiya Sewa Pramukh* (All India Welfare Coordinator) of the RSS, says this:

“These bastis are basically deprived of basic amenities of drinking water, electricity and sanitation…We serve the people living in such localities. We cannot solve their problems hundred percent, but at least the basic requirements can be fulfilled…..These bastis have also today become the centre of various anti-social and anti-national activities. Such
forces can be named as terrorists, Naxalites, Maoists, Christians or Islamic forces….in fact, the anti-national activities cannot be arrested until the people living in such bastis do not make progress. Therefore not only we, but all social, religious, cultural organizations and the saints would have to go to them and understand their needs and problems.” (Sewa Sadhana, 2008, p. 27)

The number of welfare projects run by the Seva Bharati in Karnataka have increased manifold since the 1990s, rather dramatically so since 2000 (See Figure 3.3). Concomitantly, the BJP has also risen to prominence in state politics since the 1990s [see Figure 3.5]. It won a thumping victory in the recently concluded Bangalore municipal elections, completely routing the Congress and the Janata Dal (Secular), another first for the party in Karnataka. (“Bangalore Goes the Saffron Way,” 2010)
Karnataka State legislature elections seat shares data calculated from various reports on state assembly elections results 1951-2009 generated by the Election Commission of India, available at: http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp

**Figure 3.5**: BJP’s performance in state legislature elections in Karnataka, 1957-2008. It contested as the BJS until 1972, and as the BJP since 1983.

That the Sangh Parivar views welfare as a crucial part of its strategy, and urban slums as a key target audience, is evident from this piece that appeared in *The Organiser* that describes the re-orientation of training imparted to full time workers of the RSS:
“Since the Sangh work has registered its presence in various spheres of social life, the nature of workers’ training has also witnessed a slight change during the last few years. Earlier, the main focus used to be on the Sangh shakha. But now other activities like training for service activities, prachar (publicity), sampark (contact) and yoga have also been included in the OTC curriculum. The participants also visit a nearby sewa basti for establishing contact and also to become familiar with the problems of the people living in such colonies...” (Kumar, 2006, para. 10, emphasis added)

As noted earlier, even though trade union membership has declined in Karnataka, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), the right-wing labor union affiliated with the RSS (See Glossary entry), has in fact been one of the few unions not just to expand its membership base since the 1990s but also target the informal sector specifically. Jaffrelot (2005) notes, “The novelty in the 1980s indeed seemed to reside in the expansion of this welfarist strategy to what the BMS called the ‘informal sector’, in other words to the vast majority of workers who were not officially on payroll.” (p. 364) Jaffrelot calls this the “trade union’s strategic reorientation towards welfarist work directed in the informal sector” (p. 366). He reports the membership of the BMS as 3,100,000 in 1994. As far as its network in Karnataka is concerned, Jaffrelot reports that the BMS covered 20 districts with 90,030 members in 1987 with 108 unions affiliated to it (comparable figures for Tamil Nadu are 1 district, 16 affiliated unions and 31,335 members) [Jaffrelot 2005, p. 367]. Though it might be erroneous to try to make the case that the RSS and its affiliates such as the BMS identified an opportunity, and acted promptly and purposively in
response to neoliberal reforms and needs of the informal sector arising out of it, it is certainly the case that their grassroots organizations have been able to exploit strategically the situation to build a mass base among the informal sector population residing in urban slums.

An illustration of the scope and nature of the Sangh Parivar’s welfare activity in Bangalore city is useful here. In Bangalore, and the rest of Karnataka, it is the Rashtrothana Parishat (RP), which executes many of the welfare projects associated with the Seva Bharati. While the Seva Bharati has a separate office and also claims to be operating over 100 tutoring centers in Bangalore and Hubli, my interviews revealed that most of the non-formal education or tutoring centers are administered by RP, which claims to have more than 150 non-formal education centers in the slums of Bangalore, covering 109 slums within the city limits.

RP is a service organization that was started in 1965 with “the objectives of mass education, promotion of mass awareness and rendering service to the society”. The official RP booklet states its objectives as: “nation-building along indigenous lines, socio-economic-cultural uplift of deprived brethren, harmony through intra-community dialogue”20 It claims to be coordinating activities, such as tutoring centres, vocational training centers for women, blood banks, hospitals, and reading rooms in over 300 Seva

20 “Rashtrothana Parishat: A Bird’s Eye View of Our Activities”, an information booklet about the RP, was given to me during the course of my interview with the senior official of the RP. Interview conducted at the RP office in Bangalore on August 14, 2009.
Basthis (slums) of Bangalore and Gulbarga. Shivasundar (2005), analyzing their educational projects, writes:

“Apart from the BJP’s opportunistic strategies to accommodate Dalit leadership and agendas into its electoral framework, the RSS itself, through its *shiksha abhiyans*, has made successful inroads into the Dalit masses. This is especially true in the case of cities and towns of Karnataka. One example is the *shiksha abhiyan* that the RSS is carrying out in 500 slums in Bangalore. This is a project of the *Rashtrotthana Parishat* funded by the Infosys and Wipro, the pride of globalized modern India! In this project, the charity trusts of both the companies have financed the RP to supply its venom-filled Hindu communal booklets free of cost to Dalit students. This is implemented through the *pracharaks* of the *sangh parivar* in the name of literacy and education campaigns….Now, apart from the scheduled caste/schedule tribe morchas of the BJP you have many more *Sangh parivar* outfits working in slums indoctrinating gullible Dalit minds and also providing the space for the Dalit lumpen elements with a conscious strategy of infecting unemployed Dalit youth with Hindu communal venom.” (p. 271-272)

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21 My interviews indicate that in fact it is the RP executes most of the welfare projects in Bangalore and that the Seva Bharati operates more as a part of the RP in Bangalore. The RP booklet states that any donations to Seva Bharati may be made through cheques drawn in favor of RP. Documents also reveal the same person as the key contact person for both organizations.
Volunteers and senior members overseeing the education projects emphasized their success in reaching out to local communities particularly since the mid-nineties. I observed two tutoring centers in two slums in Bangalore city, listed among the 109 slums covered by the RP. This number was also verified by a leading NGO activist whose organization had been tracking the activities of the RP in Bangalore. Of the two, one was located in a religiously mixed neighborhood located close to a Muslim mosque. How streamlined and professionally managed the project is in Bangalore is a good indication of its success. Interviews with instructors from the two centers indicated that there are about 200 teachers currently employed at these tutoring centers, with approximately 20 students assigned to each teacher. 20 supervisors are appointed to oversee these teachers, who check attendance rosters twice every week. Every fourth Sunday of the month, a training session is conducted for the teachers, emphasizing not just pedagogy but also ways of recruiting more school children to join the centers. In stark contrast, there is not so much emphasis on training of teachers in Chennai because there are not as many dedicated full-time instructors or centers to make this a meaningful exercise. This is described in detail in the next chapter. The NGO activist said that the instructors were systematically trained not just to teach children but also to mobilize the parents through emphasis on Hindu practices. Women were targeted in large numbers by organizing cultural activities, and neighborhood religious celebrations. He said that the organization had a long-term agenda in working amongst these communities; they were not just here

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22 Interviews were conducted on August 14, 2009 and December 5, 2009.

23 Interview conducted with the activist at the NGO office in Bangalore on December 1, 2009.

24 Interviews were conducted in the Bangalore slums/low-income settlements on December 1 and December 5, 2009.
for short-term electoral gains.\textsuperscript{25} One of the instructors interviewed described a training-cum-camping trip to a nearby village that had been organized in December 2009 for all the teachers, employees, and office bearers of the Parishat, and it had garnered a total headcount of 700.\textsuperscript{26} All the other interviewees, including elected representatives, journalists, academics, and social activists from other NGOs, concurred stating that the RSS had entrenched itself firmly within various slum communities in Bangalore, and coastal Karnataka, and more broadly in the state.\textsuperscript{27}

\textbf{3.4 ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE AND THE SUCCESS OF THE SANGH PARIVAR}

The previous section clearly illustrates that the welfare strategy of the RSS affiliates in Karnataka, and in Bangalore, have taken shape largely since the 1990s. However, all Indian states underwent reforms in economic policy in 1991, and arguably faced similar dislocations, rendering them open to the influence of the Hindu organizations. Then, why is there significant spatial variation? Why do the Hindu welfarist groups not succeed in all states? What has facilitated their strong presence in

\textsuperscript{25} See fn. 23. Interview conducted on December 1, 2009.

\textsuperscript{26} Interview conducted on December 5, 2009.

\textsuperscript{27} Several interviewees confirmed this: Two interviews were conducted with senior personnel at prominent policy advocacy institutions in Bangalore on August 4, and August 6, 2009. Two senior academics working on urban local dynamics at a prominent research institution were interviewed on August 3, and August 18, 2009. Two senior political correspondents at two prominent weekly news magazines were interviewed on August 10, and August 12, 2009. The Bangalore bureau chief at a prominent daily English newspaper was interviewed on November 27, 2009. Two prominent journalists and activists at a leading regional weekly new magazine were interviewed on December 1, 2009.
Karnataka? I argue that timing alone does not determine the success of the Hindu nationalist groups in urban slums. Neoliberal reforms often put the informal labor force in a precarious position, and create the need for better access to welfare services among the poor urban workforce, but that does not automatically mean that all communities automatically turn to other providers for such amenities.

Tamil Nadu, for instance, which also experienced similar economic reforms, did not prove to be a fertile ground for the right wing’s welfare activities or its ideology. By the RSS’s own admission, there have been greater problems building mass appeal and organizational support for its welfare activities in Tamil Nadu as compared with Karnataka. According to the RSS annual report on welfare in 1997, an attempt was made to study the general nature of problems faced by welfarist organizations, including the Seva Bharati, in conducting Sevakaryas: The findings from the study specifically related to the Seva Bharati include: 28% of centers under the Seva Vibhag in Karnataka complained about paucity of funds as compared to 53% in Tamil Nadu; only 13% in Karnataka complained about shortage of workers as compared to 60% in Tamil Nadu; 15% in Karnataka complained about lack of participation of local people as compared to 27% in Tamil Nadu (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 1997).

What is it about Karnataka that has ensured the success of the welfarist Hindu groups in several urban slums? This section explains the success of these groups in the context of the transformations that have occurred in the nature of urban associational life in the state, by studying the case of Bangalore city in detail. I argue that the nature of

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28 These interviews are discussed in detail in the next chapter.
local associational networks and linkages to local power structures are extremely important in determining whether or not a community is able to garner resources and services from the government, which in turn determines whether or not the Hindu NGOs are able to capture the public space. The decline of community-based associational networks linked to local party officials and power structures creates a vacuum in many communities, facilitating the entry of welfarist NGOs to cater to their needs. The proliferation of elite-dominated NGOs that cater to the upper middle class as well as the centralization tendencies of the state government are examined in order to analyze how the local power structures have been overridden in the governance process causing the patronage arrangements to break down and allowing organizations such as the RP to fill that space.

While I detail the transformations in the nature of associational life in Karnataka, I focus specifically on the southern region (Bangalore city and the coastal belt) where the Hindu nationalist groups have established an extraordinarily strong presence. If we examine the welfare projects initiated by the Sangh Parivar within Karnataka, we can see that there are clear differences between the North and South regions (See Figures 3.6 and 3.7). It is clear that while the welfare work has almost remained stagnant across the north for the observed period, it has increased significantly in the southern region in the same time.

**Figure 3.6:** The number of welfare projects running successfully in North vs. South Karnataka (KAR denotes Karnataka in the figure)

**Figure 3.7**: A comparison of welfare projects across the four categories (education, healthcare, social organization, and self-reliance) in north and south Karnataka

Not only does the RSS seem to have a greater presence in the south vs. the north, the number of projects initiated in the south in education, self-reliance and social organization have increased manifold. It is consistent with the nature of economic transformation of Karnataka. The coastal and southern areas of Karnataka have gone the furthest in terms of implementing liberalization policies, and therefore also been most affected by the adverse consequences of such policies on the working class, thus creating the right conditions for the entry of Hindu welfarist groups. Crucial needs in areas like education and vocational and job skills training (the latter is categorized as self-reliance by the RSS, wherein they provide vocational training for women and unemployed youth
to assist with self-employment or finding jobs in the informal sector) seem to be fulfilled to a large extent by the RSS. This seems to have gone hand in hand with a substantial increase in social organization activities, where the RSS have used their presence in these neighborhoods to mobilize residents for other activities such as communitarian celebration of religious festivals, participation in religious processions and customs, attendance in *Shakhas* and other ideological training programs. Not only have the economic consequences of liberalization policies facilitated the entry of the RSS into the southern part of the state, their increasing strength and successful entrenchment have been greatly aided because of the nature and functioning of associational networks in these areas.

One may argue that the inequitable consequence of the reforms for the poor social groups creates the need for welfare provision among them in southern Karnataka. As my interviews and evidence based on Bangalore indicate (Bangalore is the most prominent city in southern Karnataka), associational networks amongst the urban poor communities are either absent or extremely weak and often incapable of advancing their cause effectively. This combined with the lack of strong political linkages allows the entrenchment of the Sangh Parivar’s welfarist organizations in this belt. However, this would be an incomplete explanation of why this region, and not the North, has been dominated by the Hindu nationalist organizations. I will explore this issue briefly in Chapter Six.
3.4.1 ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE SINCE THE 1990S

In this section I explain the changes that have occurred in the nature, focus and functioning of local associational networks, and how they interact with the political and economic backdrop to facilitate the entry of Hindu nationalist NGOs into urban slum communities. I focus my attention particularly on Bangalore.

I argue that urban poor communities can resist the Hindu nationalist onslaught only when they have strong community-based associations that are linked to local political structures. Associations by themselves, even when they are inclusive, may not be sufficient to keep the Sangh Parivar out. Without links to political officials, who are crucial mediators between the poor and higher levels of government, local issues and welfare needs remain unaddressed, which allows welfarist NGOs to enter. On the other hand, political linkages in the absence of associations to enforce accountability and responsiveness can lead to very exploitative asymmetric brokerage ties that are not always dependable, thus again allowing the space for alternative service providers. It is the combination of the two, strong associational networks plus the linkages to local levels of governance, the guarantee of a long-term mutual trust based relationship, which help deter the entry of the welfarist Hindu organizations.

So then what is the problem in Bangalore? What allows the Sangh Parivar to dominate urban slum communities here? Briefly stated, the problem is that there is a paucity of genuine community based organizations working amongst the urban poor neighborhoods of Bangalore. The socio-economic and labor status of these groups living in slums, as discussed earlier, makes it hard for them to organize for meaningful
collective action and negotiation. Often the Sangh Parivar is by default one of the few organizationally-strong and locally-rooted groups that has been working persistently in these areas since the mid-nineties. Secondly, where there are pro-poor NGOs, they are often perceived as outsiders with neither a long history nor strong community representation. They are either seen as short-term arrangements or they fall short in terms of organizational/financial resources. More importantly, they are not linked strongly to the local political power structures, which are so crucial for the urban slum dwellers. The Sangh Parivar organizations have a long-term vision backed up by welfare provision. Even though they have not necessarily had strong political linkages in the past, where they often score is because of the absorption of the local community workers and volunteers into their official ranks and the opportunity for leadership positions and upward political mobility. This has become a great incentive in recent years particularly with the electoral success of the BJP in the state, allowing for greater interaction between the grassroots and the political powers that be.

3.4.2 “STRATIFICATION” OF ASSOCIATIONAL NETWORKS

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) conducted surveys in Bangalore from 2002-2004 as part of a large project across four cities in three countries to gauge political participation and representation of the urban poor (Houtzager, 2005). Narayanan’s (2005) report, which was part of this project, discusses the results from the
associational survey. It provides fascinating insights into the working of associational networks in Bangalore. While there has been a proliferation in the number of NGOs working in Bangalore in recent years, Narayanan talks about the stark stratification of associational activity in Bangalore:

“On the one hand there are associations and movements that are distinctly elitist, run typically by the upper middle class even confined geographically to upper middle class neighborhoods. These organizations adopt the formal language of citizenship and speak of budgeting and transparency and accountability in local government…their attempts at broad-basing the movement have not quite materialized. On the other hand there are others typically originating with or are focused on the lower class people that mobilize and organize people to make demands on the state.”

(p. 8)

The large professional NGOs are dominated by upper middle class professionals (very often they have close links with corporate businesses in the IT sector) whose idea of community participation does not necessarily incorporate the poor or address their preferences. Their governance agenda marginalizes the urban poor. Such NGOs are usually funded by international donor agencies, use buzzwords such as governance or decentralization that do not resonate with the urban poor wards, and try to implement top-down development schemes without being moored in local dynamics (Clay, 2007; Benjamin, 2000). They are viewed by the urban slums communities as outside
impositions that are short-term, and likely to leave once the donor agency has withdrawn support (On this point, see interview with policy analyst cited in Chapter Two, fn.13).

On the other hand, mass movements of the urban poor, where they do exist, have tended to adopt protest techniques viewing partnership with the government as inconceivable: “this self-selection has undermined the ability of a whole stratum of civil society organizations that represent the interests of the poor, to partake of political processes.” (p. 25) They are not well-linked with local or state level politicians/parties; they are definitely not a channel of political representation for the members. Moreover, they are often cash-strapped and lack organizational strength. My interview with an NGO volunteer working primarily among the urban slums indicated this.  

She said their organization had tried to oppose these tutoring centers when they started cropping up in several Bangalore slums a few years earlier by setting up their own inclusive centers. These however failed for the most part because they could not raise enough financial resources to sustain the campaign. Neither did they at any point coordinate with local councilors/party cadres in this endeavor. Most of their secular centers simply shut down because they had run out of money, hence allowing the Rashtrotthana Parishat a free run.

Thus, associational life has undergone a transformation. On the one hand are urban poor associations who fail to create long-term linkages between communities and party officials. On the other hand, upper middle class activism often remains [29] Interview with a staff member at a non-profit organization working specifically among slum dwellers and backward caste residents, conducted on December 4, 2009.  

unresponsive to the needs of the urban poor and oblivious to the rise of Hindu nationalism across Bangalore. However, that is not the only problem. The problem is the impact this has had on local patron-client channels.

3.4.3 “RE” CENTRALIZATION BY STATE GOVERNMENT AND BREAKDOWN OF PATRONAGE STRUCTURES

What has been a serious problem is the state government’s increasing transference of development, and welfare responsibilities to private non-state actors through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). Narayanan (2005) states, “there is a marked shift towards increased private participation and corporatization of state agencies. This is a leitmotif in almost all policy documents of the state government since the late 1990s.” (p. 7) Even though the decentralization process initiated by the 74Th amendment to the Constitution transferred in theory several powers and functions to local bodies, this has remained poorly implemented especially in urban areas such as Bangalore. All state governments in the last decade have created several “para-statal” agencies to oversee land development, infrastructure, and amenities that often do not have any elected officials at all and none from the local municipal bodies or the urban poor communities. These organizations staffed by top bureaucrats, corporate elites, and answerable only to state-level leaders, are increasingly encroaching on the functions assigned to local municipal bodies and committees, and making macro-level decisions about areas and issues that are
not under their political jurisdiction (Benjamin, 2000, p. 37). In the process, they make it impossible for the urban poor to have their priorities represented at these forums.

For instance, the current Karnataka Chief Minister initiated the Agenda for Bengaluru Infrastructure and Development Task Force (ABIDe) “to build a better Bengaluru for its Citizens by adopting a new urban Planning model, upgrading infrastructure, improving social facilities to create a better environment for a good quality of life.” (ABIDe, 2009) An evaluation report of this initiative by an NGO highlights several problems with how this task force functions, particularly the use of task forces and committees that consist of appointed members and therefore no input from elected representatives or any genuine democratic participation on the part of the citizens:

“Close examination of Task Force practices to date do not indicate that there have been sustained or comprehensive efforts to engage different stakeholder groups or get these visions out on to the streets for deeply democratic engagements. ABIDe’s strategy has instead relied mostly on interactions with middle class English-speaking communities who have access to the Internet. This strategy has clearly found favour with many middle class groups despite being consulted after the plans and vision were largely complete and without clarity on whether and how their feedback would be incorporated into ABIDe’s plans. While this has attracted some debate, suggestions, and offers of volunteerism from sections of the middle class, the response has been small when we compare it to the overall middle class population and minute if we
compare it to the city’s population. It is therefore clear that ABIDe’s strategy has very narrow reach. Second, when citizen input is solicited after plans have been developed, then their feedback is restricted to modification of the plans; it cannot question the assumptions underlying the plan, and why certain thematic sub-groups or projects, which benefit specific groups, for instance, have been chosen over others. Another omission is the lack of attention paid to coordination among service agencies to carry out different projects despite ABIDe’s promise of enhancing coordination among government agencies.” (Daksh, 2009, p.23)

ABIDe is the new revamped BJP version of the Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) which was initiated by the former Congress Chief Minister S.M. Krishna in 1999. It was also criticized for similar reasons for being largely a PPP initiative dominated by the corporate lobby and bureaucratic agencies without any stakeholder participation. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), an ambitious initiative of the central government, has also run into similar problems. Envisaged to improve urban infrastructure and services targeted at the urban poor, the program is jointly funded with the Centre contributing 35% of the budget, the state government contributing 15%, and the rest to be raised by the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) or para-statal agencies. This has become another excuse for the state government to promote nodal agencies, PPPs and corporate lobbies. For instance, the NGO CIVIC, after evaluating 20 slums across Bangalore, argued that there had been deviations in implementing the Basic Services for Urban Poor (BSUP) as laid down by the Centre in the JNNURM guidelines, with priority
being given instead to Urban Infrastructure and Governance (UIG) (“Urban Poor Short-changed,” 2010). The Daksh report (2009) echoes this as well. It finds: “Skew in funding allocations between BSUP and UIG continues. In Bangalore BSUP spending only accounted for 12% (374.06cr) compared to 88% for UIG projects (Rs 2817.72cr); In Mysore, BSUP projects accounted only for 12% (Rs 136.21cr) compared to 88% of UIG funds (Rs 1022.22cr).” (p. 22)

Interviews with senior bureaucrats revealed this as well. “As far as education and other services are concerned, there is no policy to transfer any jurisdiction to the urban local bodies.”31 The bureaucrat was even more severe in his indictment of the state’s attitude towards PPPs:

“There are many organizations such as ISKCON32 and Azim Premji Foundation33 currently involved in different aspects of education through PPPs. However, there is no clear policy or criteria in selecting them. These are political level decisions. Inviting these NGOs and PPPs is a means to avoid transferring power to the people. Now, MLAs are trying

31 Interview with senior bureaucrat at the Karnataka Government’s Department of Education, conducted on August 7, 2009.

32 ISKCON or the International Society for Krishna Consciousness is a religious institution that has become part of the government school mid-day meal program through a PPP. This decision has been the centre of a host of controversies.

33 This is the non-profit wing of WIPRO Company. It has become deeply involved in Karnataka education by intervening in the administration of several government and government-aided schools to improve their functioning, developing testing and syllabus modules for the school curriculum, and creating teacher’s training methodologies. All these responsibilities have thus been taken away from governmental bodies that used to do this previously, also removing public accountability in many ways.
to become members of the SDMCs. Politicians have no intention of giving up power with respect to budget money. Their perception is that if they directly control budgeting, they will be able to control more votes. This is ruining education.”

Even politicians echo such views: “Service delivery is affected because of multiple agencies overseeing the same thing. For instance, in my constituency, water supply is controlled by both the BBMP and BWSSB. Similarly, for street lighting, one needs to go to the BBMP, but for electricity complaints one needs to contact BESCOM. People are confused about whom to approach with their problems.” He goes on to say,

“Selecting of NGOs for PPPs often involves political motivations. For instance, having a religious institution such as ISKCON is bound to generate problems, particularly since ISKCON has been shown to be involved in commercial real estate development in a big way. There is a crossing of the line. Similarly Adamya Chetana, another NGO involved in the mid-day meal scheme, has close links with a BJP MP. These networks get used for political work. But it is hard to question these institutions because they have generated goodwill and have some amount of public

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34 School District Monitoring Committees (SDMCs) were initiated to give parents’ bodies the power over decision-making with respect to the schools in their district in the spirit of decentralization and devolution to citizens. However, increasingly, many of these initiatives have been subject to political control by politicians trying to take them over or appointing members to such bodies, thus making the decentralization redundant.

35 See fn. 31. Interview with bureaucrat conducted on August 7, 2009.

36 Interview with Member of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly representing the Congress party, conducted in his office in Bangalore on August 6, 2009.
support. Everyone is fearful of taking up the issue of ISKCON because it’s an influential body. You do not want to rub anyone in the wrong way, because this may affect your political prospects." 37 This illustrates in a sense the political acquiescence of all parties concerned in this ongoing manipulation of the political process, which ultimately hurts the citizens.

The marginalization of the urban poor persists in other ways as well. As recently as May 2010, the state government has made it mandatory for all deputy commissioners to get approval from the Secretary of the Housing Department before “declaring” a slum in their jurisdiction (Bageshree, 2010). Not only does this supersede the authority of municipal commissioners, but also makes it that much harder for the urban poor to lobby their case because now they need to contact the state-level authorities, which is virtually impossible for them, more so if the said slum is outside Bangalore.

In Bangalore, as in most other cities, the level of governance that matters most to the urban poor is the local one (Jha, Rao, and Woolcock, 2007; deWit and Berner 2007). More importantly, the success of the local-level patronage networks is built upon the logic of political competition. The slums, acting as “votebanks” crucial to electoral success at the local level, are able to induce cooperation and welfare provision by the political patrons. However, by taking the power away from urban councilors and local-level leaders and urban bodies, the state government’s centralized decision making has changed the nature of political competition and caused a breakdown of local patron-client relationships. Shifting duties to higher levels of government not only reduces the

37 Ibid.
relevance, usefulness and efficacy of these local associational structures, but also removes incentives for local level leaders to mediate on the behalf of the urban poor. Being linked to local municipal councilors through strong associations, who in turn are linked to higher levels of power, is how patronage is delivered to many communities both in the form of particularistic and targeted goods as well as publicly-provided amenities. These networks are often party-neutral or inclusive of all party leaders, in order to bargain effectively with whichever party is in power at the time. By rendering them irrelevant to local decisions, the state government in Karnataka has not only undermined the decentralization process but also eliminated the “vote bank” as an important factor, thus completing the disempowerment of the urban poor. As de Wit (2002) points out, the elitist NGOs tend to perform well at advocacy but fail in service provision while on the other hand long-term reciprocal patronage has been increasingly replaced by instrumental brokerage in Bangalore (p. 3939).

Thus, the increasing centralization of planning and decision-making by the state government with respect to policies affecting the urban poor, and decimation of the power and role of local political structures, not only cause serious inefficiencies in service provision to the poor but also now removes the redressal mechanisms that they once had in order to correct such imbalances. In the absence of genuine community-based organizations working in the urban slums, often these sections have no option but to turn to what they see as a credible welfarist organization that is rooted in the community and working to provide welfare for them.
3.5 ENTER THE SANGH PARIVAR: SAFFRONIZATION OF BANGALORE

Hindu nationalism increasingly occupies precisely this urban poor space in Bangalore that has been overlooked both by civil society and political parties. Tutoring centers set up base directly in the target community and draw most volunteers/instructors from the local community. There might be supervisors that come from outside but for the most part they immerse themselves in local social dynamics. Thus, they replace the old local patronage networks by being part of the community, recruiting most of the workers and volunteers from within the community, providing channels for participation and even political leadership, thus establishing themselves as credible community organizations in the slums. Shivasundar (2005) argues,

“In the absence of radical Dalit politics, the semi-employed and unemployed Dalit youth, devoid of any democratic political idiom to express their anguish, were slowly channelized into the Hindutva stream by the Sangh parivar in some pockets. Anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan propaganda came in very handy in this process. The northern districts bordering Maharashtra, like Belgaum, Bagalkot, Hubli are witnessing this development. Even in the southern parts in places like Kolar god fields, Chickamagalur, and so on, a similar process is underway. ..It is important to note that all these places are also where acute economic crises have seriously dislocated the lives of the Dalit masses…the weakness and opportunist manipulations of Dalit leadership and no effective mobilization of the Dalit masses by any progressive organization has
created a situation which is effectively used by the Sangh Parivar for indoctrination.” (p. 271-273)

These themes were reflected in the interviews with the two instructors from Rashrotthana Parishat as well.\(^{38}\) Both of them viewed their position with the Parishat as a long-term opportunity because of the lack of other channels of mobility/employment and the lack of linkages with patrons or brokers that might be able to help them secure better positions. The tutoring center for now was the only source of employment they had as well as the best means to move ahead in the future.\(^{39}\) One of them also specifically mentioned the apathy of the local councilor of the neighborhood, responding to whether there had been any local political resistance to the setting up of a tutoring center there, thus indicating how the local level channels have ceased to be responsive.\(^{40}\)

The Parishat and other allied organizations are not tied down by targets international donor agencies have set; they are not challenged by local political representatives either. They do not term their intervention as “governance”, but “Seva” or service, a term that is easily comprehended by most people. They do often compete with other local NGOs working with the urban poor but often beat them simply by virtue of access to much greater financial/organizational resources.

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\(^{38}\) Interviews with the two instructors were conducted in the Bangalore low-income neighborhoods on December 1, and December 5, 2009.

\(^{39}\) One of the instructors said that she had been promised a permanent teaching position either at the Parishat center or at one of the full time formal schools run by them. Interview conducted on December 5, 2009.

\(^{40}\) Interview conducted on December 1, 2009.
The causal narrative detailed above is bolstered by the intra-city variation that can be observed in Bangalore with respect to the success of the Hindu nationalist welfare activities. There is an interesting pattern with respect to where the RP welfare activities, particularly non-formal education tutoring centers, are concentrated. The RP, as discussed above, operates tutoring centers in 109 slums in Bangalore city. All of these slums happen to be concentrated in the southern part of Bangalore (in Shankarapura, Banashankari and Jayanagar constituencies). The reason for this is the significant intra-city variation in the nature of associational networks as we go from north Bangalore to south Bangalore. Benjamin (2000) characterizes north Bangalore thus:

“largely municipalized and shaped by local demands….the wide spectrum of local society has empowered a local political process across party lines. Some local politicians have moved up the political ladder to help reinforce the claims of these neighborhoods in the larger political system… In direct contrast, a large part of south Bangalore has been formed via top-down processes of master planning, possible because of the relative disempowerment and political divisions between local groups.” (p.50)

The above quote demonstrates the importance of locally empowered groups creating close linkages and working in conjunction with the local political structures. The poor have been edged out of planning decisions about land issues and other welfare needs in south Bangalore primarily due to a lack of strong associations and a lack of engagement with the political channels, allowing on the one hand the bureaucratic
agencies to marginalize the urban poor and on the other facilitating the entry of Sangh Parivar’s welfare oriented centers. This indicates that though overall Bangalore is a city where the RSS and its affiliates have a strong presence in local communities, there is intra-city variation in their entrenchment resulting from intra-city variation in the nature of associational life. This strengthens my causal narrative by indicating how associational linkages can be key in determining where the RSS and its welfare activities are able to succeed. By this logic, it is possible that there could be intra-state variation in the success of the RSS and the BJP in Karnataka, even though overall it is a state where they are considered to be quite well entrenched. I explore this puzzle briefly in Chapter Six.

3.5.1 A BRIEF STUDY OF THE SANGH PARIVAR IN COASTAL KARNATAKA

After the detailed analysis of Bangalore, I now briefly turn to the case of coastal Karnataka, where the Sangh Parivar has dominated every level of politics right from the local civic networks up to the state and national level politics. I explore whether the same causal mechanism discussed above operate in this region as well. I conclude by looking at some unanswered questions that need to be explored in detail in the future.

Coastal Karnataka has been plagued by instances of policing by vigilante groups belonging to the Sangh Parivar. While mobilization around contentious wedge issues has been ongoing for some time, instances of anti-Christian violence and moral policing of
the two communities to prevent inter-community interaction have seen a radical increase in the past few years. Kumar’s (2010) report in the Times of India states:

“Of the 341 incidents in Karnataka in 2004-2008, in 2008 alone, 108 were reported with the majority pertaining to attacks on churches. These statistics compiled by the Union ministry of home affairs indicate that Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are equally communal sensitive states recording 654 and 613 cases respectively in the past five years. Interestingly, communal incidents in Gujarat (326) and Orissa (243) are lesser than those in Karnataka.” (para. 2)

Most independent media reports and fact-finding missions have alleged that these incidents have involved virulent mobilization by the Sangh Parivar outfits such as the RSS, the Bajrang Dal, the Hindu Yuva Sena (Hindu Youth Army), and the Hindu Jagrana Vedike (Hindu Awakening Forum), and others, which have been working in the region since the 1990, particularly following the Ram Janmabhoomi controversy. What is the reason for the entrenchment of the Hindu organizations in this region? Is it possible to identify causal mechanisms similar to those in Bangalore to explain the success of these sectarian groups in the region?

The data on the socio-economic dynamics of the region need further investigation. As far as the mobilization by the Hindu organizations goes, the media mostly focuses on the more militant side of activity, with reports highlighting disputes over land/religious buildings, communal celebration of Hindu festivals, large polarizing religious processions, and protests against cow slaughter. The extent of welfare provision by the
Sangh is not highlighted to the same extent. I argue that the more militant mobilization cannot succeed without the prior entrenchment of these organizations through welfare provision. In Bangalore too, it is welfare that allows them to enter into a community and later promote religious rituals and activities in order to mobilize the Hindu population. Militant mobilization is the second step; welfare is the means to establishing credibility and building legitimacy amongst a community so that later they can provide the support base or sectarian mobilization. However, this chronological link needs to be further analyzed in the case of coastal Karnataka.

The reason for the success of the RSS and its allied organizations in the coastal belt also needs further analysis. Most secondary sources point not just to the economic impoverishment of the poor but the resulting economic competition between social groups in the region that the Hindu organizations have been able to exploit. The organizations not only provide welfare but also use this local competition dynamic in a shrinking job market to mobilize the Hindus against the minorities (PUCL-K report, 2009). The PUCL-K report provides some empirical evidence in favor of the causal mechanism. It is a problem of unemployment coupled with lack of associational networks to address this that leads to competition between the communities, which is exacerbated by the involvement of the Sangh Parivar. Highlighting a local dispute, the PUCL-K report (2009) states:

“Anti-Muslim feeling prevails especially among Billavas and Mogaveeras. In the case of Mogaveeras, as fishermen, they are in economic conflict with Beary Muslims who are traders in fish. As far as
the Billavas are concerned, they bear the brunt of the unemployment problems. The Sangh Parivar is mobilizing unemployed youth in Billava and Mogaveera communities. Neither Billavas nor Mogaveeras have strong community organizations to address their issues, and this vacuum has been filled by the Hindutva organizations like Bajrang Dal and Sri Rama Sene. Billavas, who form a majority of Sri Rama Sene cadres, have moved from being followers of Sri Narayan Guru to the Hindutva brigade. Mogaveeras have found a niche in the Bajrang Dal.” (p.3)

An earlier report by the People’s Democratic Forum (PDF, 1999) following the 1998 Surtakal riots in Dakshin Kannada finds a similar correlation. It reports,

“The issues exploited by the Sanghis vary depending on the socio-political context. Sometimes, it is the targeting of the economic gains made by “minority”, such as the Beary community in and around Mangalore…Interestingly, what appears as a growing Hindutva strategy, as seen in southern Karnataka, is the attempt to rope in the backwards castes to their cause….The success of the Parivar’s functioning also depends on another fundamental point, which is the stress on its mobilizational strength. That the BJP unit of the area was able to mobilize a few thousand people overnight speaks volumes about their organizational weight.” (p. 10)

The sense of deprivation and competition among these groups, which is really a sense of frustration with the existing pattern of inequitable development, is being
systematically transformed into hatred by the Sangh. Journalists have noted that not only are inter-community relations really polarized, but also that the Sangh Parivar now has deep organizational roots in the region. The dynamics of this region need to be examined in greater detail in order to make empirically-grounded comparisons with Bangalore. Similarly, only a further investigation of associational life and clientelistic linkages will reveal why North Karnataka has not experienced the same kind of entrenchment of the RSS organizations as in the southern part of the state.

3.6 CONCLUSION

One important future research question is why the political parties in Karnataka at the state government level have chosen to bypass the local level institutions to create these para-statal bodies. In India, the urban poor have for long been considered to be vote banks, and the turnout amongst these sections in the elections has been very high, in contrast to the developed world, and to the benefit of political parties. In this scenario, why would parties suddenly change their winning formula and shift focus to the politically fickle and numerically weak middle class by deliberately undermining local level institutions? This question merits careful attention in order to provide a complete explanation for why the Hindu sectarian groups succeed in Karnataka.

41 Interview conducted on November 27, 2009 and December 1, 2009.
In the next chapter, I examine the case of Tamil Nadu, a state where similar welfare service provision efforts by the RSS have failed to make a mark among the urban poor. The BJP has remained marginal electorally as well. Similar to the Karnataka case study, I study the nature of economic reforms and analyze the nature of welfare service provision in Tamil Nadu. Even though Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are comparable in the level of economic liberalization for the most part and economic growth resulting out of that, yet Tamil Nadu has a better human development record. It performs better than Karnataka in different aspects of social welfare provision. Interviews with party representatives of the prominent regional parties as well as the BJP, activists from the RSS and other NGOs help me build a causal narrative about the differential trajectory with respect to the evolution of associational networks in the state and how the nature and functioning of these associations prevents the success of Hindu welfarist organizations in urban slum communities. The legacy of a highly successful lower-caste movement created a distinct identity politics that was not receptive to calls for Hindu unity by the RSS. Furthermore, the unique associational networks and party structures that emerged out of this movement created political incentives that induced parties to distribute services efficiently and inclusively, which in turn reduced the window of opportunity for the RSS ad its affiliates. Since most of the primary data is based on Chennai city, I use secondary data sources to examine local politics and associational life in Coimbatore city, where the RSS has been active and the BJP has had brief electoral success. Looking at a successful case of RSS entrenchment within a state where it has failed adds depth to the causal narrative. I conclude by drawing comparisons between the Karnataka and Tamil
Nadu cases and tracing the evolutionary history of associational life in Tamil Nadu, the nature of political competition in the state and its impact on clientelistic ties.
CHAPTER FOUR

DRAVIDIAN POPULISM VS. THE SAFFRON JUGGERNAUT: THE CASE OF TAMIL NADU

SUMMARY:

The second case study chapter examines Tamil Nadu, a state where welfare service provision efforts by the RSS have failed to make a mark among the urban poor. The BJP has remained marginal at the electoral level as well. Even though Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are comparable in the level of economic liberalization for the most part and resulting economic growth, Tamil Nadu has a better human development record. It performs better than Karnataka in different aspects of social welfare provision. Similar to the Karnataka case study, I first analyze Seva Bharati’s welfare service provision in Tamil Nadu. Interviews with political party leaders and workers, BJP and RSS cadres, NGO officials, political commentators academics, women residents of a low income urban neighborhood as well as close observation of the Seva Bharati tutoring centre in the neighborhood help me build a causal narrative about the differential trajectory with respect to the operation of associational networks in the state, and how the nature and functioning of these associations prevents the success of Hindu welfarist organizations in urban slum communities. The primary data is based on extensive interviews conducted in Chennai city. I conclude by drawing comparisons between the Karnataka and Tamil Nadu cases and briefly tracing the evolutionary history of associational life in Tamil Nadu, the nature of political competition in the state and its impact on clientelistic ties. The legacy of a highly successful lower-caste movement not only created a distinct identity politics that was not receptive to calls for Hindu unity by the RSS, but the unique associational networks and party structures that emerged out of this movement created political incentives that induced parties to distribute services efficiently and inclusively, which in turn reduced the window of opportunity for the RSS and its affiliates.
4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter described the trajectory of success of the Sangh Parivar in Karnataka, particularly Bangalore city, and provided an explanation for this success by analyzing the nature of associational life and its (lack of) linkages with local politics. The problem with Bangalore as we saw in the last chapter was that most of the NGOs and formal civil society organizations such as citizen’s action groups or Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) are mainly a feature of middle class neighborhoods and mostly dominated by their specific concerns. There is a lack of genuine associations constituted by the urban poor. The NGOs that do claim to represent this section tend expressly to avoid linkages with local political channels. Successive state governments have also chosen to collaborate with middle class and corporate associations, thus weakening the local political patronage structures even further. The role of local party workers and leaders as political intermediaries has almost been eliminated with most decisions about land allocation, slum improvement, and infrastructure and service provision being planned and executed at the top ranks. The lack of community associations combined with the declining power of local political leaders leads to poor communities losing access to upper political levels. Thus, faced with acute needs for services, they turn to the other non-state actors and organizations that can provide them with services and access. These are the spaces that are occupied quite efficiently by the Sangh Parivar organizations such as the Seva Bharati and the Rashtrotthana Parishat.

To understand the factors that hinder or prevent the influence of Sangh organizations, we need to consider a case where the Sangh has pursued the same strategy
but failed to make an equivalent impact as in Karnataka. Tamil Nadu is a perfect case. Not only are the self-reported project numbers in the state lower than those for Karnataka, but also if we were to examine a proxy measure of success, i.e. the BJP’s electoral performance in the state, the party has repeatedly failed to make political headway. This is in stark contrast to the Karnataka case, where the BJP has fared exceedingly well in the last two decades alongside the Sangh’s increasing presence.

To reiterate the empirical puzzle, the Sangh, despite its best efforts, has consistently failed to establish itself through service provision in Tamil Nadu. The number of welfare service projects executed by the Seva Bharati is much lower than in Karnataka when it comes to education and healthcare. Key members of the organization admit that keeping these projects up and running, and building a support base through new recruits, has been a constant uphill task, and is for the most part flailing in places like Chennai city. I argue in this chapter that it is the nature of associational life in Chennai that inhibits the growth and success of the Sangh organization amongst the urban poor neighborhoods. Informal everyday networks of engagement at the neighborhood level amongst the slum/low-income communities in the city closely coordinate with local political leaders and party workers, thus creating a clientelistic relationship where votes are bargained for access to higher political channels and services. By becoming key constituents for the political parties in the face of intense electoral competition, they are able to make demands on the state and receive targeted benefits as well as publicly provided goods and services, thus reducing the space for the Sangh Parivar organizations to insert themselves into the local dynamics.
The chapter draws upon my fieldwork conducted in Chennai in October-November 2008. I conducted interviews with members/activists of the RSS, *Seva Bharati*, and the BJP. I also talked to leaders and elected representatives of other regional parties, other NGOs working in the field of education, academics with expertise about state-level and local politics, and journalists covering right wing and party politics in the state. I also closely observed the operation of a *Seva Bharati* tutoring centre in a low-income neighborhood, and interviewed the person supervising the centre, instructors teaching at the centre, as well residents/parents living in the neighborhood and utilizing the service of the centre.

The chapter begins with an overview of the Sangh Parivar’s welfare provision in the state and in Chennai city. Based on interviews, observation, and secondary materials, I outline the operation, spread, and success of the *Seva Bharati* projects in the city. In the next section, I discuss some of the alternative explanations that have been advanced to explain the Sangh’s weak performance in the state, examining whether they have merit and are able to explain the inter-state variation convincingly. Following this, I elaborate my theoretical framework. I use evidence from interviews as well as secondary materials to establish the nature and functioning of associational life in Chennai. Specifically, I analyze the importance of political linkages in enabling local neighborhood level informal networks to demand and receive services from political parties. I also examine the nature of party politics and competition in the state, and how it creates the context within which such clientelistic networks operate successfully. I look at how the marginalized sections are organized and mobilized quite effectively by the regional political parties through such pre-existing civic associational networks, and why and how
they push back their competitors, the Hindu Right. I conclude the chapter with some comments about why the nature of associational life in general is different in Tamil Nadu to begin with as compared with Karnataka.

4.2 SEVA BHARATI’S WELFARE PROVISION IN TAMIL NADU

In Tamil Nadu, just as we saw in the case of Karnataka, there is a huge emphasis on education projects. However, as Figures 4.1 and 4.2 below demonstrate, the number of projects is lower in Tamil Nadu as compared to Karnataka, be it education or healthcare. The types of educational tutoring centers that the Seva Bharati is trying to establish in Chennai are the same as in Karnataka. The tutoring centre that I observed in a low-income neighborhood in Chennai was very similarly organized as the ones run by the Rashtrotthana Parishat in Bangalore. These are evening tutoring classes organized for the children living in the neighborhood to supplement their schoolwork and help them with homework, course materials, and exams. The instructors are young people recruited from within the neighborhood in order to build good networks with the residents and encourage greater participation in the activities of the centre. As in Bangalore, there is heavy emphasis on going beyond required course materials and teaching the children about the greatness of Hindu religion and culture. Annual picnics and trips are organized, sometimes involving the parents as well as the children, to hear lectures by senior RSS leaders. Most of these lectures revolve around the themes of nationalism, patriotism, and
their relation to Hindu culture. As we saw in the Bangalore case, here too teenage boys are singled out to attend special camps and programs on a monthly basis to receive training in martial arts and physical combat, and these sessions also comprise of lectures and ideological debates/discussions led by RSS leaders to teach them about patriotism and Hindu pride. These centers are also a way to reach out to and mobilize the Hindu residents of the neighborhood, particularly women, by encouraging them to participate in Hindu religious rituals and festival celebrations. These activities are organized in the neighborhood Hindu temples, and the RSS leaders use these occasions to lecture about the need for Hindu unity. These are also instances when the RSS leaders encourage the women to follow the Brahminical version of the rituals, which are often very different from local customs, practices, and form of worship. This is not surprising given that the RSS objective is to unite the Hindus by imposing a homogenized version of religious tradition and culture that supersedes local syncretic and ecumenical customs.

Thus, for the most part, the tutoring centers set up by the Seva Bharati in Chennai are quite similar to the ones observed in Bangalore. However, I did observe some points of difference. For instance, as opposed to cultural and religious education being integrated into everyday lessons in Bangalore, the Chennai centers hold separate hour-long culture classes on Sundays. Teenage boys are made to attend the RSS Shakha meetings on Sunday morning in lieu of culture classes. However, as noted in the case of Bangalore, this has been incorporated as a regular feature of the Bangalore centers as well since 2009. I do not think that there were significant differences between these centers that might have somehow affected the neighborhood’s perceptions differently in one city compared to the other. Some parents in the Chennai neighborhood have had
misgivings about the compulsory *Shakha* attendance (See fn. 42 for details about the interview). When I asked the center supervisor about what the purpose of the *Shakhas* was, and the kinds of lessons that teenage boys received there, the answers I got were vague. I was told that the *Shakha* simply encouraged the teenage boys to be disciplined and physically fit and active, and this was done through sports, games, and some martial arts training. As we have observed before, the *Shakhas* are the core building blocks of the RSS structure. Basu (1993) argues that these meetings, which provide members “with both ideological indoctrination and paramilitary training”, are a means to promote the RSS objectives such as promotion of Hindu culture and ultimately the creation of a Hindu state. McDonald (2003, p. 1564), who explains the structure of the *Shakha*, states:

“It is a form of physical training undertaken by members of an extreme Hindu nationalist organization called the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS). In the *shakhas*, a combination of Western-style military drill and indigenous games and exercises are used to inculcate a sense of kin attachment to the Hindu *rashtra*, an exclusionist notion of a future Indian nation-state—a case of “keeping an eye on the body,” as work on the body forms the starting point in the creation of the new nation… The physical activities are designed to imbue the participants with the desired values such as courage, teamwork, leadership, sacrifice, brotherhood, and utmost loyalty to the Hindu nation. Significantly, many of the games are framed in a narrative of aggressive nationalism… Usually the last quarter of the *shakha* is given over to ideological lessons on Hindu mythology or a discussion on a contemporary issue. A popular myth retold in the *shakha*
is taken from the Hindu epic the Ramayana, which tells the story of how Rama rescued his wife Sita from her evil abductor, Ravana, demonstrating the virtues of strength, masculinity, and warfare. The shakha finishes with a patriotic song and salute to the sacred flag.”

It is the combination of military drill training along with constant emphasis on the need for Hindus to be masculine and aggressive towards all that challenge the Hindu nation that encourages negative attitudes towards religious minorities. A concerned parent whose teenage son had been attending the Shakha said that he had lately become very aggressive towards Christian residents in the neighborhood, even though the families had been residing here for a long time and had been on a friendly basis with them for a number of years. This is particularly disturbing because most residents in the neighborhood have syncretic and ecumenical worship and cultural practices. Most of them attend the Seva Bharati sponsored temple activities, but much to the consternation of the supervisor they also continue to attend Sunday Mass, call upon Christian healers when they think it is appropriate, and perform animal sacrifices at shrines built for the local deities. The aim of the RSS is to promote a homogenized version of Hindu religion, and use it to build an exclusivist “imagined community” of Hindus, and it seems to be having an impact on at least some of the children attending the tutoring centre regularly. But it is hard to say whether this is a one-off instance or not. Since the other parents that I talked to did not have teenage boys, nothing conclusive can be said about the link between the Shakhas and the learning of certain types of attitudes towards religious

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42 Interview conducted on November 18, 2009 during visit to Chennai low-income neighborhood where the Seva Bharati tutoring center is located.
minorities. The only other frame of reference that is available to put this in perspective is my conversation with an ex-Seva Bharati recruit who had studied at the very centre that I have described above. He told me that he attended the Shakha on a regular basis through his teenage years but quit when he was around seventeen years old because he did not agree with the intolerant, and aggressive stance encouraged by the Shakhas. This is what he told me about the work of the Shakhas:

“We were trained aggressively in self-defence. Special summer camps were held during the summer holidays for this purpose. The children who attend the tutoring centers regularly are encouraged to attend these camps. This is how my elder brothers and I were recruited by the RSS. Initially, young boys attending the centre are motivated through free education, combined with games and fun activities. English language education and vocational training opportunities are held out as incentives to encourage attendance. Later, they are encouraged to attend the Shakhas. Shakha training, targeted at teenage boys, revolves heavily around themes of Hindu pride and patriotism, and aggressive opposition to the presence of Christian missionaries and residents in the neighborhoods. Boys are brainwashed to hate religious minorities and are taught that India is for Hindus. No other religion has a right to be here. When I was around sixteen years old, I was trained to specifically intimidate and even attack the Christian evangelicals who visited our neighborhood.”

43 Interview conducted on November 3, 2009.
He told me that soon afterwards he along with many of school friends decided to quit the RSS. He said that since then the presence of the RSS in his neighborhood and the surrounding ones, as well its influence among the younger boys in the neighborhood, has continued to decline. Some of the reasons for this will be discussed below.

Coming back to analyzing the success rate of the Seva Bharati initiatives in Chennai, in my opinion, there is not a great difference in the actual operation of the tutoring centers in the two cities. But, as evident from Figures 4.1 and 4.2, there is a clear difference in the number of Seva Bharati projects, with Chennai lagging behind as compared to Bangalore. In fact if we were to look at BJP vote shares, a reasonable proxy measure of the Sangh Parivar’s success, given that the Sangh Parivar organizations implicitly and explicitly mobilize support for the party through their welfare activities [the BJP cadres that I interviewed revealed that BJP workers often cooperate with the Sangh cadres at the grassroots level both in terms of welfare activities and for canvassing during the elections. Similarly, the residents in neighborhood who send their children to the Seva Bharati centre said that the center supervisor had visited them in their homes to campaign explicitly for the BJP], it is evident that the BJP has not experienced the kind of success in Tamil Nadu as seen in Karnataka (See Figures 4.3 & 4.4; as is evident from Figure 4.4, power in Tamil Nadu has alternated between the two regional Dravidian

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44 The interviewee said that his two elder brothers had stayed on with the Seva Bharati. Currently, they are key RSS workers in his neighborhood. When I asked him if it would be possible for me to meet them, he did not think it was appropriate or safe to do so.

45 Interview with ex-BJP district worker, conducted on October 30, 2009; interview with senior BJP state unit member, conducted on November 17, 2009.

46 Interviews with the residents were conducted on October 23, 2009 and November 18, 2009.
parties, the DMK and the AIADMK). Since the Nineties, the BJP has continually increased its seat share in Karnataka state assembly. It won the last state elections held in 2008, thus forming its first ever government (without alliance partners) in Karnataka. In contrast, its performance has remained stagnant in Tamil Nadu. It won one seat in the 1996 election and four seats in the 2001 election, dropping back to zero in 2006 and more recently in the 2011 elections. While this is not a perfect measure, it is a reasonably reliable indicator of the weakness of the RSS to establish itself at the grassroots level in the state.
Education Projects in Karnataka Vs. Tamil Nadu


**Figure 4.1**: Education Projects in Karnataka vs. Tamil Nadu

**Figure 4.2:** Healthcare Projects in Karnataka vs. Tamil Nadu

**Figure 4.3:** BJP Seat Share in Assembly Karnataka and Tamil Nadu State Assembly Elections
Looking at the figures above, the RSS is struggling to gain a foothold in Tamil Nadu, whereas Karnataka is clearly a case of success for the RSS and its welfare projects. This is further confirmed through interviews that I conducted with the RSS activists and Seva Bharati workers. Being the secretive organization that the RSS is, it is often quite difficult for researchers to get information or honest opinions from the top-level leadership of the RSS. My experience was not very different. I visited the Sangh karyalaya (main office) in Chennai, where my interview with the Prantha sahkaryavah
(State General Secretary of the RSS) did not yield any information\textsuperscript{47}. After detailed questions about my family and educational background, I was quizzed about my references and links to the RSS, which were considered to be inadequate and tenuous, and therefore I was mostly ignored without being formally asked to leave the office premises, and none of my queries were addressed.

However, I did have the opportunity to interview other state and local level functionaries who happened to be visiting the office on that particular day, and they were somewhat more forthcoming in their answers. There is still a very strong chain of command, which confirms the view of the RSS as a highly disciplined hierarchical organization. My questions about physical training camps for teenage boys were evaded, I was asked to get permission from the prantha sarkaryavah in order to attend or observe the camp. It was however considered acceptable for me to visit and interview the supervisor of the Seva Bharati tutoring centre, but even this was allowed only after explicit approval from the prantha sarkaryavah and the varga karyavah (Unit Worker). While the Rashtrothana Parishat had been able to provide exact figures about the number of tutoring centres in Bangalore city, the RSS and Seva Bharati workers in Chennai were very vague in their responses to this question. My extensive conversations gave me the impression that there were only a very few of these active in Chennai. In fact, apart from the center that I visited, there was only one other center that was constantly mentioned by the varga karyavah and other RSS workers.

\textsuperscript{47} Interview attempted on October 22, 2009
In general, based on my interviews, it seems appropriate to conclude that the scale of operations was definitely not as extensive, organized, or streamlined as in Bangalore. For instance, Rashtrothana Parishat employs around 200 teachers to work at the 108 tutoring centres, all recruited from within the neighborhoods in which they operate. The effort is quite professionally managed, with supervisors assigned to oversee and evaluate the performance of the teachers (each supervisor is responsible for 20 teachers and attendance rosters are checked twice every week). Training sessions are organized for the teachers on a monthly basis (every fourth Sunday of the month is set aside for this purpose) to train them in pedagogical methods as well as recruiting more children and parents to join. When I asked the Chennai workers and instructors about similar initiatives, I was told that no organized effort of the sort existed. The state-level Pracharak (organizers), whom I interviewed at the RSS office in Chennai, started telling me about the success of their Ekal Vidyalaya educational initiative in Madhya Pradesh48. When I asked him about the extent of coverage in Tamil Nadu, and Chennai, he was vague about how many schools of this sort or otherwise were operational here, or if there were any successful educational projects. He said that the organization tried to conduct several teacher-oriented programs in Chennai. When I asked him about the details of this initiative, he said “there is no organized structure; it is just a small group of Sangh volunteers that tries to contact schools to see if the teachers would be willing to be trained by them.”49 He did not have any information regarding how frequently this was done,

48 Ekal Vidyalayas, or single-teacher schools, are grassroots educational centers run by the RSS and its affiliate, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, particularly in the tribal belts of India, where government services and welfare provision is either absent or extremely inefficient.

49 Interview conducted at the RSS office in Chennai on October 22, 2009
what kinds of schools were contacted, and whether these teachers were asked to volunteer at the Sangh tutoring centers.

In Chennai, it is clear that the Seva Bharati projects are flailing because of low membership and lack of volunteers. Very few youth in the slum/low-income neighborhoods are willing to volunteer at the tutoring centers on a long-term basis or become dedicated cadres working for the organization. The ex-BJP district worker lamented the lack of recruits to work for the party and the Sangh at the grassroots level. She said that in order to encourage more youth to join, “they need to be trained in the ideology from a young age.”  Even though there is coordination between the Sangh workers and the BJP party workers during festival celebrations and elections, there has not been any real positive impact on the presence and influence of either organization in the city. In the part of the city that she was quite familiar with as a party worker, she said that she was not aware of any Sangh presence or projects. The former RSS recruit that I interviewed (See fn. 43 above) stated that the attrition in youth membership was because everyone knew that there were much better opportunities both for employment and for political mobility outside of the RSS through linkages with the regional political parties. 

My interviews with the two instructors at the Seva Bharati center confirmed this and the general lack of interest in the Sangh organization. The instructors, one male and one female, were college students from the neighborhood in which the tutoring centre operated. They saw their work as instructors at the center clearly as a temporary position

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50 Interview conducted on October 30, 2009.

51 Interview conducted on November 3, 2009
to earn some extra money while they finished their college degrees. Both of them (interviewed separately) told me that they had plans to take up graduate study as soon as they finished college, which would open doors for them in terms of “real” jobs. An RSS official, who is also a senior office bearer of the Vivekananda Education Society (VES), lamented the lack of youth volunteers and high attrition rates. He said: “We train young workers and leaders for these centers through the *Shakhas*. Unfortunately, it has been very hard for us to recruit fulltime workers for the centers or volunteers to attend the *Shakhas* regularly. The youth are willing to join political organizations in their neighborhoods, but not willing to attend *Shakhas.*”

In general, in the period following the demolition of the *Babri* mosque in *Ayodhya*, and the rioting that followed in many Indian cities, there was a fear that the *Hindutva* ideology would spread to Tamil Nadu as well, particularly since Coimbatore city experienced several incidents of Hindu-Muslim clashes and violence in this period. These fears were exacerbated because of the increased RSS (and *Hindu Munnani*) mobilization in Chennai slums under the guise of celebration of Hindu festivals.

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52 Interviews with the instructors conducted on October 23, 2009.

53 It is an organization that runs around 15 schools in Chennai usually in lower middle class neighborhoods. It is affiliated with the *Vidya Bharati*, the educational affiliate of the RSS that runs several formal schools across India. It strongly promotes Hindu culture and patriotism as part of the curriculum through activities such as celebration of Hindu festivals, and learning and reciting Hindu religious texts. I visited one of the 15 schools in Chennai in order to interview the RSS official and had an opportunity to talk to the principal of the school. She emphasized that there is a lot of emphasis on learning Hindu values and culture. She described all the cultural events and festival celebrations organized by the school, all of them reflected the Hindu religious tradition, none of them reflects the tradition of religious diversity and syncretic practices that are predominant in the city.

54 Interview conducted with RSS official at a VES run school in Chennai, October 22, 2009.

55 *Hindu Munnani*, or Hindu Front, is a Hindu revivalist party allied with the BJP and the RSS in Tamil Nadu. It is hostile to Muslim and Christian minorities, and has organized festival celebrations not just to promote a pan-hindu identity but also often to provoke Hindu-Muslim disturbances.
These neighborhood celebrations, particularly the Vinayaka Chaturthi festival, involved religious processions organized by the Hindu nationalist groups in urban slums, and were staged in ways deliberately to provoke the ire of religious minorities living in these mixed neighborhoods. They were also perceived as part of the larger strategy of the RSS to mobilize lower caste youth in the slums against the Muslim minorities. Describing such processions held in 1999 and 2000, Fuller argues: “Hence almost all the processions, tilting precariously between aggressive exuberance and incipient violence were very masculine events, and the young men in them were assigned to the stereotypical category of “rowdies” with uneducated low caste, lower class, slum dwelling backgrounds” (Fuller, 2001: 1611). In similar vein, Anandhi (1995: 36-43) describes how the Hindu Munnani and the RSS were able to use the festival participation to mobilize the poor Dalits in a mixed neighborhood in Chennai.

However, the last decade has shown that these fears have been unfounded. For the most part, the RSS-sponsored provocative processions have all but disappeared not just because of stringent law and order enforcement but equally because they have found it difficult to recruit lower caste slum youth to support this cause. Where these festivals are celebrated, they are organized on a small scale at the community level, where they neither have the visibility nor the level of support as witnessed before. As Geetha and Rajadurai (2002, p. 123) point out: “On the question of the Vinayaka processions – they have settled into yearly affairs, with the crowds getting thinner each year, and the Dalit factor really appears unstable, suggesting perhaps Fuller should revisit his thesis.” This
view was reiterated by several of my interviewees.\textsuperscript{56} A Member of Parliament belonging to one of the two prominent regional parties said: “These processions were designed to provoke disturbances in the community. They were deliberately organized such that they would pass through narrow lanes with mosques and there would be a lot of sloganeering and shouting. The government put in place strict codes in terms of how these processions were to be conducted to prevent communal clashes. It never put a stop to the processions itself, but they just sort of fizzled out because there was not a lot of interest or support for these celebrations among the local communities”.\textsuperscript{57} Similarly, reversing her opinion (Anandhi, 1995) on the presence of the Sangh in urban slums and its influence among the poor Dalit residents, Prof. Anandhi said:

“The only reason the Dalit youth cooperated and enthusiastically participated in these programs was because they thought it would empower them and provide them better channels to negotiate with the state. When the riot occurred, only then did they realize that the mobilization was supposed to be against the Muslims and not for their welfare. They decided to break ties with the Hindu nationalist groups and go back to working closely with the Muslims. So ultimately, these groups

\textsuperscript{56} V. Geetha herself, during my interview with her, reiterated her opinion regarding the decline of such mobilization activities organized by the RSS in the last decade. Interview was conducted on November 9, 2009. This view was also confirmed by two senior journalists belong to two leading news magazines. These interviews were conducted on November 16, 2009 and November 18, 2009 respectively.

\textsuperscript{57} Interview with Member of Parliament of prominent regional party conducted at her office in Chennai on November 5, 2009.
were not able to stick around and continue their activities here because of rejection by the communities themselves.”

The ex-RSS recruit said that since the time he had left, many of their militant mobilization tactics such as the provocative religious processions had decreased. They still continued to be organized in urban slums neighborhoods such as his where the Seva Bharati still had workers, but the number of dedicated workers and recruits in general had decreased, making it harder and harder for these organizations to organize these events on a grand scale as before or use them to incite clashes.

Prof. Anandhi went on to emphasize that slum life in Chennai was extremely heterogeneous and secular, particularly if one were to observe the types of associations that operate in these neighborhoods. Film star fan clubs, the interviewee noted, were a good example of this. These fan clubs are an important part of associational life in Chennai (Dickey, 1993; Rogers, 2009). They are indispensable to both neighborhood residents as well as party officials. They provide social services to local residents, mediate with local party officials on their behalf, and then canvass for parties at election time while providing channels for political advancement for aspiring residents. Their role and importance will be elaborated in the later section describing associational life in Chennai. The youth are mobilized through such inclusive organizations, political parties, and trade unions. Nowhere is there a monopoly of the RSS even though they may still be operating in some of the sums.

58 Interview with Prof. S. Anandhi conducted on November 3, 2009.

59 Interview conducted November 3, 2009.
While it has been argued that the AIADMK, a regional political party that has alternated in power with the DMK, has allied with the BJP in the past and strategically supported Hindu nationalist groups and concerns since the 1990s (V. Geetha and T.V. Jayanthi, 1995), there are also a number of instances where its policies have been censured forcing it to withdraw. One such controversial issue is the ban on animal sacrifice. In 2003, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha (leader of the AIADMK party) issued an order to District Collectors and police officials to put an end to animal sacrifice in temples by strictly enforcing the Tamil Nadu Animals and Birds Sacrifices Prohibition Act of 1950. It was seen as an affront to the lower caste and Dalit community in the state, and there was such widespread public outcry against it and open defiance of the ban in many places, that finally Jayalalitha not only retracted the enforcement of the law a year later, but in fact altogether repealed the act. She still lost the 2006 elections to DMK (Kent, 2010). In a complete opposite sequence of events in Karnataka, the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Protection of Cattle Bill 2010, which provides for stringent punishment for violators and makes the offence cognizable and non-bailable, was passed by the state legislature, albeit one controlled by the BJP. “This is symptomatic of the silent communalization of Karnataka at the hands of the Hindu Right”, argues Rao (2011, p. 82).

Thus, what this section clearly demonstrates is that the RSS has struggled in building mass appeal and organizational support for its welfare activities in Tamil Nadu as compared with Karnataka. This is evident from the RSS’s own admission as well as the extensive interviews conducted in Chennai and Bangalore that confirm this.
4.3 THE WEAK PERFORMANCE OF THE SANGH ORGANIZATIONS IN TAMIL NADU: SOME ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Continuity of party system argument/Dravidian ethos: The argument is that Tamil Nadu did not experience Congress party decline in the same way that Karnataka did in the 1990s. A stable albeit competitive two-party system developed early on in the state after the Congress lost power to the DMK in 1967. The DMK, which emerged from the pre-colonial anti-Brahmin grassroots movement and later transformed itself into a Tamil nationalist movement, was able to unite all the backward and non-Brahmin castes effectively. The rationalist anti-Brahminical and anti-Hindi ideological legacy of the DMK, as well as the breakaway AIADMK party, has hampered the entry of the Hindu Right into Tamil Nadu politics. Conversely, in the aftermath of mobilization around the Vinayaka Chaturthi processions and Hindu-Muslim clashes in the late Nineties, several scholars argued that it was the declining Dravidian ethos and AIADMK’s willingness to support Hindu revivalist issues that was creating an acceptable public space for Hindu nationalist ideology and related organizations (V. Geetha and T.V. Jayanthi, 1995). However, as I pointed out earlier, these fears have been unfounded. Many of the AIADMK’s controversial policies have engendered vociferous debates in the public sphere, and have been pushed back as shown in the case of the proposed legislation regarding the ban on animal sacrifice.

More importantly, while both regional parties have sometimes entered into politically expedient electoral alliances with the BJP in order to gain strategic advantage in national-level politics, state-level elections are still won on the basis of how well their
organizational structure penetrates the grassroots level and how efficiently their party cadres respond to local needs. At the local level, it is hard to displace their well-entrenched networks of local clientelistic relationships that distribute welfare benefits in return for votes. The BJP has consistently failed to gain political mileage in the state, whether or not it has an electoral alliance with either regional party. In fact, when it comes to local level politics, both regional parties have tended to defend their territory aggressively in order to prevent the entry of challengers and safeguard their linkages to local associational networks. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Moreover, the question is not one of whether the Hindu right wing has failed at the electoral level but rather why it has not done well at the civil society level. This cannot be explained simply by the emergence of the Dravidian parties. We need to look at micro-level party politics in the way that it operates in neighborhoods to understand how the Hindu Right is pushed back. Both parties, especially the DMK, retain a network of local grassroots organizations and networks. Many of these formal and informal networks link the parties, the local party workers and leaders, and the residents of low income or slum neighborhoods in interdependent patronage relationships. Given the intense local competition between the DMK and the ADMK, these informal associations have continued to remain relevant to political outcomes, thus becoming important intermediaries between political patrons and slum-dwelling clients, providing channels of access and service provision. Given their crucial role in electoral victories, these networks are not only sustained by the parties but in fact the local leaders also play a gate-keeping role by policing and deterring new entrants. It is this aspect of the state-
level politics that acts as an impediment to the entry of the RSS organizations in many urban neighborhoods.

Some scholars have argued that the quality of bureaucracy in Chennai/Tamil Nadu is different than that in Bangalore/Karnataka in that it is inherently better (conversation with K. Sivaramakrishnan at Yale South Asia Workshop 2011). Kohli (2007) specifically refers to the professionalism of the Tamil Nadu state bureaucracy and the corresponding achievements of the state in poverty alleviation, adding that this link needs to be further researched. Bureaucracy in Bangalore is perceived as having sealed itself off from the public, particularly the urban poor, thus gradually becoming insular and indifferent to local demands, whereas Tamil Nadu’s bureaucracy is supposedly qualitatively superior in this respect. While this may be true, I argue that this is an effect of the different nature of civic life in both cities. In Bangalore, it is the non-political nature of associational activity among the urban poor neighborhoods that perpetuates the political apathy of parties and bureaucratic structures. It allows the political parties, even encourages them, to bypass local-level NGO efforts, and orients them towards partnerships with middle-class RWAs and corporate organizations, which are believed to be the new bases of political support. This system entirely marginalizes the urban poor and their networks in Bangalore. One of the reasons that Chennai’s bureaucracy remains connected and responsive is because the local networks and associations are strong pressure groups that produce politically shrewd and empowered citizens who know how to use the political networks to their advantage. The political parties, who depend on their support, have an interest in appeasing them. Hence they assure that state policy and
bureaucratic structures are responsive. The populist orientation of state policies in Tamil Nadu will be elaborated in the following section to illustrate this point.

A related argument is that history of local government in the two places is different. Chennai Municipal Corporation for instance has a much longer history of institutional presence than its Bangalore counterpart. It is the fact that local government structures are stronger in one place than the other that explains better service provision and lesser role for the RSS in Chennai. I argue that longevity and continuity do not automatically imply better quality of service provision. We need to explain what ensures that the bureaucracy’s continued responsiveness and performance. Longevity cannot by itself explain quality of service or responsiveness. There has to be motivation, often a political incentive, to ensure responsive policies and efficient implementation of these policies. I argue that the incentive comes from the nature of local politics that makes local networks and informal associations indispensable, hence impelling the political parties to perform. Therefore, we need to examine the political linkages between local networks and political parties to explain this. Of course, historically, why civic life evolved this way in Chennai and how political linkages were developed is a different story. But it is the self-reinforcing quality of these informal patronage networks and the nature of political contestation, which deters entry of other competing organizations such as the RSS.

The next question that arises is that if in fact the urban poor residents depend on transactional relationships by trading votes for services, why then do they not enter into similar transactional relationships with the Sangh organizations. The problem is that
while the *Sangh* organizations such as the *Seva Bharati* do provide services such as education, and healthcare, there are certain services such as land legalization or tenure that need more active intervention by the government of the day. It is therefore more beneficial to interact with the regional parties in Tamil Nadu rather than the *Sangh*, which cannot guarantee the same level of political access. The BJP’s absence or lack of political power in the state does therefore to some degree affect the *Sangh’s* chances of success at the local level, where pragmatic residents use the free services that the *Seva Bharati* has to offer but trade their vote to established parties they know will be able to control the state and redistribute goods and services.

This of course raises the question of whether it is simply the lack of BJP’s electoral success, and hence the lack of BJP’s patronage, that determines whether or not the *Sangh* organizations are able to flourish in poor urban neighborhoods. One cannot deny the fact that whenever the BJP has captured power in a state, the policy atmosphere has been one that is conducive to the *Sangh* organizations. They are often receivers of state largesse in the form of land or fund grants, or sometimes RSS personnel are appointed to key posts within the administration to help shape policy that advances the *Sangh* objectives. This has happened not just at the state level but even at the centre. When the NDA alliance (with the BJP at the helm) was in power at the centre, there were allegations of RSS officials being given a free run in terms of changing the national school curriculum and textbooks to bring them in line with the *Sangh’s* Hindutva vision. There were also several controversies about RSS officials being promoted by the BJP to occupy key positions within government-affiliated cultural and educational bodies, as well as organizations such as the *Seva Bharati* receiving government aid under the NGO
promotion scheme. While it is true that BJP governments, both at the center and the states, have often tried to pave the way for RSS organizations, it is not a one-sided relationship. One reinforces the other. As Thachil (2009) shows, Sangh organizations have succeeded in creating a strong social support base for the BJP through their activities, which has produced electoral dividends for the party in states where it did not have a previously strong presence. It has been a completely bottom-up process in many ways. So, while one could argue that the BJP’s lackluster performance in the state might be a contributing factor to the Sangh’s weak presence here, I argue that if there were no alternative civic ties in place to deliver services to the urban poor, the Sangh would have had a greater chance at success. This is precisely the case in a state like Chattisgarh (Thachil, 2009) where the government’s poor performance allowed the Sangh to insert itself into local spaces, thus creating the ground for the BJP’s electoral success. Even though they might not be able to guarantee political access to begin with, the Sangh organizations are at least able to provide the poor with critical services that they require. In Tamil Nadu, where there are clientelistic networks linking the urban poor to political channels, the people often do not feel the need to turn to alternative organizations. Moreover, the competitive nature of the system also compels the parties to respond to the urban poor’s needs while at the same time protecting their territory.
4.4 CAUSAL FRAMEWORK: ASSOCIATIONAL NETWORKS AS A BULWARK AGAINST HINDU NATIONALISM

In this section I elaborate the theoretical framework and then examine my hypotheses using data from interviews and secondary sources to establish the pattern and functioning of associational life in Chennai city, and how and why it prevents the entrenchment of Hindu nationalist welfare efforts amongst slum and low income neighborhoods. I argue that neighborhood-level informal associations not only produce social capital but also form linkages with political parties and leaders, thus working to ensure better public service delivery. In the process they eliminate the space for alternative providers including the Hindu Right. We need to understand the process of claim making, and how and why the urban poor in Chennai are able to do this efficiently as compared to Bangalore. I argue that the key to understanding the outcome is the nature of civic life that is prevalent among the urban poor, which is politically-integrated civic life, or in other words, associational networks with clientelistic linkages with political parties.

Let me elaborate this causal framework. The urban poor not only expect the state to provide public goods and services, but many of the services they require can be provided by the state alone such as legal tenure and land authorization. Therefore, political access is very important to these groups (Harriss, 2005; Edelman and Mitra, 2006). I argue that where community-based civic engagement is strong at the grassroots/neighborhood level (formal or informal), it can engender collective action. However such community-level networks by themselves are not sufficient to ensure
publicly-provided goods and services. Without links to local political officials who provide mediation between the poor and the government, welfare needs are likely to remain unaddressed, thus creating the space for right-wing organizations to intervene. However, political brokerage through local officials in the absence of a concerted neighborhood effort is also riddled with problems. Such ties can become asymmetric and exploitative, thus defeating the purpose. It is only the combination of the two, strong social ties (formal or informal) at the neighborhood level plus the linkages to local elites that helps ensure service provision and in the process deters the entry of the welfarist Hindu organizations. Acting as long-term reciprocal networks connecting people from the community to political parties, they tend to become strongly entrenched over time, particularly in the case of Tamil Nadu where these groups constitute the political bases of support for the regional parties, and therefore empower the poor in influencing state policies.

My explanatory framework builds upon Varshney’s (2002) conceptualization of pre-existing levels of civic engagement in preventing ethnic violence in urban neighborhoods. Varshney argues that it is inter-ethnic associational networks that act as peace committees to contain communal polarization and constrain political elites. Similarly, I argue that these local networks not just prevent violence but are also instrumental in providing much needed access to relevant political channels. Where my argument differs from Varshney’s is with regard to the type of civic engagement and the role of political linkages. It is only by linking themselves closely to political actors within their neighborhoods that these networks become important. They transform into clientelistic vote banks, thus becoming instrumental to local electoral success. Thus, they
are able to pressure politicians for better welfare provision, therefore eliminating the need for non-state providers such as the Hindu social service groups. Also, Varshney argues that of the two types of civic engagement, it is associational forms of engagement through formal organizations such as trade union or film/reading clubs that are more effective in inducing cooperation and preventing violence. He argues that everyday forms of engagement that are informal may not have the same effect. I argue that the nature of slum life often precludes membership in formal organizations. Given that the urban poor are often employed in the informal sector as casual temporary laborers, they neither have a permanent workplace nor the time and resources to engage in formal occupation-based associations. It is therefore the informal ties at the neighborhood level that often take on an important role with respect to collective action/representation. Fan clubs, RWAs, self-help groups that operate formally or informally at the neighborhood level are the civic ties that bind the community together. It is at the neighborhood level that the Hindu Right succeeds or fails.

Many scholars argue that urban slums often provide the perfect conditions for the proliferation of extremist ideologies and radical religious organizations. It is argued that the dispossessed and alienated urban poor often find solace and support by turning to these organizations. I argue that what drives the proliferation of such organizations, and makes them attractive is not their ideology but the tangible services and benefits they promise to provide. For the urban poor who largely constitute the informal sector of the economy defined by low skill, low security, low paying jobs, the politics of survival combines with political pragmatism impelling them to support organizations they think would be their best chance of receiving services that they need. Scholars who dismiss
clientelistic networks as undemocratic and exploitative do not take into account that the urban poor are not often the passive players that they are made out to be. They understand the power of their vote and the notion of the vote bank. I argue that where they are part of neighborhood collectives (formal or informal), they are able to use their voting strength to make claims on the state. They are able to access political channels and get the state to respond if not efficiently then at least adequately.

The general argument is that states/cities with more politically-integrated civic life will have better welfare provision outcomes, and hence will have fewer incentives to turn towards alternative and denominational welfare organizations such as the Seva Bharati. Intra-state variation is possible depending on the variation in the nature of civic engagement within the state, just as much as inter-state variation. By the same logic, inter-city variation is possible as well and has been alluded to in the case of Karnataka in the previous chapter. The 108 tutoring centres run by the Rashtrotthana Parishat are concentrated in the southern part of Bangalore city. This is because the nature of associational life in the southern part differs significantly from north Bangalore. There are close ties between the local political process and local neighborhoods in the northern part of the city, whereas in the south the urban poor are edged out due to lack of strong civic ties and more importantly linkages to the political system. This intra-city variation as well as intra-state variation needs to be explored through further research. In the case of Tamil Nadu/Chennai city, I argue that, while similar intra-city and intra-state variation is possible, in general the city is characterized by robust forms of associational life within urban poor neighborhoods, and most of them have upward linkages with political channels, thus ensuring party responsiveness. Moreover, this pattern of associational life
extends throughout most of the state, and I will briefly explore reasons for that by looking at the ideological and political trajectory of Tamil Nadu.

4.4.1 ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE IN CHENNAI

Let us examine the hypotheses identified above in the light of evidence from interviews as well as secondary sources. Let us first begin by understanding the nature of informal networks and ties that strengthen civic life at the neighborhood level. Various types of civic ties connect Chennai’s urban poor. It is possible to identify three types of informal/associational ties operating at the level of the neighborhood in Chennai city and across much of the state, particularly among the marginalized urban poor.

a) **Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs):** The first of these are the ubiquitous Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs). There is emerging survey and ethnographic work in Chennai that has begun to analyze this phenomenon. The RWA phenomenon in mega cities like Bangalore, Chennai, Mumbai, and Delhi have until now been largely perceived as a domain of middle-class activism. These are associations that emerge in middle-class neighborhoods, and their concerns and worldview tend to work against the

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60 Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) are neighborhood-level organizations particularly in urban areas. They have emerged as popular forms of associationalims in major Indian cities in the past decade, particularly among middle-class neighborhoods. They represent the interests of the residents living in a particular locality or block by focusing attention on local issues and concerns. They often act as conduits between the neighborhood and the local political and bureaucratic structures. They may or may not be registered formally, their nature and functioning varies widely across cities and neighborhoods.
existence of low income/slum neighborhoods. [Harriss, 2005; Zerah, 2007; Lama-Rewal, 2007] However, many of these studies often limit their research to formal registered membership-based associations that fall under some kind of legalized framework. It is assumed that the poor will not have the time, inclination, or resources for building horizontal ties. Slum life, it is presumed, will be characterized by asymmetric relationships between individual residents and brokers or big men, that are inefficient viz-à-viz problem solving and instead strip the already poor people of whatever subsistence resources they might have. The reality is that many urban poor neighborhoods in Chennai have diverse heterogeneous and strong community ties just as the middle-class neighborhoods, but they are often missed by scholars since most of them are not institutionalized in the legal sense. Most of them operate at the informal level, but they are often able to bargain collectively and effectively with political intermediaries and channel much required services required by the neighborhood. Recent studies are beginning to recognize and incorporate these kinds of social networks in their analyses, thus providing a more nuanced picture of the composition of the RWAs, their functions and their importance as channels of representation and claim making for the urban poor. While most middle class RWAs vociferously eschew linkages with local political channels, it is precisely these linkages that enable the urban poor to make their form of collective action relevant.

Coelho and Venkat (2009) conducted a survey in Chennai neighborhoods in 2005, which reveals fascinating patterns of associational life in low-income neighborhoods.61

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61 197 associations were surveyed, of which 94 (48%) were of low income residents, 98 (50%) were middle income, and five were mixed. 97 of these were RWAs, while 70 were SHGs. The latter, report the authors, were almost exclusively found in low income neighborhoods.
They report that all the slums and low-income neighborhoods covered in their sample had associations that were at least two decades old. These included RWAs, Self-help Groups (SHGs), youth/dalit associations, and fan clubs.

“Our study found several bodies named and registered as RWAs in slums and low income neighborhoods in the city and its peripheries. Sprunging up in neglected margins or undeserved pockets, these RWAs arm themselves with the tools of civil society – registration, elections, letterheads – to claim official attention, and are often more active than the middle-class associations that have received so much attention.” (p. 359)

One feature that distinguishes the organizations in lower-income neighborhoods from the middle class RWAs in their sample is the carefully cultivated relationships between the former and the local political party wings. They use channels of political patronage, and form interdependent and collaborative networks with political wings to address neighborhood problems, particularly that of basic amenities such as roads, electricity and water, as well as land tenure/authorization.

b) **Self-help Groups (SHGs):** SHGs are a newer form of collective mobilization amongst the urban poor. Most of them are present in low-income neighborhoods, and according to Coelho and Venkat’s sample, most were founded after 2000. They are unique in the sense that they are usually comprised of and led exclusively by women in the neighborhood. Their successful existence goes against the conventional wisdom and allegations that neighborhood level networks tend to be dominated by big men of the slums. Most of the SHGs are focused on creating savings, micro-credit, and entrepreneurship and livelihood
opportunities for women. They have also increasingly begun to play an influential role at neighborhood level, empowering women to create informal ties within the community, take up issues of concern, and form links with political channels to solve neighborhood problems. “Nevertheless, many conceived their role as working to solve local problems through organized means, and some had taken up issues of civic amenities with local officials and politicians.” (Coelho and Venkat, 2009, p. 364)

A survey of 25 SHGs of poor women in Chennai (de Wit and Padmavathy, 2007) finds similar evidence: “SHGs also engaged in common social issues such as support during floods, preventing child labour and motivating illiterate children to go to school. SHG members may contact the City Corporation in cases of emergency and check on the quality of drinking water.” (p. 941) The fact that they have begun to create trust and social capital at neighborhood-level amongst the urban poor is evident:

“Moreover, several SHGs have taken over responsibility for communal affairs, in sharp contrast to the other case studies in which CBOs essentially (but to different degrees) became instruments for the privatization of public resources. Two reasons can be cited: the groups were formed based on close personal relations and only gradually extended their outreach to (parts of) the communities at large; and the resources at stake were too small to attract hijacking by powerful groups within or outside the slums. Gender is important, as women share much of their everyday lives which may become the basis of mutual trust” (p. 941)
These SHGs have tended to emerge in the late 1990s under the *Mahalir Thittam* (Women’s Scheme), a partnership between the Tamil Nadu Government’s Corporation for Development of Women (TNCDW), NGOs and community-based organizations, which is aimed at the socio-economic empowerment of women. The women residents that I interviewed in a low income neighborhood in Chennai were part of one such Self-Help Group.\(^6^2\) The TNCDW status report (2011) estimates that a total of 491,311 such SHGs operate in Tamil Nadu as of March 2011. Of these 159,219 are located in urban areas with a membership count of 2,482,654 women. A district wise break up of these numbers reports that Chennai city alone accounts for 23,620 SHG groups with a membership of 366,110 women. Both state regional parties, the AIADMK and the DMK, have constantly tried to take credit for the launch of this scheme and sustained support through funds. The critical role of SHGs as pressure groups is evident not only by the fact that they are supported by both parties through funds and special schemes, but how aggressively they were mobilized through various sops in the lead up to the 2011 state elections by both parties.

c) **Film Star Fan Cubs**: The third type of organization that is visibly active in many low-income neighborhoods is film star fan clubs. While these may sound trivial, they are an important form of civic engagement, particularly among the educated but unemployed youth in slums, and constitute an important political support base for the regional parties. As Rogers (2009, p. 65) argues, “Film star fan clubs are a social phenomenon that exists

\(^6^2\) Interviews were conducted on October 23 and November 18, 2009. This is the same neighborhood in which the *Seva Bharati* operates a tutoring center.
throughout Southern India. They are male-only youth groups found on most street corners in lower middle class or working class neighborhoods… Interestingly, many fan club memberships span all faith groups.” Since the 1970s they have maintained close links with political parties, often transforming themselves into party cadres to help elect their film star into office. The first of these fan clubs emerged as organizations to support M.G. Ramachandran, the famous Tamil movie star, who supported the DMK but split from the party in the 1970s to form his own party, the AIADMK. Tamil Nadu politics since then has revolved around these two parties alternating in power through highly contested and close elections. As Dickey(1993) points out:

“MGR's clubs began organizing in the mid-1950s, among the first fan organizations to appear. When MGR left the DMK he was accompanied by few high-level DMK officials but took much of the party's mass following with him, including many thousands of fan club members. These groups soon evolved into a tightly organized, intricate network of political support…No other politician or party boasted such a well-organized, widespread, and reliable cadre.” (p. 358)

Since then, such fan clubs have not only grown tremendously in number, but they have also increasingly been involved in organizing and mobilizing local neighborhoods for political action in favor of political parties and in return channeling social welfare from the party leaders for improvement of the neighborhood. For instance, describing the activities of MGR’s fan clubs, Dickey (1993) states: “In addition to direct campaign assistance, clubs also provided critical support to MGR with their social service projects.
These services could include advising authorities of fires, crimes, or electrical outages, cleaning blocked drains and dirty streets, providing shelter for flood victims, and handing out food and clothing to local residents, as well as larger projects such as donating expensive tools to laborers. Members fully expected that these activities would endear their organization to neighborhood residents and help maintain MGR’s reputation” (p. 359). Such fan clubs have been formed for numerous movie stars since them, many of them transforming themselves into political parties. The best example is filmstar Vijayakanth’s newly formed party, Desiya Murpokku Dravidar Kazhagam (DMDK), which was formed in 2005 and has been contesting elections since 2006. It is currently the main opposition party in the Tamil Nadu state legislature following the 2011 state elections.

4.4.2 ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE & POLITICAL LINKAGES

Overall, examining the operation of these three types of associational life amongst the urban poor demonstrates the longevity of such civic engagement. The argument is that these associational ties are important not simply because they create social capital or bonds of trust within communities but that it is through linkages with the political realm that they are able to deliver benefits to these communities. Not only are these networks an entrenched feature of civic life in these neighborhoods, but so are the political ties that they have developed with local leaders, which they use to pressure parties for provision
of services in return for political support/votes. The notion of apolitical or anti-political civil society has no practical relevance for the marginalized slum communities. It is only through political channels they are able to receive goods and services. It is only by becoming vote banks and entering into clientelistic relationship with political parties that they are able to entice the parties to respond to their demands.

This is evident from recent studies on associational life in Chennai. For instance, most RWAs in poor neighborhoods in Coelho and Venkat’s (2009) survey sample had strong political ties, with key members either belonging to political parties or being the local party functionaries, or local councilors. Coelho and Venkat (2009) state that many of these RWAs also explicitly ally themselves with political parties and canvas for them during elections. The advantages of such political linkages are obvious:

“The associations or sangams were established by local units of political parties or by powerful leaders….Roads, water connections, streetlights and markets soon got established through the representations to local officials and politicians. More recently, the sangams involve themselves in channeling local welfare schemes, managing the distribution of flood relief by the municipality, holding eye or medical camps, and assisting in marriages and funerals”. (Coelho and Venkat, 2009, p. 365)

Similarly, fan clubs are important not only to promote the commercial success of the movies but rather because they form effective patron-client networks. Leaders of these fan clubs link up with established political parties to launch their own political careers or by turning themselves into political parties with the film star as their leader.
These networks are then used to distribute social resources downwards to the urban poor, particularly the unemployed or low income lower caste working class population living in slums, in return for their continued political electoral support. “…the fan club organizations institutionalize an effective network of patron-client relationships within impoverished communities. The fan club organization acts as patron to regional fan club secretaries, usually local small businessmen, within these communities. And in turn, the regional secretaries act as patrons to the fans, distributing the social resources.” (Rogers, 2009, p.71) Actor Vijayakanth’s DMDK party, which is strongly backed by the collective mobilization of his fan clubs, is the opposition party in Tamil Nadu’s current legislature (the state election was held in May 2011).

Similarly, de Wit and Padmavathy’s (2007) study indicates that many of the women-dominated SHGs are highly politicized too. Some of them, they argue, are formed right before elections as vote banks and sometimes collapse afterwards, but not before receiving the promised services or benefits. In one case, for instance, a local politician distributed 700 sewing machines as well as paid for sewing training for the SHG members (as cited in de Wit and Berner, 2009, p. 941).

Often, patron-client linkages created by such organizations can intersect, thus further strengthening these political linkages. For instance, I met with the Ward Councilor in the lower income neighborhood that I visited, where I also observed the Seva Bharati tutoring center. The Councilor is very popular and respected amongst women residents in the neighborhood, and they address her as “Akka” or big sister. Most of the women in the neighborhood are closely linked to each other through a government
aided SHG, and while the Councilor has no direct role in the day to day running of the group, the women often look to her for support and leadership. In most of these households, as in other similar neighborhoods, it is the woman’s responsibility to ensure that there is adequate water supply for the household, and that services such as sanitation and electricity are taken care of\(^63\). The women residents interviewed told me that whenever there are gaps in service delivery they take up the issue with the Councilor, who immediately uses her political clout to get these concerns addressed.\(^64\) The councilor has constantly campaigned for several issues that affect the livelihood of women and quality of life in the neighborhood (“Segregated Waste Collection,” 2007; “Bid to Demolish Fish Market,” 2009), and in turn the women residents of the neighborhood support her in her political activities (“Work on Stormwater Drains,” 2008). The Councilor, during the course of my interview, said that she would be overseeing the construction of a “Samuha Nala Koodam Kalyana Mandapam” or a Community Welfare Marriage Hall, where the poor families will be able to organize wedding ceremonies at a low cost. She said\(^65\):

\(^63\) This was a typical lower income neighborhood where both male and female members of the household are employed in the informal sector. All the women residents I interviewed work as maidservants in the adjoining upper middle class neighborhood. The male members work as day wage construction workers. Most of their income is spent on buying alcohol. Many of the male residents were inebriated at the time these interviews were conducted. The entire responsibility of running the household, making sure that service provision is adequate, and that the household generates enough income and savings in order to provide for children’s education is left up to the women. The self-help group provides them economic security while protecting their savings from the male members of the household, and the close ties with the Councilor ensures that their problems are heard and addressed in return for providing her political support, and supporting her political party.

\(^64\) Interviews conducted on October 23, 2009 and November 18, 2009.

\(^65\) Interview with Ward Councilor conducted on October 23, 2009.
“These are the kind of linkages that matter. When party workers like me provide these services, why are women going to want to attend the religious services that the Seva Bharati organizes? The welfare schemes that the ruling DMK has implemented for the poor such as the Chief Minister’s medical insurance scheme are legitimate and serve a purpose. To get admitted to a good hospital or attend to medical emergencies requires a lot of money. This is what the poor families in this community need help with, not religious services. The Seva Bharati is never going to be able to build roots in the community with things such as temple rituals and celebrations that are irrelevant and useless.”

The councilor has been able to create a credible image for herself not just through her own efforts but also because of the fact that she has been a grassroots party worker in the neighborhood for a long time and has strong links with a state legislator from the party. The residents are encouraged that this political linkage will enable the flow of patronage and ensure that their problems are solved. Moreover, as another interviewee [an academic who has closely studied the activities of fan clubs in the state] indicated, the state legislator in question himself used to be a fan club organizer, who was able to

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66 One of the women residents, also a member of the SHG, explicitly mentioned this link and the fact Akka is able to address their problems effectively because of this. The Councilor for her part makes sure that everyone knows about the linkage. There are huge party hoardings outside of her residence. Inside, she has photographs of her late father (who was also a dedicated party worker) taken with senior party leaders, as well photographs of the state legislator who is her patron and helped her win the local municipal elections all throughout her office where she meets with residents. She emphasized the largesse and the attention that the legislator pays to the ward numerous times throughout the interview. Due to her own background, as well as her ties with the legislator, many residents feel that she is a credible person who will be able to address the community’s concerns.

67 Interview conducted on November 12, 2009.
use the fan club’s strength and political canvassing to quickly ascend the political hierarchy, first being appointed to a senior post in the city bureaucratic structure, and then eventually contesting for a seat in the state legislature. In return, since coming to power, he has ensured that the fan club and the neighborhood receive patronage in the form of both targeted rewards and service provision.

The Councilor’s views were echoed by the women residents as well who stated that while they appreciated the free service being provided for their children, they were not particularly unhappy or dissatisfied with the public schools that their children were already attending. Their pragmatism was also reflected in their voting preferences. Many of them were aware that the Seva Bharati tutoring centre was associated with the RSS and the BJP, but they said that voting for the BJP was a losing proposition given the domination by the two regional parties, which meant that the BJP would never be able to control the government or redistribute any resources to them.68 Since the BJP usually contests in the state elections as part of an alliance with one of the two regional parties, it is really up to the dominant alliance partner as to which constituencies it gets to contest in. The DMK party candidate had won in the 2006 state assembly elections in the constituency that this ward was part of. Two women residents that I interviewed stated that the Seva Bharati supervisor had come to their homes to campaign on behalf of the AIADMK-BJP alliance before the 2009 national elections. The AIADMK candidate did end up winning the parliamentary seat eventually, but both of them separately clarified that it was not because of the efforts and activities of the Seva Bharati in any way. Rather, it was because the local DMK party workers had not been able to ensure that the

68 Interviews conducted on October 23, 2009 and November 18, 2009.
residents received the flood relief compensations that were due to them as announced by the DMK government in control of the state government at the time. This had been the most important issue for them at the time of the 2009 elections. It was a case of the voters punishing the ruling party for poor followthrough on the welfare schemes, and the failure of the party workers to ensure their implementation. Seva Bharati does not figure in the list of people that the women residents interviewed would contact for problems with services such as water, housing, or electricity, or other community concerns. Women who were members of the SHG identified it as being the channel through which they had been able to create close communication channels with the local councilor who helped them address these issues by taking it up with the correct bureaucratic agencies or higher up party leaders. Two women residents who were not part of the SHG stated that local party workers of the DMK and the AIADMK would be their first choice if they wanted local issues addressed.

These surveys and interviews indicate that we need to reevaluate the past conventional wisdom that participation is either skewed towards highly educated and wealthier people, or that the urban poor are uninformed political stooges, caught in vicious brokerage relationships for poorly provided benefits. As the ex-RSS recruit argued, the RSS is not the sole channel through which slum dwellers in Chennai can hope to gain opportunities for employment, and upward economic and political mobility. The existence of informal fan clubs and RWAs and the recent proliferation of SHGs have all contributed to the political empowerment of residents living in these neighborhoods. In particular, as shown above, these informal networks operating at the neighborhood level

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69 Interviews conducted on November 18, 2009.
facilitate the development of clientelistic linkages with regional parties, thus reducing the space for the Sangh. While the RSS still may be part of the mix in some neighborhoods, it has been extremely hard for the RSS to dominate slum life in the way that it does in Bangalore’s low-income settlements.

4.4.3 POLITICAL COMPETITION AT THE STATE LEVEL STRENGTHENS CLIENTELISTIC NETWORKS

Associational activity, albeit informal, seems to be flourishing in the urban poor neighborhoods, and the political linkages that informal associations develop with the political party structures is important in explaining how the space for the Seva Bharati is decreased. However, it would be incorrect to ignore the political context in which these clientelistic linkages develop and become strong. We need to look at party competition and politics at the state level to understand why such informal community-based organizations are valued by the regional political parties, how parties appeal to them and sustain these linkages at the local level, and what they do to safeguard these linkages and prevent challengers or new entrants from encroaching upon the spaces and ties that they have nurtured over the years. My argument is that, when there are strong local politically-linked networks, claim-making by the urban poor is successful, preventing the entry of the RSS. When there is close electoral competition between the two parties, the parties have a great incentive in responding to demands of social groups. While two-party
competition may motivate parties to increase the level of public provision to satisfy the demands of various social groups who are crucial to winning a majority, close competition in a multi-party system produces a scenario where vote banks comprised of the urban poor become crucial to electoral success. Thus, they become the target of particularistic rewards in addition to publicly-provided welfare schemes. In both scenarios, associational networks with strong political linkages tend to play a crucial role. They are the link between the community and the party leadership.

Tamil Nadu is one of the states where the Congress lost power early on. It lost to the DMK in the 1967 state legislative elections, and has never been able to regain control of the government since then. The DMK controlled the government for a decade until a split in the party gave rise to the AIADMK led by M.G. Ramachandran (MGR), the Tamil film idol. AIADMK dominated state politics until MGR’s death in 1987 left the party in disarray. The DMK returned to power in 1989, but since then every election has seen an anti-incumbent result, and the DMK and AIADMK have alternated in power right up to the most recent round of elections held in May 2011 (See Figure 4.4 above and Table 4.1 below). Politics in the state was characterized by intense rivalry and two-party competition.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Election Year →</th>
<th>1967(^0) (DMK’s first victory)</th>
<th>1977 (AIADMK defeats DMK)</th>
<th>1989(^1)</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIADMK Did not exist</td>
<td>30.36%</td>
<td>21.15%</td>
<td>44.39%</td>
<td>21.47%</td>
<td>31.44%</td>
<td>32.64%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMK</td>
<td>40.69%</td>
<td>24.89%</td>
<td>33.18%</td>
<td>22.46%</td>
<td>42.07%</td>
<td>30.92%</td>
<td>26.46%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INC</td>
<td>41.10%</td>
<td>17.50%</td>
<td>19.83%</td>
<td>15.19%</td>
<td>5.61%</td>
<td>2.48%</td>
<td>8.38%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMK</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.89%</td>
<td>3.84%</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>5.65%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDMK</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.78%</td>
<td>4.65%</td>
<td>5.98%</td>
<td>Boycotted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| VCK                  | -                                 | -                        | -        | -      | -      | 1.29%  | 1.5%   | 8.38%  
| DMDK                 | -                                 | -                        | -        | -      | -      | -      | 7.9%   |


Table 4.1: Vote Shares of Prominent Parties in State Assembly Elections

This two-party competition resulted in what many scholars have termed a competitive populist model, where both parties have tried to implement extensive public welfare schemes and legislations providing concessions to different social groups. The AIADMK, under MGR’s leadership, introduced the “Midday Meal Scheme” to offer one free meal a day to all children attending government schools, the first of its kind in India. Other states since then have tried to implement similar schemes targeting the economically needy sections of the population in their respective states. Similarly, Tamil

\(^{70}\) DMK dominated Tamil Nadu politics until 1977, when M.G. Ramachandran, a prominent DMK leader and very popular Tamil film star defected and created his own party, the AIADMK, which then decisively won three consecutive elections – 1977, 1980, and 1984.

\(^{71}\) MGR’s death in 1987 let the AIADMK in disarray. Two different factions emerged, one led by MGR’s wife and the other led by J. Jayalalitha. Jayalalitha was a former filmstar herself and rumored to be MGR’s longtime partner. Her action, AIADMK (JL), emerged as the frontrunner in the 1989 election and since then Jayalalitha has remained the leader of the reunited AIADMK. DMK won the 1989 election, and Jayalalitha’s AIADMK won the 1991 election. The two parties have continued to alternate in power. The AIADMK defeated the DMK in the most recent 2011 elections to come back to power.
Nadu was the first state to have extensive quotas (up to 70%) for the backwards castes in government sector jobs, bureaucratic appointments, and admissions in universities and colleges. This was a policy that was aggressively implemented by both the parties very early on. This was one of the reasons that Tamil Nadu was not affected by the backlash and violent demonstrations that often occurred in other states since the 1990s to protest the Supreme Court-mandated 50% quotas. Tamil Nadu had had such quotas in place for a long time, and there was never any protest associated with their implementation because of the public support and consensus around this issue. The two-party competition made it necessary that the two parties provide such public goods for their political survival. Moreover, both the DMK and the AIAIDMK are “catch-all” parties. Harris and Wyatt (2004) argue that even though both tried to appeal to different social groups, they were unable to build loyal bases in the targeted groups. “Their supporters could be found on either side of key social divides”. Not only is Brahmin population very small, no other caste is dominant enough to be a viable support base by itself (Washbrook, 1989). Parties in such a situation have to create loose alliances incorporating a broad swathe of social groups.

Several populist welfare schemes such as slum upgradation schemes, concessions through the Public Distribution Scheme such as provision of rice at heavily subsidized prices, noon meal schemes for school children, farmer subsidies, quotas in education and government sector jobs have emerged as a result. These publicly-provided goods are very clearly aimed at the economically needy sections of the population. The urban poor living in slums and low-income settlements have been able to take advantage of these schemes to a considerable extent. I argue that this becomes possible not just because of strong
informal networks demanding such goods and services through political channels, but also because the political environment is supportive of these claims.

Most people, when discussing populism or clientelism, tend to focus on targeted freebies such as cash-for-votes preceding each election. However, these welfare schemes have played an important role in how legislation has developed in the states and they have had significant impact on the quality of life of the poor in the state. Tamil Nadu is one of the most urbanized states, so the problems of access and delivery in public services should be high. However, on many basic and human development indicators, health and education outcomes, the state fares much better than Karnataka, even though both have similar levels of economic growth and urbanization. For instance, Visaria (2000) argues that other Indian states would stand to benefit immensely by emulating the reforms and improvements introduced by the Tamil Nadu government to improve the quality of and access to healthcare services. Such concerted efforts to improve public services become necessary when politics is defined by two-party competition. Chhibber and Nooruddin (2004) provide evidence to demonstrate that this pattern of public provision is likely to emerge in states with two-party competition.

Harris and Wyatt (2004) argue that Tamil Nadu, since the 2001 elections, has been undergoing a party-system transformation. They argue that with the emergence of significant new players in the system that are cutting into the traditional support base of the DMK and AIADMK, the state is moving to a multi-party competition model. It is certainly true that several niche parties have emerged and consolidated their vote banks over the past three state elections (See Table 4.1). Small parties, such as the PMK and
MDMK, have emerged as significant players with their localized caste-specific support bases. However, the DMK and AIADMK have still remained the two most dominant parties during this entire period, with the Congress retaining its role as an important alliance partner. The most surprising new player has been Vijayakanth’s DMDK party that has established itself in the last two elections. With 29 seats (six more than the DMK), DMDK is the official opposition party in the current legislative assembly with Vijayakanth as leader of the opposition. As discussed above, his party has emerged as a frontrunner through the tireless efforts of his numerous fan clubs throughout the state, indicating the importance of strong grassroots involvement in creating vote banks and electoral victories.

Overall, this party system fragmentation has only served to increase the intense competition between the leading political parties both to retain their loyal supporters and to capture the swing voters. As multi-party competition emerges, cultivating and strengthening urban vote banks becomes even more urgent amidst a fragmented electorate. Thus, the past two elections have seen an aggressive mix of targeted rewards and freebies close to election time (which seem to be aimed at undecided or swing voters) and extensive welfare schemes (in order to reinforce the parties’ pro-poor image and retain loyalists). While election campaigning does involve particularistic targeting, manifestoes clearly spell out public welfare schemes for the urban poor that are sought to be implemented after the win. For instance, in the 2006 elections, DMK's manifesto promised subsidized rice through ration shops, free television sets, free gas stoves for poor women, maternity assistance for six months, waiver of farmers' cooperative loans, free electricity to weavers and two acres of land for every landless peasant family, a
balanced mix of welfare schemes and targeted rewards ("DMK Manifesto Hero," 2006; "DMK Manifesto full," 2006). Each party, after winning the election, is known to do its best to implement the public welfare schemes announced in the manifestos in the early years of its tenure. This patronage machine is a well-oiled one, owing to the links that parties have with the local communities through the party workers. The freebies promised are rolled out in an orderly fashion.\textsuperscript{72} The DMK leader, immediately following the electoral win in 2006, put into place legislations to ensure the distribution of subsidized rice, and made improvements to the noon meal scheme for children ("Three Eggs a Week," 2007). Similarly, Jayalalitha, whose party had promised a slew of schemes in their manifesto for the 2011 elections, has already begin to implement several of them such as a pension scheme for senior citizens, financial assistance to fishermen and destitute women, alongside distribution of goods such as free rice, free bicycles and free gold coins to targeted groups ("Jayalalitha Sworn in," 2011; "Jayalalitha Fulfills Poll Promise," 2011).

The system works efficiently because the local-level party cadres are able to aggregate and represent the demands emanating from the local communities, and the nature of political competition at the state level ensures that the political parties address these effectively. One of the senior journalists that I interviewed confirmed that there are

\textsuperscript{72}Interviews conducted with various residents on October 23, 2009 and November 18, 2009 indicated that several of them had recently received cash transfers (Rs. 2000 per family) following the victory of the incumbent party in the general elections, and had a color TV set and a gas stove delivered to their homes as promised by the party during election time. The rest were awaiting their turn. The system is quite meticulous with the residents being informed well in advance about when the goods would be delivered so that the residents could be at home to receive them. The women of the neighborhood, who predominantly work as housemaids, requested a day off work from their employers in anticipation of the delivery.
patron-client networks extending right down to the lowest level, ensuring that there is a connection between the community and the top party leadership. He said\textsuperscript{73}:

“I have been privy to the proceedings of several DMK & ADMK party meetings over the years. The discussion at these meetings always revolves around who got which contract right down to the Panchayat level. Each party tries to ensure that money reaches the cadres, who then further redistribute it downwards to ensure that political support bases are strengthened. I have reported from various small towns across the state over the years. Almost all of them have small community based informal associations consisting of about 15-20 youth, who are linked to the local party leader, who in turn is linked to the local MLA. At the state Secretariat office in Chennai, you can often see the local MLAs surrounded by a group of local leaders who have come from various constituencies to represent local demands. The MLA then takes these issues either to a party MP or a senior leader to ensure that these issues are taken care of, thus enabling representation of the very lowest level. The two regional parties manage these clientelistic networks so beautifully and efficiently that new parties find it very hard to break into the system because they can never match these networks.”

\textsuperscript{73} Interview with senior political editor of a leading fortnightly news magazine, conducted on November 16, 2009
4.4.4 THE SANGH IMPEDED

As the above sections demonstrate, politically linked associational life operating against the backdrop of intense electoral competition becomes an effective channel through which voters, particularly the urban poor, are able to receive particularistic services. It also acts to pressure the parties to increase the level of publicly provided goods and services in the form of various welfare schemes. That these informal networks are valued by the political parties as important vote banks is evident from the fact that the party workers at the local level do police the entry of new entrants to prevent the weakening of local ties and their support base. In fact, neither of the two regional parties is very keen to have formal non-governmental organizations and service providers actively participate in social policy or service delivery at the local level.

As we saw in the last chapter, the state government in Karnataka has promoted Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), and actively pursued NGOs and corporate actors to become direct stakeholders in the governing process. However most of these NGOs and corporate agencies disempower the urban poor, because the latter are rarely able to have any representation in these NGOs or to have a real say on policies such as land allocation, infrastructure, and service provision that affect their livelihood crucially. Moreover, these new planning agencies and the schemes that they implement often bypass local-level political leaders altogether, thus weakening the patron-client linkages at the local level. Local urban leaders no longer have an incentive to cultivate ties with the local communities or strengthen vote banks since they are often reduced to political brokers that do not have long term reciprocal relationships with the urban poor voters.
In stark contrast, the Tamil Nadu government has not been very supportive of PPPs or in general the activities of NGOs trying to work in service delivery and improvement. This point was emphasized by a senior administrative officer of a prominent NGO working towards improving the quality of education in government schools across the state. He said that the Tamil Nadu government does not encourage PPP initiatives like the Karnataka government, and is very wary of NGOs who attempt to work towards improving service delivery in at the community level. “They like NGOs only in a very limited role, maybe as subcontractors or helping with the implementation of the schemes and programs. They are very touchy about NGOs working with the local communities because they feel that that would affect their image amongst the voters”, he stated. His NGO was refused permission by the government to work with government schools to improve learning outcomes. However, the NGO managed to do so anyway, though informal channels and tacit approval of district-level bureaucratic officers. At the time of the interview, according to the NGO officer, the organization was active in 7000 schools spread over ten districts. It was on a scale that was beginning to worry the government, and it was actively trying to end the NGO’s intervention.

This unwelcoming attitude towards NGOs and alternative non-state organizations is strong at the local level too, particularly when they are perceived to be encroaching on the political space of the established parties. For instance, when the Seva Bharati centre supervisor tried to extend his organization’s welfare work beyond the usual religious gatherings to making public speeches about Hindu unity, the ward councilor immediately sprung into action. She said, “About two years ago, after the usual religious gathering at

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74 Interview conducted on October 27, 2009.
the temple, he would set up loudspeakers and make public speeches about how Hinduism was the only true faith, and that the local people needed to stop worshipping other gods. I put an end to his political mischief. I gave him a stern warning about limiting his messages to his religious gatherings. I told him to stop misusing public space to impart messages intended to polarize the residents in the neighborhood.”

She said that she had tried to impress upon the women residents, particularly those who have close ties with her through the SHG, that the center and its teachings may not be a good influence on the children. Some of the SHG members at least have since then stopped sending their children to the center’s classes.

Furthermore, the Councilor added that she and her party workers have tried to keep a close watch on the supervisor’s political activities. She said that, while it would not be correct to try and shut down the center or stop residents from sending their kids there to attend classes, she would definitely ensure that the center did not overreach. If it tried to expand its role in the community beyond tutoring classes to spreading divisive political messages, she would take action. She also added:

“‘It is better to leave such people alone and let issues such as these die a natural death instead of needlessly bringing attention to it by trying to aggressively stop the center. Ultimately, the kind of petty services that he provides through his center is not going to sway people to support his organization or switch their vote to his party in large numbers.’”

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75 Interview with the Ward Councilor, October 23, 2009.

76 Ibid.
The ex-BJP district worker conceded that it was hard for the RSS and BJP to compete with the strong organizational structure that the DMK had in place right down to the neighborhood level. There is a realization that politically-integrated clientelistic networks are necessary in order to channel welfare and gain credibility. She argued:

“BJP and RSS cadres have neither the incentive nor the resources to nurture linkages with the local communities or distribute any services to them effectively. At the neighborhood level, the workers need to link themselves to the community, address their needs, assist in getting them civic amenities, and create strong ties with the local networks. Unfortunately, there are not enough dedicated workers at the grassroots level to create these long-term linkages neither does the top party leadership distribute resources downwards for these ties to be established.”

The RSS’s welfare provision is unlikely to have the desired impact unless it actually creates extensive and long-term linkages with the communities that can channel resources and political rewards. Moreover, it seems that the RSS strategy of welfare provision is one that aims at promoting the Hindutva vision but not necessarily one that satisfies the needs of local communities. “The social and political needs of people in these communities are different from what is taught in the Seva Bharati centers. Their concerns are about getting a job or getting some political benefit. This is the reason why

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77 Interview conducted on October 30, 2009.
the RSS is not very relevant in Tamil Nadu. While many residents do value the free education provided through tutoring centers, they have several other needs and social and political aspirations that are not met effectively by the Seva Bharati. The RSS may be able to compete with the regional parties in providing particularistic benefits such as school supplies for children, cash awards to be used towards school tuition, and rent support for poor residents, but they are not able to provide public goods such as toilets, taps, and land tenure to benefit the community as a whole. Being able to get their children admitted to good government-run colleges, getting a lucrative public sector job, or even simply getting the civic amenities to improve their quality of life, requires linkages with a party that will value their strength as a vote bank and that has a realistic shot at gaining power.

I have argued in the previous chapter that the RSS has been able to establish a strong presence in many urban spaces in Bangalore city and throughout Karnataka because associational networks amongst the urban poor neighborhoods have tended to be weak and patron-client linkages have declined or failed to meet the people’s needs. However, one cannot rule out BJP’s increasing political role in the state as one of the factors that has assisted the RSS’s activities both through favorable policies but also through the increased possibility of an efficient flow of patronage resources. Both trends have reinforced each other. The vacuum in terms of a strong civil society and clientelistic networks have allowed the RSS to insert itself more easily into these spaces and ingratiate itself to the people through service provision. But one could argue that it has been successful not just because of its ideological messages and tutoring centers but also

78 Interview conducted on November 16, 2009.
because these have been accompanied by other tangible benefits or at least the promise of
them by virtue of the BJP being in power.

In Tamil Nadu, it is a catch-22 situation for the RSS. It may not be fully possible
for the RSS to succeed at the grassroots level until the BJP becomes a political actor of
some significance at state-level politics and is able to guarantee credibly distribution of
patronage. However, political success is hard to achieve without the strong clientelistic
linkages at the grassroots level to begin with, which in turn has been difficult for the RSS
given the strength of preexisting networks and the policing by the regional parties.

4.5 CONCLUSION: WHAT REMAINS TO BE EXPLAINED?

I have argued that informal associational activity in Tamil Nadu, particularly in
Chennai city, not only is well entrenched but also very effective in building bridges with
the political party structures at the urban level. This is especially true of the urban poor
communities, where the residents realize that whereas they may not have the resources or
education or means to make effective claims on the government, they can certainly use
their collective strength as a vote bank to pressure political parties to pay heed. Informal
networks such as SHGs and RWAs often develop close linkages with the local ward
councilor or party workers, thus trading their political support for goods and services.
Similarly, neighborhood fan clubs often become the political vehicle for aspiring youth,
who retain their ties to the communities and channel patronage through these clubs as a
reward in order to maintain their support base while becoming crucial intermediaries between senior party leadership and local communities. I have also demonstrated how these ties have remained important even as the state politics has transitioned from intense two-party competition to multi-party competition, where publicly-provided services such as welfare schemes benefiting large numbers of voters continue to be important alongside targeted particularistic benefits and incentives.

Whether there is a pattern in terms of how these goods and services are channeled and to whom is unclear at present. The cash-for-votes strategy, one of the worst kept secrets of election campaigns in the state ("Cash-for-votes in Tamil Nadu," 2011; Hiddleston, 2011), may be a last minute carrot provided to influence on-the-fence swing voters. On the other hand, the fact that the ruling parties often take care in meticulously distributing the freebies promised as part the election manifestos indicates [ranging from gas stoves and TV sets to cash awards] indicates that these may be just the kind of rewards that are distributed to loyal voters or constituencies that have elected a legislator from their party. Public welfare schemes, whether it is a new health insurance plan or a pension plan, could be an attempt to strengthen the party’s support base, whereas changes made to these plans such as expanding the beneficiaries of such plans or maybe schemes targeted at particular groups [such as dowry and marriage assistance to poor women] could be aimed strategically at swing voters/groups. While my interviews alluded in a limited way to these interesting patterns in the distribution of patronage rewards, nothing conclusive can be said about this yet. Similarly, there may also be a variation in what type of clientelistic benefit is implemented when, depending on the closeness of competition or victory. At this point, they are merely interesting hypotheses that require
further detailed investigation, but ones that certainly hold the key to formulating useful models about the workings of clientelism and patronage politics, particularly in terms of distinguishing between different types of goods & services provided and their timing, as well as the nature of the groups targeted.

Another puzzle generated by the Tamil Nadu case is about the variation in the nature of associational life. Why is such activity, albeit informal, stronger in Tamil Nadu/Chennai than in Karnataka/Bangalore? Why do the urban poor have a long tradition of engaging with political parties through such local community-level networks? My theoretical framework, for the purpose of the dissertation, takes these networks as given, and then explains why they have continued to flourish, and their crucial role in resisting outsiders and new entrants. It does not explain why they emerged in the first place. For this, we may need to trace back to the Dravidian movement and the British colonial policy that encouraged associational life pre-1947. Associations emerged as a direct result of colonial policy, which made “backward caste” identity the basis for distribution of economic and political benefits. Several caste associations emerged early on to take advantage of this policy, thus contributing to the increase in voluntary associational activity at the grassroots level (L. Rudolph, 1965; Rudolph and Rudolph, 1960; 1967; Hardgrave, 1969). In a path-dependent logic, these associations not only entrenched themselves within society and became vehicles of political mobilization, but they also produced a critical juncture, giving rise to the non-Brahmin Tamil Dravidian movement that perhaps redefined the nature of Tamil Nadu politics while drastically decimating the ideological space for a pan-Hindu social movement. In advancing this argument, my interpretation overlaps to a great degree with that of Subramanian (2002), who argues:
“Hindu nationalism was impeded for long in Tamil Nadu not by the ideology of the early Dravidian movement, but by the DMK’s construction of cohesive partisan subcultures incorporating networks linking various caste and religious groups” (p.31). There is evidence to demonstrate the early origins of associational life in Tamil Nadu, when it was still Madras Presidency under the British rule. However as Subramanian argues, it may be true that this social pluralism would not have been sustained without a political party that was supportive of such pluralism at the societal level. He argues that it was in fact the organizational pluralism that existed within the DMK in the form of cadre autonomy and flexibility that sustained associational activity in Tamil Nadu. DMK embraced these organizations, strengthening their grassroots presence and operation. Chandra (2004) makes a similar argument regarding the nature of recruitment and promotion of new leaders within the party hierarchy. She argues that inclusive parties that politically incorporate marginalized citizens can prevent the space for narrow sectarian mobilization. Where my argument differs from Subramanian and Chandra is that while the DMK’s party culture may have promoted associational life, these associations have become important in their own right. They are so indispensable to electoral victories that parties, irrespective of internal organization, have had to be responsive to their demands.

What is also interesting about Subramanian’s argument is his differentiation between the two different styles of populism that have come to characterize the DMK and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu. He distinguishes between AIADMK’s paternalistic populism as opposed to DMK’s assertive populism:
“Assertive populism urges excluded groups towards militant action to enter imperfectly inclusive public spheres. It creates entitlements to education, jobs, loans, subsidized producer goods, and sometimes small pieces of property. Assertive populist regimes accommodate demands presented as those of a popular community more readily than those asserted on behalf of specific interest groups…The assertive populist outlook regards the activists’ self-willed activity as the basis of the movement and the social changes it introduces…It serves to legitimize the distribution of patronage among activists, who are not required to defer to party bosses as they would to traditional patrons…Paternalist populism promises that a benevolent leader, party or state will enforce community norms. It takes these norms to require that the poor and powerless be provided subsidized wage goods and protection from repressive elites. Along with the relative passivity of paternalist populist supporters comes a weaker party organization having little ability to challenge the leader…As part of its intolerance of independent initiative, paternalist populism shows a greater inclination to control independent associations than assertive populism does.” [p. 75] (emphasis added)

This ties in neatly with Widlund’s (2000) delineation of the AIADMK as a party revolving around the personality cult of the leader vs. the DMK as a strong cadre-based clientelistic party. This may further explain why associational life at the local level waxes and wanes in its effectiveness to make demands on the state and receive goods and services. While both parties engage in populist patronage politics, it is the DMK [with its
brand of assertive populism] that is truly able to create strong credible linkages with local informal networks with the help of activist cadres who have a lot of flexibility and autonomy. Though the AIADMK emerged from the same ideological milieu as the DMK, it has failed to develop strong cadre-based organizational roots as the DMK. Centralized party control has weakened the power and political leverage of the local party units and workers, thus impeding a strong linkage with the voters at the grassroots level, despite the fact that fan clubs have been an important mobilizational base for the party. This might be the reason why the periods when the AIADMK has been in power in the last two decades the RSS has perceived a window of opportunity to establish itself through service provision in urban poor neighborhoods, because the AIADMK party workers are not able to decisively make allocation and distribution decisions as compared to the DMK cadres. Many scholars have concurred that AIADMK rule, whether under MGR or Jayalalitha, has always been very much top down with every small decision having to go through the party high command, thus severely curtailing the autonomy of local-level workers who find it hard to build credible links with the communities in such a scenario. This is again a very interesting line of argument that needs to be further verified by a detailed investigation of the role of party workers at the local level.

Yet another interesting line of investigation would be the intra-state differences in the influence of the Hindu organizations. This was discussed in the Karnataka chapter in some detail. Although Tamil Nadu is a state that has remained unperturbed or oblivious to the ascendance of Hindu nationalist politics at the national level or even in neighboring states [except for the brief period of intense mobilization by Hindu organizations in the late 1990s under the guise of festival celebrations; this has been discussed earlier in the
chapter], there are two pockets within the state that are perceived to be regions where the RSS has attained limited success: these are Kanyakumari and Coimbatore. While Kanyakumari, the southern-most of tip of India, has seen divisive conflict between Hindu and Christian fisherman groups, Coimbatore experienced open clashes and riots between Hindus and Muslims in the mid-1990s, right around the time that the Hindu organizations were becoming visible through provocative processions and celebrations in Chennai city too. The RSS claims that it has a significant presence at the local level in both these regions, although it is difficult to verify this. The RSS reports about welfare activities do not provide detailed statistics for every district. However, the figure below gives us some indication of the variation within the state between the north and south regions (See Figure 4.5).
Figure 4.5: A comparison of welfare projects across the four categories (education, healthcare, social organization, and self-reliance) in north and south Tamil Nadu

The above graph is not conclusive about the strength of the RSS in the southern part of the state, where Coimbatore and Kanyakumari fall. In fact, the RSS does not seem to have fared any better in the south as compared to the north except in the area of social organization. However, in 2009, this sector seems to have taken a hit as well. They seem to have improved their presence in education and even more substantially in self-reliance. This is consistent with the arguments and evidence from interviews that I have presented.

above for the most part. As the residents in Chennai indicated, they have never been averse to using the services of the Seva Bharati, particularly if it is free education for their children, or services that they find useful (self-reliance activities or vocational and job training programs for women and unemployed youth). However, it has never translated necessarily into an attachment or proclivity for the RSS ideology. This is clearly indicated in how the Seva Bharati’s projects with respect to social organization (the term they use for their attempts at social engineering and bringing about homogeneity and unity among the various castes through ideological and religious activities) have actually declined in the south. This is not to deny that RSS did experience limited success in these pockets. What is the reason for that? Is it an absence of associational life or is it the failure of associations to engage with the political parties? One might speculate that Coimbatore, once a flourishing industrial center, has suffered a drastic decline of industries in the mid-1990s, creating a vacuum in formal trade unionist associational activity at the local level, which was then filled by the Sangh organizations. This would perhaps explain the success of the Seva Bharati with respect to self-reliance as well as social organization initiatives for a brief period in these pockets as indicated by Figure 4.5. However, the BJP and RSS influence is already on the decline here. The RSS, I would argue, never really had an extensive grassroots presence. It was merely able to exploit opportunistically some of the inter-group economic rivalries that were beginning to emerge due to industrial decline and the need for services that it was creating amongst the working class communities that found themselves suddenly without employment. It has once again become a stronghold of the DMK party in the last few elections. Associational life has been able to rebuild its clientelistic linkages with the DMK leaders
and workers and reestablish itself, thus decreasing the need for the RSS. Similarly, Subramanian (2001) has argued that Kanyakumari is the only place where Dravidian parties have been traditionally weak, and correspondingly associational linkages have not been strong either. Hence, it has been easier for RSS/BJP to establish itself here. Intra-state variation is an interesting phenomenon nonetheless, and the nature of associational activity and party structures needs to be studied more closely in these areas.

I have argued that we need to look at the role of pre-existing civil society organizations in urban poor neighborhoods in order to explain the variation in the success of RSS’s welfare organizations. Informal community-based neighborhood associations such as fan clubs, youth groups, resident welfare associations, women’s self-help groups often exist and operate in poor urban neighborhoods, engendering collective bargaining amongst the poor residents. Where these organizations are able to form linkages with political parties through slum leaders, councilors, or local political party workers, they are able to trade their votes for better provision of goods and services. This clientelistic relationship not only provides much needed welfare services but also simultaneously narrows the opportunity space available for the Hindu Right groups to gain a foothold in these places. Conversely, as I demonstrated in the case of Bangalore city in Karnataka in the previous chapter, places with weak local associations and declining linkages with political channels are where the Hindu social service projects are valued by local residents. This is the micro-level causal mechanism that determines whether or not the Hindu nationalist social welfare provision succeeds or not. In the next chapter, I use national elections survey data to analyze at the national level the reasons for the variation in the support for the Hindu nationalist organizations. I examine the relationship between
associational membership, satisfaction with the state governments’ service provision, and support for the Hindu Right. I examine the link between membership in associations at the individual level and the corresponding support for the RSS.
CHAPTER FIVE
ASSOCIATIONAL MEMBERSHIP AND SUPPORT FOR THE SANGH:
ANALYSIS OF SURVEY DATA

SUMMARY:

Social service organizations belonging to the Hindu Right use welfare provision to entrench themselves in urban slums across India. However, their presence in urban areas varies substantially across space. What explains why the Hindu Right’s welfare projects thrive in some places but not in others? Using the cases of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, I have examined the variation in the reach and spread of the Seva Bharati, the welfare provision wing of the RSS. I have argued that the Seva Bharati’s activities fail when local informal neighborhood level associations in urban slums function as efficient political patronage networks, inducing state political parties to meet welfare needs adequately. When neighborhood networks are strong and well linked to local party officials, the urban poor are able to bargain collectively for better service provision from political parties, thus decreasing their dependence on all other non-state social service groups. This chapter tests the central hypothesis of the dissertation using individual level survey data. The chapter begins with a reiteration of the emphasis placed in social services by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and its constituent organizations, since the 1990s, followed by a discussion of the national level trends and variation in the level of service provision by the organization. I use the national elections survey data from 2004 to analyze at the national level the reasons for the variation in the support for the Hindu nationalist organizations. I examine the relationship between associational membership, linkages with the state government, and support for the Hindu Right. The models indicate that membership in non-sectarian associations is positively correlated with the belief that the state government matters. This is not surprising considering that associations are successful in receiving goods and services only when they build linkages with local party/government officials. In contrast, membership in religious organizations is negatively correlated with the preference or the state government, because religious associations provide precisely the goods and services that the state fails to deliver to these neighborhoods. “Secular” associational membership is also negatively correlated with support for the Hindu Right. This supports my claim that local associations play a crucial role, particularly through the linkages they create with the government, in reducing the need for non-state social service organizations including the Hindu Right.
5.1 REITERATING THE PUZZLE

The electoral defeat of the Hindu nationalist party in the last two parliamentary elections in India, and the absence of widespread large-scale religious violence since the 1992 riots, have often been considered as symptomatic of the retreat of right wing Hindu forces in Indian politics. This however ignores the network of powerful civil society organizations that constitute the Hindu nationalist movement operating outside the realm of electoral politics. They have strongly entrenched themselves amongst urban slum neighborhoods across Indian cities by filling gaps in social services, particularly since the rolling back of the state due to neoliberal reforms. My paper addresses the empirical puzzle of variation in the success of such sectarian Hindu organizations across Indian cities.

As has been explained in detail in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the RSS, the parent body of most Hindu right-wing organizations in India, is an all-male, highly disciplined, hierarchical organization that seeks to “organize” Hindu society by incorporating ever more segments of Hindus into its ranks. Over the years, it has diversified organizationally by creating and supporting various affiliate organizations aimed at specific audiences. The BJP (the Hindu nationalist party) has been the political face of Hindu nationalism since the Eighties, with close ties to the RSS. Other affiliates include a student wing, a religious wing, workers’ and farmers’ unions, a women’s wing, and a welfare service provision wing consisting of organizations working in tribal areas and urban slums through initiatives such as formal and non-formal education, and healthcare. The RSS and its affiliates are referred to collectively as the Sangh Parivar.
The RSS has worked at the grassroots level to transform society from bottom up primarily through establishing *Shakhas* 79 in as many neighborhoods as possible. However, most of these *Shakhas* for a long time catered primarily to upper caste Hindus. Secondly, most of them were treated as a recreational club that combined sports and some cultural education. Even though the number of *Shakhas* has increased manifold (See Figure 5.1), this was not seen as an effective strategy of building mass support at the grassroots level, particularly when it came to establishing a significant presence among the marginalized lower caste sections among the Hindus. In fact, the *Shakhas* themselves have undergone some changes. The introduction of weekly and monthly meetings, to supplement the daily two-hour meetings, is a consequence of realizing the need for innovation and flexibility in order to accommodate people’s busy schedules (See Figure 5.2).

In addition to the continued emphasis on *Shakhas* also emerged the Sangh’s emphasis on social welfare and service provision in the late 1990s. It has gained prominence since then as an appealing strategy to reach out to and gain legitimacy among various sections of Hindus that previously did not have an affinity towards the Hindu nationalist ideology. The *Seva Bharati*, an affiliate of the RSS created in 1989, is one such organization that was created specifically to target poor urban neighborhoods populated primarily by lower caste Hindus. It has significantly expanded its operations since the late 1990s. The number of welfare projects implemented by the *Seva Bharati*

79 *Shakha* (lit. branch) is the basic organizational unit of the RSS. It is a term used to denote the daily gathering of all members in a particular neighborhood. The daily programs consist of physical exercises, patriotic songs, and group discussions on various subjects, particularly related to politics and Hindu nationalism.
has nearly quadrupled, going from 15,063 projects in 1997 and 25,131 in 2004 to 59,076 projects in 2009 (See Figure 1.2 in Chapter One). It reaches out to urban slum communities through health and education services, economic development/self-reliance projects, and “social organization/social harmony”. Education projects comprise a major portion of the Seva projects especially in the form of informal tutoring centers that conduct free evening classes in slum neighborhoods to help poor students with schoolwork. These centers are an excellent way of establishing roots in local neighborhoods. In addition to this, almost all the affiliate organizations of the Sangh have been reoriented towards welfare and social service since the late 1990s (See Figure 5.3). All their activities and projects are overseen by the RSS, which coordinates the welfare initiative. In fact a new section was created within the RSS in 1989, called the Seva Vibhag, to coordinate this huge welfare effort. This section is in charge of collecting statistics about the various organizations’ projects, evaluating their reach and impact, and bringing out annual reports. The Seva Vibhag published its first annual report in 1995, the second in 1997, and the third in 2004. Starting from 2006, the reports have been produced regularly on an annual basis in order to keep abreast of this massive effort. In fact, the welfare provision effort is considered important enough that the supreme commander of the RSS summarizes the activities and achievements every year in his annual speech to the cadres.
Figure 5.1: Increase in the number of *Shakhas* organized by the Local RSS Branches
Figure 5.2: Trends in weekly and monthly Shakha meetings from 2004-2010
Figure 5.3: Number of Seva Bharati Welfare Projects Compared to the Total Number of Welfare Projects Initiated by the RSS from 1995-2009

However, there is tremendous variation in terms of how widespread the Sangh’s welfare work is across Indian states. If we examine the total number of welfare projects, or even just the category of education and healthcare projects, initiated by the Seva Bharati, there are some states where the reach and concentration of welfare work is consistently widespread while there are others where the Seva Bharati has not been able to create a huge network. This is evident from the figures presented below which compare the number of healthcare and education projects for the states by year (See Figures 5.4 and 5.5: The figures demonstrate that there is a substantial increase in the
number of projects overall in the period from 1995-2008. However, clearly, the RSS presence is some states is consistently higher than in others. It has increased its presence significantly in some states, whereas its presence has remained low or fizzled out in some states). This is interesting given that the RSS would like to establish a comparable presence in all states, since their primary goal is to organize society at the grassroots level throughout India. This figure also clearly shows that the Seva Bharati has not succeeded in establishing a firm presence in urban spaces in Tamil Nadu as compared to Karnataka through welfare provision initiatives. The previous chapters have already examined in detail the reasons for the variation in Seva Bharati’s presence in Karnataka vs. Tamil Nadu through the use of fieldwork data and interviews. In this chapter I will be focusing on national level trends and testing hypotheses to explain the variation at the national level.
Figure 5.4: The Variation in Seva Bharati’s Healthcare Projects across Indian States by Year
Figure 5.5: The Variation in Seva Bharati's Education Projects across Indian States by Year.
5.2 BACKGROUND ON THE RSS’S WELFARE WORK

What explains the significant variation in welfare work across the states? What explains the increasing levels of welfare provision since the late Nineties? As far as the literature goes, as has been already mentioned in Chapter 1, there is some amount of complacency in focusing on this aspect of the Hindu nationalist because of the electoral defeat of the BJP in the last two national parliamentary elections. Since much of the literature tends to focus primarily on the electoral side of right-wing politics, it misses the nuances of understanding Hind nationalism as a social movement that has constantly strategized to establish a grassroots presence and expand its social base not just for electoral purposes.

I argue that we need to look beyond electoral politics in order to understand the emergence and variable success of social welfare provision strategy of the RSS. The long-term goal of the RSS and its affiliate organizations is to transform India from a secular state into an exclusivist Hindu nation. However, most grassroots support for their work and their organizations among poor urban neighborhoods comes about not necessarily because of the appeal of the exclusivist ideology. Neither is their reach and influence uniform across all states and urban spaces therein. I argue that it is the need for public goods and services, particularly because of the retreat of the state in the post-liberalization era that creates a window of opportunity for the Sangh’s social service organization such as the Seva Bharati to step in. In fact education and healthcare, where acute need exists because of the inefficiencies in the state governments’ provision of these services, is where the Sangh has invested most of its resources with respect to social
service initiatives and projects. They have not only filled the void left by the retreat of the state, but have also increasingly used the opportunity to extend their mass base among marginalized subpopulations that were previously outside their ideological influence.

Mass support at the grassroots for the Hindu nationalist movement’s ideas and practices is constructed not through militant religious mobilization but rather through everyday interactions with the communities through its welfare projects, particularly education. Informal education/tutoring centres in slums have given them a way to interact with and mobilize a whole community in a way that the Shakha did not facilitate. The tutoring centres combine formal school curriculum with the Sangh’s own brand of Hindu nationalist ideology and cultural training, thus recruiting young students to its cause while building a credible image amongst indebted parents whom it also mobilizes through various community activities.

The strategy is one that clearly taps into the needs and aspirations of the lower caste communities, who yearn for good education that would give their children the advantage they never had, but also for greater acceptability within the Hindu hierarchy and are eager to learn the “Sanskritized” culture and practices of the upper castes. The tutorial centers are able to provide both. The Sangh views this as an efficient way to mobilize the lower castes and bring them into the Hindu fold, taking it one step closer to its imagined cohesive Hindu society.

This is not to say that welfare work is something entirely new and recent. The RSS has always been involved in welfare work from its inception, as have been its affiliates. What is remarkable about the welfare work in the Nineties is the huge
transformation in the nature of the work, the communities targeted, and the sheer scale and extent of the work. For instance in 1970s and 80s onwards, the VHP, the religious affiliate of the Sangh, was the organization that was most heavily involved in social service. Most of it was focused to a large extent on re-conversions to Hinduism and countering the influence of the Christian missionaries, particularly among tribal communities. The Sangh’s focus on urban slums is a Nineties phenomenon. In fact, the overall expansion of welfare work was so tremendous in this period that the RSS specially launched efforts to create a data bank to keep track of the projects and evaluate their impact, something that was never done before. Thus, welfare work became more of an organized streamlined effort that now involved huge investment of resources as well as annual evaluations.

The objective is not just social service. These projects and initiatives are seen as sites for dissemination of core Hindu nationalist ideas and ideological values in a subtle fashion. Most of the emphasis is on learning the correct moral values, imbibing the right cultural attributes, and learning about the country’s glorious past and historical traditions. Almost all of this is couched in religious terms, with Hindu religious values being emphasized as the noblest form of cultural tradition. This is then also subtly associated with ideas about nationalistic pride and patriotism. Defending what is Indian then becomes defending Hindu cultural practices, values, and traditions. All other forms of religious expression, though not always explicitly, are projected as antagonistic to what is Indian. These ideas are reinforced over and over again in everyday interactions through cultural classes at the tutorial centers for children, through religious activities, at vocational skills centers organized for women, and at the community celebration of
traditional Hindu festivals. Even when the slums or settlements are demographically and religiously diverse, non-Hindu students are forced to dress and pray the Hindu way in order to access the social services. The religious festivals celebrated are exclusively Hindu ones, which are emphasized as the true components of Indian culture and tradition. Thus, the idea that Indianness is contained in Hindu tradition, and the notion of other religious minorities being un-Indian, is something that is disseminated indirectly in small doses over time in non-aggressive and non-confrontational ways. Overt ideological statements or chauvinistic ideas about nationhood are pushed to the background. Instead, these organizations project themselves as charitable organizations providing for the needy, while simultaneously teaching them about Hindu religious rituals and cultural values. Religious ideas and symbols are then used to also create a natural affinity for the idea of a Hindu nation amongst these communities. It is an equally and in fact a far more effective way of establishing credibility and expanding the movement’s base among this section rather than strong doses of Hindu nationalist rhetoric that have no practical meaning for these marginalized sections.

5.3 BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter 1, it has already been pointed out that as far as the literature goes, there is some amount of complacency in focusing on this aspect of the Hindu nationalism, particularly because of the electoral defeat of the BJP, the Hindu nationalist party closely
allied with the RSS, in the last two national parliamentary elections. Since much of the
literature tends to focus primarily on the electoral side of right-wing politics, it fails to
understand Hindu nationalism as a social movement that has constantly strategized to
establish a grassroots presence and expand its social base outside the electoral arena.
Most scholars who trace the rise of Hindu nationalism in India tend to focus on the
political success of the BJP alone. Many attribute it to the breakdown of the “Congress
system” [Kohli, 1990; Yadav, 1996]. As Congress’s catch-all party status declined in
the Nineties, the BJP emerged as the most viable party to replace it nationally,
particularly by using religious appeals to reach out to Hindu voters [Hardgrave and
Kochanek, 2008; Ludden, 1996]. Some argue that the BJP’s success has resulted from its
ability to tailor its ideology to appeal to regional audiences (Hansen and Jaffrelot, 1998)
while others observe that the BJP’s greatest gains particularly outside its traditional upper
caste/class base have been due to the support its allies have received (Heath, 1999).
Others attribute the popularity of Hindutva politics to a change in mass ideology. They
argue that the party has used longstanding Hindu-Muslim grievances such as the
Ayodhya issue to advance its sectarian agenda. Neither of these explains the expansion of
the Hindu nationalist movement through welfare provision. The RSS and its affiliates
constitute an exceptionally strong organizational network in India, otherwise
characterized as having weak associational life (Chhibber, 1999).

There are some case studies that have acknowledged the strategic role of the
Sangh’s expanding social services in building a Hindu consciousness and mobilizing

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80 This term was used to describe the pre-Nineties party system in India characterized by one-party dominance. The Congress party, which absorbed and internalized all political competition, effectively operated as an amalgamation of factions or a coalition of state parties by assimilating a lot of diverse group interests in its fold.
sections of the population that were hitherto outside the influence of the Sangh ideology [Jaffrelot, 1996; Hansen, 1999; Jaffrelot, 2005b; Thachil 2009]. For instance Hansen (1999) terms the Sangh Parivar’s network in Pune city (Maharashtra state) an “alternative civil society with separate schools, its own banks, dominance in a large number of colleges, its own associations for youth, students, women, children, social organizations working in the slum, informal networks…” (p. 117). The RSS itself admits the importance and exclusivist nature of this strategy: “Our programs and activities are but the outer form of our sevakarya. The ultimate object of all these endeavors is Hindu Sangathan – consolidation and strengthening of Hindu society” (H.V. Seshadri, former General Secretary of the RSS, as cited in Sabrang Communications, 2002, p. 56). Scholars have also recognized the emphasis placed on education as part of the RSS work and welfare projects in building roots among marginalized communities that are inadequately serviced by the state (Basu et al., 1993; Jaffrelot, 2005; Sarkar, 2005; Froerer, 2007; Menon, 2010]. Most of these studies however fail to address the puzzle of spatial variation.

5.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

I focus on why the RSS’s social service activities tend to succeed in some places and not others. But even before we get to this, the first question we need to answer is why would the lower caste populations, who had thus far resisted the RSS and had not developed an affinity for the RSS ideology, suddenly start supporting them in the Nineties. Although the investment of time and resources in welfare provision by the RSS
were undoubtedly high, this by itself does not explain the phenomenal success of the welfare work. We have to understand the context, which increased the likelihood of success.

I argue that we need to draw from the literature pertaining to social movements, particularly its insights about the political opportunity structure, to understand the factors that enabled the success of the welfare projects among the targeted communities at the time that they did. As the welfare state has shrunk since the onset of neoliberal reforms, it is the poor casual laborers living in urban slums that have felt the crunch the most because of decreasing access to social services, particularly education and healthcare. Since buying services from private service providers is unaffordable for most of these communities, they come to depend on alternative providers such as NGOs and charitable institutions, which not just provide these services for free but also help navigate the complex bureaucratic channels that can help them access the government. This is precisely the space that the Seva Bharati eases itself into quite easily. The Seva Bharati’s welfare work is concentrated in slums and low income settlements, and most of the resources tend to be delegated to education support services for children (through tutorial classes) or vocational skills training for women such as sewing, typing, or computer and other job skills for the youth, and so on. It uses these services to engage with the larger community, women in particular, thus creating something akin to patronage linkages with the residents who come to depend upon them for education, healthcare, vocational training, help with employment, as well as political access. This is a good strategy to reach out to new social bases, socialize them gradually into the Hindu nationalist ideology, and recruit them as loyal supporters of the broader movement.
The welfarist strategy was not conceived as a response to neoliberalism or globalization, but has certainly benefited from it. As Jaffrelot (2005) and others have argued, the growth of the Hindu nationalist movement at the grassroots had stalled due to the lower caste mobilization and the emergence of lower caste parties in the Nineties. The RSS was facing an ideological dilemma in trying to argue for a harmonious Hindu society that incorporated all castes on the one hand, but at the same time opposing quotas and reservation policies for the Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) that were announced by the government following the Mandal Commission report. The Mandal issue brought back into focus the sharp divide between the upper and lower castes not just across India but also within the Sangh Parivar and its ideology. [Jaffrelot, 2003b, p. 454]

It is in this context that the RSS began to look for new ways to reach out to these marginalized sections that perceived the RSS as a Brahminic entity. It started to invest in welfare projects targeted at the poor needy lower caste sections of the population, particularly in the urban areas, in order to bring about social assimilation, cultivate an affinity for the Sangh and its ideology. As Jaffrelot (2003b) argues,

“…Seva Bharati’s ideological purpose is to divert the Dalits, who are naturally appreciative of charitable work, away from egalitarian ideologies and to assimilate them into a ‘Hindu nation’. While these social groups were trying to emancipate themselves more effectively, neither the RSS not its affiliates were in a position to make inroads among the Dalits. It was difficult for a movement dominated by the high castes to reach a
segment of the population so different in terms of caste and social status.

Seva Bharati was intended to put up with these defects.” (p. 455)

The strategy succeeded in terms of reach and influence not only because of the efforts of the RSS but also because of the conducive atmosphere created by the economic reforms. The strategy was adopted at a time that India had initiated economic reforms. It started becoming successful in urban areas when the economic adjustments and policies started creating an increased need for welfare, which was met inadequately by a state apparatus that was shrinking away from social welfare spending.

I have argued above that we need to understand the timing of expansion in welfare provision in terms of a political opportunity structure that is created by the implementation of the neoliberal reforms. However, this still does not explain why the RSS has variable levels of success, which then brings me to the main focus of my theoretical framework - the explanation of the spatial variation in success. Where do the Sangh initiatives miss their mark? Where do they fail?

To answer these questions, I examine the key role of local associational networks in making political parties responsive to the urban poor. Informal community-based neighborhood associations such as film clubs, youth groups, resident welfare associations, and women’s self-help groups often exist and operate in poor urban neighborhoods, engendering collective bargaining amongst the poor residents. However, simply being part of associations does not guarantee public services. Where these networks build linkages with local political actors and parties, and establish long-term stable clientelistic relationships, votes are traded for public provision of goods and
services. Strong linkages with the state government, mediated through these local associational networks, reduce dependence on alternative non-state service providing organizations. Parties are induced to provide better public goods and services in return for the cooperation of these associational networks. Thus, where these organizations are able to form linkages with political parties through slum leaders, councilors, or local political party workers, they are able to pressure politicians for better welfare provision, thereby narrowing the opportunity space available for the RSS to gain a foothold through service provision. Conversely, places with weak ties with the state government and weak local associations are where the Hindu social service projects tend to be highly valued by local residents. This is the micro-level causal mechanism that determines whether or not the Hindu nationalist social welfare provision succeeds or not. These are the arguments that I seek to test using national elections survey data. The micro level causal mechanisms have already been demonstrated in the two empirical chapters preceding this one.

Based on this proposed causal mechanism, I derive the following testable hypotheses operating at the individual level:

**H1a:** *Members of local non-sectarian associations are more likely to develop strong linkages with the state government.*

Participation in such local associational activity is likely to be positively correlated with a strong preference for the state government since these are the clientelistic exchange relationships through which the members receive services.
**H1b**: *Members of religious organizations are less likely to develop strong ties with the state government.*

People who join religious organizations do so precisely because their needs are better fulfilled by the religious associations rather than the government. Therefore membership in religious organizations is likely to be negatively correlated with a preference for the state government.

**H2**: *The higher the rates of participation in local non-sectarian associational life, the lower will be the support for the Sangh organizations.*

Members of non-sectarian organizations, particularly when they are able to develop linkages with the government, are able to receive goods and services they need from the state government. This reduces their dependence on religious organizations, and hence the support for the Sangh and its affiliates.

These hypotheses are designed to test at the individual level how associational membership and linkages created with the state government affect people’s support for the Sangh’s social service organizations. I use data from the National Election Study (NES) 2004 conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) to test these hypotheses. CSDS has conducted comprehensive post-election surveys since the 1996 Parliamentary elections. The surveys use multi-stage stratified random sampling techniques in order to ensure representation of the social, cultural, and political diversity of the population within the cross-section samples. The 2004 survey has 27,189 respondents spread over all 28 Indian states, and 2 out of the 7 union territories.
5.5 DATA & ANALYSIS

5.5.1 DEFINING THE VARIABLES

Outcome Variable for H1a & H1b:

**stategov_matters**: My theory predicts that when local associations exist, and they create clientelistic ties with the state government, they act as conduits between the voters and the government, deliver much needed public goods and services, and as a consequence reduce the dependence on the *Sangh* for social services. The problem is that there is not a good measure of the clientelistic linkages between local associations and the state, which is why I use the *stategov_matters* variable. While clientelistic relations are hard to measure, the idea is to be able to gauge whether people are closely tied to the state government. This variable indicates a strong preference for the state government on the part of the voters. My theory predicts that secular associational membership should be positively correlated with a strong preference for the state government. Religious associational membership is less likely to be correlated with such a preference because religious organizations are presumably already filling the service gap through their welfare projects. The need to create linkages with the state government is not as necessary for the members of such organizations.

To construct this variable, I used a question from the NES 2004 survey that asks respondents what mattered to them most when voting – whether it was the state government, or the central government. If state government matters the most to people
when voting, presumably there is a strong clientelsitic linkage between the government, local networks, and the voters.

**Outcome Variable for H2** [Individual support for the Sangh organizations]

The NES 2004 data does not directly measure the respondent’s support specifically for the *Sangh Parivar’s* welfare organizations such as the *Seva Bharati*. In order to test the hypotheses, we therefore need to operationalize a variable that is a good proxy for the individual support for these organizations. There are two questions in the 2004 NES survey that can be used as suitable proxies.

a) **Ram_Temple**: This variable is constructed using a question that asks the respondent whether s/he agrees that on the site of the *Babri Masjid*, only Ram temple should be built. This is coded as an ordinal variable with three possible values: 0 for “disagree”, 1 for “no opinion”, and 2 for “agree”. While this question does not directly measure how much the respondent values the social services provided by a *Sangh Parivar* organization, the issue itself is so fundamental to RSS ideology that it is constantly a topic of discussion and debate. The spatial construction of the Hindu nation that the Sangh reiterates emphasizes the reclaiming of such Hindu symbols in the name of patriotism and nationalism [Corbridge and Simpson, 2006; Basu et al., 1993]. This idea is communicated both explicitly and indirectly in the *Shakha* meetings, but also in the culture classes taught at the tutoring centers. In fact the *Seva Bharati* produces its own course material for these classes that glorifies the Hindu religious history of India and talks about how this heritage has been under siege ever since the “invaders” have ruled India and imposed their policies on a Hindu nation. The RSS and its affiliates were the
prime movers in the agitation around the issue of construction of the temple in the Eighties and Nineties. This issue therefore is inextricably associated with the Sangh organizations in people’s minds, and these “patriotic” ideals are reinforced by Sangh social service organizations through various means at the grassroots level. Thus, if the respondents depend on the Sangh Parivar’s organizations for welfare services, it is highly likely that they will also agree to the construction of the temple on this disputed site.

b) Ban_Conversion: This variable is constructed using a question that asks the respondent whether s/he agrees that there should be a legal ban on religious conversions. This is also coded as an ordinal variable with three possible values: 0 for “disagree”, 1 for “no opinion”, and 2 for “agree”. Again, though this question does not directly measure support for the Sangh social welfare programs, one of the primary reasons that the Seva Bharati has chosen to reach out to the slums through education is to counter the influence of Christian missionaries who the RSS accuses of using their schools to reach out to and convert poor Hindus. Again, much of the emphasis on Hindu cultural and religious practices in the tutoring centers is to prevent other non-Hindu charitable organizations to establish a base in these communities. For instance, a Seva Bharati publication evaluating the impact of the welfare work pointedly states: “It has been the experience that Seva activities generate strength and confidence in society. In regions where Seva activities are flourishing, society automatically and instinctively reacts against onslaughts. Instead of conversion, one witnesses the return of hundreds to their mother faith. No offence to points of Hindu faith is meekly tolerated…” (Singh, 1997). Educational centers run by the VHP amongst the tribal populations frequently report how their activities were able to reconvert the tribal children and adults who have mistakenly
strayed away from Hinduism under the influence of Christian charities. [Seshadri, 2001; Froerer, 2006] As I witnessed in my own observation of the Seva Bharati tutoring centers and community activities, the teachers constantly emphasize the need to recognize the greatness of Hindu values and not to be swayed by material inducements offered by non-Hindu organizations whose main purpose is to create divides within Hindu society. If the Sangh Parivar organizations are a prominent part of the respondent’s lives, we would expect that they would agree to the legal ban too.

**Independent Variable for H1a & H2**

**Orgmember** [Individual participation in “secular” non-sectarian associational activity at the local level]: To construct this variable, I used a question from the NES 2004 survey that asks respondents whether, aside from caste and religious organizations, they belong to any other organizations such as co-operatives, trade unions, and welfare organizations. This is a good measure of how involved people in associations at the community level. It is a binary variable with the values 0 for “No” and 1 for “Yes”.

This is also the independent variable for testing H2. If, as per my theory, participation in associational life reduces dependence on the Sangh for services, then we would expect respondents who voted “yes” to this question to be less likely to support the Sangh organizations [that is, less likely to “agree” on construction of the Ram temple, less likely to agree to a legal ban on conversion] than people who said “no”.

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**Independent Variable for H1b**

**Religiousorg_member** [Individual membership in sectarian religious organizations]:
This is constructed using a question that asks respondents whether they are members of any religious/caste organization or association. The Sangh Parivar organizations would broadly fall under this category because of their emphasis on Hindu religious values and culture, and community mobilization through celebration of Hindu festivals, and organizing religious activities for the women at the local Hindu temples. This is also a binary variable with values of 0 and 1.

**Control Variables**

In order to test the relationship between the outcome variables and the independent variables that I have outlined, we also need to see whether the expected relationship holds when we control for variables that might confound the relationship being tested due to their correlation with the dependent and independent variables.

a) **localparties_matter**: This control variable is constructed based on a question that asks respondents whether, compared to national parties, regional/local parties can provide better government. This is coded as an ordinal variable with three possible values: 0 for “disagree”, 1 for “no opinion”, and 2 for “agree”. Some states in India have strong regional parties that win substantial vote shares and play a crucial role in state-level politics. But there are some states where regional parties do not exist or do not play a significant role, yet the people might develop strong ties with the state government and the national parties controlling the government through patronage networks. Irrespective
of whether or not there are regional parties operating at the state level, voters may be able to build strong linkages with the state government, and using this control variable ensures that people’s preferences for the state government is taken into account regardless of whether the preference is for local parties or national parties.

b) stategov_sat: This control variable is constructed based on a question that asks respondents about how satisfied they are with the performance of the state government. It is an ordinal variable with three possible values: 0 for “disagree”, 1 for “no opinion”, and 2 for “agree”. People may or may not be satisfied with the performance of the state government on various counts and indicators, yet they may develop strong linkages with the government anyway to make claims and demands on it for goods and services. This control variable helps us isolate that effect.

c) state BJPvoted: Voting for the BJP at the state level elections may be indicative of the sympathy for the Hindu nationalist ideology and program. Respondents who have voted for the BJP in the past few elections may be likely to support the Sangh irrespective of their satisfaction with the state government’s service provision and irrespective of their dependence on the Sangh organizations for welfare. To control for this effect, I construct a variable based on a question that asks respondents whether they have been BJP voters for the past few elections in state-level elections.

d) religiosity: Higher levels of religiosity among the respondents may be prompting them to support the Sangh organizations, which alongside welfare provision also heavily stress Hindu religious practices through celebration of festivals, and community activities centred around the local temple. Regardless of their satisfaction with state service
delivery or need for Sangh’s welfare provision, respondents may be supporting these organizations for religious reasons. To control for this I use two questions from the survey: one measures how frequently respondents attend religious services, and the second asks how frequently they make donations for religious activity.

e) **State dummies**: It is important to control for state fixed effects. I include dummy variables for the states in the model to in order to control for characteristics and effects of the states.

f) I also include other **demographic control variables**, specifically: age, gender, income, education, and whether the respondent lives in an urban location. I include a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is Hindu because presumably Hindus are likely to have a greater affinity for the *Sangh* organizations as compared to other religious groups. I also include dummy variables indicating whether the respondent belongs to a Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Caste.

### 5.5.2 TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

To test H1a and H1b, I used logit models since the outcome variables is a binary response variable. The results tables are presented at the end of this chapter (See Tables 5.1 and 5.2).
Let us interpret each of these models in terms of odds ratios. Let us first consider
the relationship between membership in non-sectarian associations and preference for the
state government, which is **Model H1a**. Looking at the odds ratios table for this model
(See Table 5.1), we can state the results thus: As voters become members of secular
associations (moving from 0 to 1), the odds of the state government mattering to them
increase by a factor of 1.106, holding all other variables constant. If we interpret it as a
percentage change in odds, for voters who are members of secular associations, the odds
of having a strong preference for the state government increases by 10.6% as compared
to voters who are not members of such associations, holding all other variables constant.
This result is significant at the 95% confidence level (See Table 5.2). Also, the likelihood
ratio chi-square of 1431.399 with a p-value <.001 tells us that the model as a whole is
statistically significant, as compared to a model with no predictors. Hence, we can state
that there is a strong positive correlation between membership in a non-sectarian secular
association and a strong tie to the state government when it comes to voting preferences.

Let us now consider the relationship between membership in sectarian religious
organizations and a preference for the state government, i.e. **Model H1b**. If we consider
the odds ratios for this model (See Table 5.3), we can see that for voters who are
members of religious associations, the odds of having a strong voting preference for the
state government decreases by a factor of 0.856. Interpreted as a percent change in odds,
we can say that for voters who are members of sectarian associations, the odds of having
a strong preference for the state government decreases by 14.4%, holding all other
variables constant [See table 5.4]. This relationship is significant at the 90% confidence
level. Also, the likelihood ratio chi-square of 1428.896 with a p-value <.001 tells us that
the model as a whole is statistically significant, as compared to model with no predictors. This demonstrates that when the voters are members of alternative sectarian religious organizations, their ties to the state government decline in importance because there is a high likelihood that their service needs are being satisfied by the sectarian religious organizations in the first place. Conversely, when people are members of secular local association, there is a higher likelihood of them developing strong linkages and hence a strong preference for the state government. These are precisely the channels through which clientelistic exchange relationships are mediated, linking the voters to the state government, and creating channels of access for claim-making and provision of goods and services.

For each of these above models, I compared nested models using an LR test as well as a Wald test to check whether the coefficient on the predictor variable is equal to 0. The LR test allows us to test whether adding the predictor variable to the model significantly improves the fit of the model compared to a model that does not contain it. For Model H1a, the test statistic has a p-value <0.05, indicating that adding orgmember as predictor variable results in a statistically significant improvement in model fit. The Wald test for the coefficient associated with orgmember yields a p-value <0.05, which means that we can reject the null hypothesis that the coefficient is equal to zero. Similarly for model H1b, the LR test statistic has a p-value <0.10, indicating that adding religiousorg_member results in a better model fit with the result being significant at the 90% confidence level. Similarly, the Wald test for testing whether the coefficient is equal to zero indicates that we can reject the null hypothesis at the 90% confidence level.
The second order of business is to test whether and how associational activity, and membership in secular organizations, is correlated with support specifically for the RSS and its affiliate organizations. Does non-sectarian associational activity, as I claim, reduce support for the RSS? I used ordered logit models to test this hypothesis, since the outcome variables, \textit{ram.temple} and \textit{ban.conversion}, are both ordinal. The results tables are presented at the end of the chapter (See Tables 5.5 and 5.7). I first test the correlation between associational membership (\textit{orgmember}) and \textit{ram.temple}, one of the proxy variables that measure voters’ support for the RSS (Table 5.5). \textit{Orgmember} is negatively correlated with \textit{ram.temple}, and is significant at the 0.001 level. I also estimated an LR test by comparing the log likelihood from the full model with that of a restricted model that omits \textit{orgmember}. The result can be interpreted to mean that the effect of associational membership is significant at the 99.9\% level [LR Chi-square = 15.99, \textit{df} = 1, and p-value = 0.0001]. We can interpret the results again in terms of odds ratios, that is, factor changes in the odds of lower outcomes vs. higher outcomes. The odds of agreeing on the issue of construction of a temple on the disputed site are 0.867 times lower for people who are members of secular associations than those who are not, holding all other variables constant. Or in other words, the odds of agreeing to the temple are 13.3\% smaller for associational members than non-members, holding all other variables constant. (See Table 5.6) This result is significant at the 99.9\% confidence level. Also, the likelihood ratio chi-square of 4635.862 with a p-value <.001 tells us that the model as a whole is statistically significant, as compared to model with no predictors.

Similarly, I tested the correlation between associational membership (\textit{orgmember}) and \textit{ban.conversion}, the other proxy measuring support for the RSS (Table 5.7). I find
that \textit{orgmember} is again negatively correlated with the outcome variable, and is significant at the 0.05 level. The LR test comparing the full model with the restricted model omitting \textit{orgmember} again resulted in a significant chi-square statistic, indicating that the effect of associational membership is significant at the 95% confidence level [LR Chi-square = 5.07, \textit{df} = 1, p-value = 0.0243]. We can interpret the results in terms of factor changes in the odds of lower outcomes vs. higher outcomes. The odds of agreeing to a ban on conversion are 0.921 times smaller for people who are members of secular associations than those who are not, holding all other variables constant. Or in other words, the odds of agreeing to the ban are 7.9% lower for associational members than non-members, holding all other variables constant. (See Table 5.8) This result is significant at the 95% confidence level. Also, the likelihood ratio chi-square of 2580.93 with a p-value <.001 tells us that the model as a whole is statistically significant, as compared to model with no predictors.

Both these models demonstrate the crucial role played by secular associational activity in reducing the space for sectarian organizations such as the RSS. When voters are engaged in non-sectarian associations at the local level, it reduces their dependence on the Sangh organizations for service delivery, which gets reflected in lower levels of support for the RSS organizations and their core ideological positions.
5.6 CONCLUSION

The evidence presented in this chapter indicates support for my hypotheses when we test the relationship at the macro level using national level survey data. We can conclude with a high degree of confidence that associational membership, in tandem with strong ties to the state government, does influence people’s support for the Sangh organizations in a significant way. I tested the micro-level nuances of the causal mechanism by examining these hypotheses in the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, particularly in the capital cities of Bangalore and Chennai respectively, using fieldwork, observation, and exhaustive interviews, in the previous chapters. The results presented here supplement the findings of the two chapters by indicating that the results are generalizable, and that it is possible to apply the proposed theoretical framework to understand the impact of associational life on proliferation of the Sangh organizations at aggregate national level as well, providing evidence in support for these hypotheses, thus bolstering the conclusions presented in this paper.
**Model H1a:**
Correlation between secular associational membership and preference for the state government

+ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.010, *** p<0.0010

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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
<th>Std Err</th>
<th>Confidence Interval</th>
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<tr>
<td>_Iv1_34</td>
<td>0.372***</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.302,0.459</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.1: Correlation between secular associational membership and preference for the state government

<p>|                       | b     | z     | P&gt;|z| | %  | %StdX | SoofX |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|------|----|-------|-------|
| orgmember_1           | 0.10072 | 2.374 | 0.018 | 10.6 | 3.8 | 0.3745 |
| Localparty_r          | 0.15315 | 8.577 | 0.000 | 16.6 | 13.7 | 0.8410 |
| stategov_sat          | -0.09599 | -5.767 | 0.000 | -9.2 | -8.6 | 0.9412 |
| state_bjpv_d          | -0.28006 | -7.217 | 0.000 | -24.4 | -11.2 | 0.4254 |
| agecat                | -0.07638 | -3.841 | 0.000 | -7.4 | -5.7 | 0.7706 |
| edulevel              | -0.01979 | -1.474 | 0.140 | -2.0 | -2.6 | 1.3072 |
| urban                 | -0.05709 | -1.430 | 0.153 | -5.5 | -2.4 | 0.4212 |
| hindu                 | -0.16789 | -4.214 | 0.000 | -15.5 | -7.3 | 0.4495 |
| sc                    | 0.17778  | 3.865  | 0.000 | 19.5 | 6.7  | 0.3660 |
| st                    | 0.06344  | 1.160  | 0.246 | 6.5  | 2.3  | 0.3643 |
| obc                   | 0.03091  | 0.785  | 0.433 | 3.1  | 1.5  | 0.4719 |
| female                | -0.08438 | -2.765 | 0.006 | -8.1 | -4.1 | 0.4982 |
| class                 | -0.05706 | -5.604 | 0.000 | -5.5 | -8.8 | 1.6113 |
| _Iv1_2                | -0.65200 | -4.720 | 0.000 | -47.9 | -7.9 | 0.1268 |
| _Iv1_3                | -0.91083 | -10.246 | 0.000 | -59.8 | -19.1 | 0.2324 |
| _Iv1_4                | -0.70006 | -7.591 | 0.000 | -50.3 | -13.4 | 0.2052 |
| _Iv1_5                | -0.03192 | -0.254 | 0.800 | -3.1 | -0.4 | 0.1191 |
| _Iv1_6                | -0.72809 | -7.666 | 0.000 | -51.7 | -13.5 | 0.1985 |
| _Iv1_7                | -0.54195 | -5.484 | 0.000 | -41.8 | -9.2 | 0.1778 |
| _Iv1_8                | -0.15949 | -1.534 | 0.125 | -14.7 | -2.5 | 0.1569 |
| _Iv1_9                | -1.24129 | -10.737 | 0.000 | -71.1 | -20.5 | 0.1846 |
| _Iv1_10               | -0.73222 | -8.129 | 0.000 | -51.9 | -15.5 | 0.2301 |
| _Iv1_11               | -0.48446 | -5.111 | 0.000 | -38.4 | -8.9 | 0.1932 |
| _Iv1_12               | -0.92585 | -9.475 | 0.000 | -60.4 | -17.3 | 0.2048 |
| _Iv1_13               | -0.43401 | -5.174 | 0.000 | -35.2 | -9.4 | 0.2267 |
| _Iv1_14               | 0.06777  | 0.602  | 0.547 | 7.0  | 0.9  | 0.1334 |</p>
<table>
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<th>Odds Ratio</th>
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<td>0.521***</td>
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<tr>
<td>_Iv1_3</td>
<td>0.405***</td>
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**Table 5.2:** Percentage Change in Odds for Model H1a

---

**Model H1b:**

Correlation between membership in religious associations and preference for the state government

+ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.010, *** p<0.0010
Table 5.3: Correlation between membership in religious associations and preference for the state government

<p>|               | b       | z       | P&gt;|z|  | %     | %StdX  | SDofX |
|---------------|---------|---------|------|-------|--------|-------|
| religioso-w   | -0.15531| -1.738  | 0.082| -14.4 | -2.8   | 0.1847|
| localparti-r  | 0.15313 | 8.571   | 0.000| 16.5  | 13.7   | 0.8410|
| stategov_sat  | -0.09623| -5.780  | 0.000| -9.2  | -8.7   | 0.9412|
| state_bjpv-d  | -0.27136| -6.939  | 0.000| -23.8 | -10.9  | 0.4254|
| agecat        | -0.07561| -3.804  | 0.000| -7.3  | -5.7   | 0.7706|</p>
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<th>SE</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>95% CI Lower</th>
<th>95% CI Upper</th>
<th>p-value</th>
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**Table 5.4**: Percentage change in odds for Model H1b
## Model H2: How Organizational Membership affects Support for the Sangh

**Outcome variable:** `ram_temple`

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<th>Std Err</th>
<th>Confidence Interval</th>
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<td>0.809, 0.930</td>
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<td>0.930, 1.040</td>
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<td>0.011</td>
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Table 5.5: Results for the Ologit models testing H2 with *ram_temple* as outcome variable

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*ologit (N=26909): Percentage Change in Odds*  
Odds of: >m vs <=m

| ram_temple     | b   | z    | P>|z| | %  | %StdX | SDofX |
|----------------|-----|------|------|-----|-------|-------|
| orgmember_-1   | -0.142 | -3.999 | 0.000  | -13.3 | -5.2 | 0.3745 |
| stategov_m-s   | -0.017 | -0.588 | 0.556  | -1.7  | -0.7 | 0.4271 |
| localparty_r   | 0.065 | 4.370  | 0.000  | 6.7   | 5.6  | 0.8410 |
| stategov_sat   | 0.002 | 0.206  | 0.837  | 0.3   | 0.3  | 0.9412 |
| state_bjpv-d   | 0.371 | 12.119 | 0.000  | 45.0  | 17.1 | 0.4254 |
| religiosity1   | 0.055 | 4.148  | 0.000  | 5.7   | 5.6  | 0.9987 |
| religiosity2   | 0.050 | 3.610  | 0.000  | 5.1   | 4.9  | 0.9581 |
| agecat         | 0.000 | 0.002  | 0.998  | 0.0   | 0.0  | 0.7706 |
| edulevel       | -0.035 | -3.243 | 0.001  | -3.5  | -4.5 | 1.3072 |
| urban          | -0.196 | -6.036 | 0.000  | -17.8 | -7.9 | 0.4212 |
| hindu          | 1.276 | 38.297 | 0.000  | 258.4 | 77.5 | 0.4495 |
| sc             | -0.026 | -0.706 | 0.480  | -2.6  | -1.0 | 0.3660 |
| st             | -0.017 | -0.399 | 0.690  | -1.7  | -0.6 | 0.3643 |
| obc            | -0.020 | -0.633 | 0.526  | -2.0  | -0.9 | 0.4719 |
| female         | -0.056 | -2.302 | 0.021  | -5.5  | -2.8 | 0.4982 |
| class          | -0.005 | -0.698 | 0.485  | -0.5  | -0.8 | 1.6113 |
| _Iv1_2        | 0.889 | 8.440  | 0.000  | 143.3 | 11.9 | 0.1268 |
| _Iv1_3        | -0.209 | -2.994 | 0.003  | -18.8 | -4.7 | 0.2324 |
| _Iv1_4        | 0.134 | 1.735  | 0.083  | 14.4  | 2.8  | 0.2052 |
| _Iv1_5        | 0.238 | 2.229  | 0.026  | 27.0  | 2.9  | 0.1191 |
| _Iv1_6        | 0.071 | 0.865  | 0.387  | 7.4   | 1.4  | 0.1985 |
| _Iv1_7        | 0.246 | 3.034  | 0.002  | 28.0  | 4.5  | 0.1778 |
| _Iv1_8        | 0.408 | 4.396  | 0.000  | 50.4  | 6.6  | 0.1569 |
| _Iv1_9        | -0.413 | -4.888 | 0.000  | -33.8 | -7.3 | 0.1846 |
Table 5.6: Percentage change in odds for testing H2 with *ram_temple* as outcome variable

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Model H2: How Organizational Membership affects Support for the Sangh

Outcome Variable: *ban_conversion*

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**N** = 26909

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**Table 5.7:** Results for the Ologit models testing H2 with `ban_conversion` as outcome variable
ologit (N=26909): Percentage Change in Odds

Odds of: >m vs <=m

| ban_conver~n | b       | z     | P>|z|   | %      | %StdX | SDoF|X |
|--------------|---------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-----|---|
| orgmember_~1 | -0.08265| -2.254| 0.024 | -7.9   | -3.0   | 0.3745 |
| stategov_m-s | 0.01969 | 0.670 | 0.503 | 2.0    | 0.8    | 0.4271 |
| localparti-r | 0.09018 | 5.963 | 0.000 | 9.4    | 7.9    | 0.8410 |
| stategov_sat | -0.00675| -0.492| 0.623 | -0.7   | -0.6   | 0.9412 |
| state_bjp-d  | 0.16915 | 5.398 | 0.000 | 18.4   | 7.5    | 0.4254 |
| religiosity1 | 0.03507 | 2.600 | 0.009 | 3.6    | 3.6    | 0.9987 |
| religiosity2 | 0.08102 | 5.741 | 0.000 | 8.4    | 8.1    | 0.9581 |
| agecat       | 0.00444 | 0.274 | 0.784 | 0.4    | 0.3    | 0.7706 |
| edulevel     | -0.10495| -9.477| 0.000 | -10.0  | -12.8  | 1.3072 |
| urban        | -0.20338| -6.168| 0.000 | -18.4  | -8.2   | 0.4212 |
| hindu        | 0.25928 | 7.912 | 0.000 | 29.6   | 12.4   | 0.4495 |
| sc           | -0.09352| -2.493| 0.013 | -8.9   | -3.4   | 0.3660 |
| st           | -0.06753| -1.511| 0.131 | -6.5   | -2.4   | 0.3643 |
| obc          | 0.03176 | 0.994 | 0.320 | 0.4    | 0.3    | 0.4719 |
| female       | -0.13655| -5.449| 0.000 | -12.8  | -6.6   | 0.4982 |
| class        | -0.00206| -0.271| 0.787 | -0.2   | -0.3   | 1.6113 |
| _Iv1_2       | 0.41634 | 3.686 | 0.000 | 51.6   | 5.4    | 0.1268 |
| _Iv1_3       | 0.44903 | 6.562 | 0.000 | 56.7   | 11.0   | 0.2324 |
| _Iv1_4       | 0.45634 | 5.981 | 0.000 | 57.8   | 9.8    | 0.2052 |
| _Iv1_5       | -0.16092| -1.452| 0.147 | -14.9  | -1.9   | 0.1191 |
| _Iv1_6       | 1.01738 | 12.295| 0.000 | 176.6  | 22.4   | 0.1985 |
| _Iv1_7       | 0.55537 | 6.722 | 0.000 | 74.3   | 10.4   | 0.1778 |
| _Iv1_8       | 0.86049 | 8.958 | 0.000 | 136.4  | 14.5   | 0.1569 |
| _Iv1_9       | 0.63885 | 7.903 | 0.000 | 89.4   | 12.5   | 0.1846 |
| _Iv1_10      | 0.14771 | 2.041 | 0.041 | 15.9   | 3.5    | 0.2301 |
| _Iv1_11      | -0.02399| -0.300| 0.764 | -2.4   | -0.5   | 0.1932 |
| _Iv1_12      | 0.92991 | 11.734| 0.000 | 153.4  | 21.0   | 0.2048 |
| _Iv1_13      | 0.62894 | 8.792 | 0.000 | 87.6   | 15.3   | 0.2267 |
| _Iv1_14      | -0.50704| -4.952| 0.000 | -39.8  | -6.5   | 0.1334 |
| _Iv1_15      | 0.57103 | 5.059 | 0.000 | 77.0   | 7.8    | 0.1311 |
| _Iv1_16      | -1.34660| -10.318| 0.000 | -74.0  | -16.7  | 0.1353 |
| _Iv1_17      | -0.65609| -5.827| 0.000 | -48.1  | -8.6   | 0.1378 |
| _Iv1_18      | 1.50659 | 16.540| 0.000 | 351.1  | 31.5   | 0.1819 |
| _Iv1_19      | 0.16945 | 1.983 | 0.047 | 18.5   | 2.9    | 0.1711 |
| _Iv1_20      | 0.99604 | 12.711| 0.000 | 170.8  | 23.6   | 0.2131 |
| _Iv1_21      | 0.14142 | 1.415 | 0.157 | 15.2   | 1.9    | 0.1364 |
| _Iv1_22      | 0.07583 | 0.914 | 0.361 | 7.9    | 1.3    | 0.1742 |
| IV1_23 | 0.22421 | 2.324 | 0.020 | 25.1 | 3.4 | 0.1470 |
| IV1_24 | 0.74003 | 10.997 | 0.000 | 109.6 | 20.0 | 0.2465 |
| IV1_25 | 0.27482 | 3.528 | 0.000 | 31.6 | 5.3 | 0.1894 |
| IV1_27 | 0.51124 | 1.772 | 0.076 | 66.7 | 2.2 | 0.0422 |
| IV1_30 | 0.22447 | 2.776 | 0.006 | 25.2 | 4.5 | 0.1982 |
| IV1_32 | -0.01092 | -0.035 | 0.972 | -1.1 | -0.0 | 0.0399 |
| IV1_33 | 0.78114 | 9.065 | 0.000 | 118.4 | 14.9 | 0.1783 |
| IV1_34 | 0.97849 | 11.360 | 0.000 | 166.0 | 19.3 | 0.1806 |
| IV1_35 | 1.05013 | 9.593 | 0.000 | 185.8 | 14.9 | 0.1326 |

**Table 5.8**: Percentage change in odds for the model H2 with `ban_conversion` as outcome variable
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY:

This chapter summarizes the empirical findings of the dissertation and discusses the broader implications of the project and its theoretical framework. The chapter then goes on to identify some areas of future research. It discusses some questions and puzzles that have remained unanswered and plausible hypotheses that could be tested in the future with the availability of further data. One of the key questions that is discussed in this section is the potential for generalizability of the causal mechanism. In this regard, I explore briefly the possibility of studying the rise of the Shiv Sena, a Hindu nationalist party, in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. Shiv Sena, in alliance with the BJP, has not only scored electoral successes but in fact it has a grassroots organizational structure very similar to the RSS as well as welfare projects akin to what the RSS’s affiliates perform. Secondly, it also discusses the case of West Bengal, which has resisted the Hindu nationalist organizations despite having a not so stellar record when it comes to social development. Both these cases present themselves as interesting empirical case studies for future research in order to test whether the causal mechanism identified in the previous chapters can be applied to cases across India. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks about the state of the literature and the need to analyze the role of civil society, particularly the informal kind, from a theoretical and policy perspective.
6.1 INTRODUCTION

My work looks at the rising appeal of sectarian Hindu nationalist organizations that work in the civil society sphere in India and target urban slums through welfare service provision, against the backdrop of neoliberal reforms and retreat of the welfare state. It explores how economic reforms combined with inadequate governance enable welfare-oriented but exclusionary religious organizations to entrench themselves firmly in civil society, and instigate ethno-religious polarization in diverse multi-ethnic societies. I argue that we need to consider the role of pre-existing civil society organizations in urban poor neighborhoods in order to explain the variation in the success of RSS’s welfare organizations. Informal community-based neighborhood associations such as fan clubs, youth groups, resident welfare associations, and women’s self-help groups often exist and operate in poor urban neighborhoods, engendering collective bargaining amongst the poor residents. Where these organizations are able to form linkages with political parties through slum leaders, councilors, or local political party workers, they are able to trade their votes for better provision of goods and services. This clientelistic relationship not only provides much needed welfare services but also simultaneously narrows the opportunity space available for the Hindu Right groups to gain a foothold in these places. My research thus contributes to major themes within comparative politics such as civil society, governance, party-citizen linkages, and identity politics in an era of globalization.
My research has empirical significance as well as policy relevance with respect to the current thinking about the role of non-state actors in accommodating diversity harmoniously. My dissertation highlights the role of innovative political institutions such as local community-based informal associations, how and when they can become effective in service delivery, thus facilitating access to the state for the urban poor while deterring sectarian non-state actors.

The right-wing Hindu nationalist movement led by the RSS was considered to be a north Indian movement for a long time (Jaffrelot, 1996) that failed to make a significant impact in the south and the east. Moreover, the south and east are also the regions where the BJP has never had the kind of electoral success that it has had in most other states in the north and centre. Hansen (1996) explains the phenomenon of “vernacularization” of Hindutva by the Sangh Parivar and BJP in order to appeal to people in states where it has struggled to develop a social base by introducing regionally-specific variants of Hindu nationalist themes or trying hard to highlight the local relevance of broad national themes. Yet, as Hansen argues, the obstacles to vernacularization have been the greatest in the south and the east. Karnataka however has changed this perspective. Even as the BJP has declined nationally, it has emerged strong in Karnataka in the last decade. It has consistently increased its seat shares in Karnataka state legislature elections since the 1990s leading up to its victory in 2008. This was also accompanied by an increase in religious polarization, social intolerance and riser in violence against minorities, particularly Christian communities and Christian churches and organizations, in the state. For instance Kumar’s (2010) report in the Times of India states:
“The coalition governments involving the Congress, JD(S) and BJP from 2004-2007 and the BJP on its own in 2008 have failed to prevent communal incidents, giving the state the dubious distinction of topping the list of clashes in South India. Maharashtra tops the all-India chart of communal incidents (681) over the same period. Of the 341 incidents in Karnataka, in 2008 alone, 108 were reported with the majority pertaining to attacks on churches. These statistics compiled by the Union ministry of home affairs indicates that Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are equally communal sensitive states recording 654 and 613 cases respectively in the past five years. Interestingly, communal incidents in Gujarat (326) and Orissa (243) are lesser than those in Karnataka.” (para. 1)

However, addressing the triggers that cause incidents of religious violence is not enough to understand the success of the Hindu Right across Indian states, including the ones specified in the quote above. While state-level political incentives (Wilkinson, 2004) may explain why governments are motivated (or not) to prevent ethnic violence, the question is how do the Hindu right wing organizations effectively establish themselves at the neighborhood level in some places but not others. Why do communities at the local level support right-wing organizations in some places but not others? We need to understand Hindu nationalism outside the electoral sphere as a social movement by analyzing the reasons for its success and failure at the local level.
This dissertation tries to explain the variation in the success of the Hindu nationalist social service organizations by examining the nature of associational life amongst the urban poor in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. In the late 1990s, with economic reforms in full swing, Karnataka was hailed as an economic success, and Bangalore was transforming itself into the silicon city. Simultaneously the civil society sphere was becoming increasingly dominated by Hindu Right organizations, and social intolerance and religious violence were rising as indicated above. In contrast, its neighbor Tamil Nadu, despite experiencing similar economic transformations, remained unaffected by the Hindu Right, and has never experienced any sustained or large scale religious violence or incidents against the minority communities. This dissertation tries to understand the rise of right-wing movement by examining its social welfare initiatives at the grassroots level, and by analyzing how and why they are able to establish themselves in some places but not others. I analyze how the nature of state-society interaction can decrease the space for the right wing and diffuse its potential to polarize communities.

Neoliberal reforms since the 1990s provide the backdrop against which the welfare provision by Hindu nationalist groups began to become important for impoverished urban slum communities. Market-oriented reforms are associated with severe dislocations and hardships in the short-term, most of which are inflicted upon the increasingly impoverished urban poor. In India too, these reforms have led to increasing informalization of labor, declining labor union activism, and the state’s withdrawal from welfare provision, often forcing the urban poor to turn to alternative networks for their
welfare needs. I argue that in the absence of any organized collective action representing the urban poor workforce, the impoverished informal labor sector is often forced to depend on other social ties, thus opening the space for exclusivist Hindu welfarist organizations that provide crucial services such as education and healthcare.

However, economic dislocations do not lead to the rise of such sectarian organizations everywhere. When do the Hindu NGOs fail to resonate with the urban poor? I argue that they fail when local associations in urban slums function as efficient political patronage networks, inducing state political parties to meet welfare needs of the urban poor. Where such community-based associational networks are strong, they can engender inclusive collective action. When such associations linked to local politics, and have strong ties with local administrators and party officials, they are able to bargain collectively for better services and amenities, thus decreasing the dependence on sectarian religious groups. Local community-level associations by themselves may not be capable of deterring sectarian organizations. Without links to political officials who provide mediation between the poor and the government, welfare needs are likely to remain unaddressed, thus creating the space for sectarian welfarist organizations to intervene. But the other scenario, that of political brokerage in the absence of associations, is also riddled with problems. Such ties can become asymmetric and exploitative, thus defeating the purpose. It is only the combination of the two, strong associational networks plus the linkages to local levels of governance, that help prevent the entry of the welfarist Hindu organizations.
6.3 SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The above hypotheses and causal mechanisms are examined at the micro-level through empirical case studies of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, particularly by analyzing the local associational life, nature of patronage networks, and the functioning of Hindu nationalist organizations in local urban spaces. Karnataka is a case of success for the RSS. Its projects are successful and well entrenched in the urban spaces in the state, particularly in Bangalore. On the other hand, Tamil Nadu is a state where the RSS efforts at service provision have not been successful. The number of successful projects here is much lower than in Karnataka, including the regions that they consider to be a success such as south Tamil Nadu. Particularly striking is the fact that even when the number of education and self-reliance initiatives are high (as in south Tamil Nadu in 2009), their attempt at social organization projects has not been successful, indicating that even though people may be consuming their welfare services they are not really attracted to the ideological activities that the organization tries to promote in these communities in the guise of religious or communitarian activities. In contrast, in Karnataka, the high numbers of education and health care initiatives coexist with successful social organization projects, which indicates that people not just consume the welfare services but are also committed to the ideological and religious mobilization activities organized by the RSS.

Why does the RSS welfare provision fail to have a significant presence in Tamil Nadu? I argue that we need to look at the nature of associational networks connecting the urban poor, and the nature of their ties with political party structures in order to
understand their capability to make demands on the state, which in turn explains whether or not non-state providers such as the RSS are able to establish themselves in these communities through social service provision. I find that Tamil Nadu has strong local associations mediating between the urban poor and political party representatives, thus creating quasi-permanent stable patronage networks. In contrast, Karnataka is a case where associational life is weak as are political patronage ties linking the parties and poor voters, thus producing the variation in the success of Hindu nationalists in the two states.

In Karnataka, particularly in Bangalore, though associational life is often understood to be on the rise, most of the NGOs and civil society organizations in the city are dominated by middle class members and concerns. There is a lack of genuine associations constituted by the urban poor. The NGOs that do claim to represent this section are very often outsiders rather than grassroots networks, and tend to avoid linkages with local political channels. Successive state governments have also chosen to collaborate with the formal middle class and corporate associations, thus weakening the local political patronage structures even further. The decline of community-based associational networks linked to local party officials and power structures creates a vacuum in many communities, facilitating the entry of welfarist NGOs to cater to their needs. The proliferation of elite-dominated NGOs that cater exclusively to the upper middle class and their close ties to the state overrides local power structures in the governance process, causing patronage arrangements to break down and allowing Hindu Right organizations to fill that space. In contrast, it is the nature of associational life in Tamil Nadu and Chennai that inhibits the growth and success of the Sangh organization amongst the urban poor neighborhoods. Informal everyday networks of engagement at
the neighborhood level amongst the slum/low-income communities in the city closely coordinate with local political leaders and party workers, thus creating a clientelistic relationship, where votes are bargained for access to higher political channels and services. By becoming key constituents for the political parties in the face of intense electoral competition, they are able to make demands on the state and receive targeted benefits as well as publicly-provided goods and services, thus reducing the space for the Sangh Parivar organizations to insert themselves into the local dynamics.

These hypotheses are also tested at the aggregate national level using individual level election survey data to examine how associational membership and linkages created with the state government affects people’s support for the Sangh’s social service organizations. The models estimated and presented in Chapter Five support and reiterate the findings derived from the case studies of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. They indicate that membership in non-sectarian associations is not only positively correlated with the belief that the state government matters, but also negatively correlated with support for the Hindu Right. This supports the claim that local associations acting at the community level play a crucial role, particularly through the linkages they create with the government, in reducing the need for non-state social service organizations including the Hindu Right.
6.4 IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO LITERATURE

My research examines the impact of neoliberal reforms on welfare and service delivery, the consequent rise of non-state service providers, and its implications for social movements and participation at the grassroots level. The notion that sectarian movements often use welfare work to establish legitimacy and grassroots support for their ideology is not novel. Organizations such as the Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Hezbollah have thrived precisely due to such reasons. In this respect, my research indicates the possibilities for cross-national comparisons with sectarian and faith-based social movements and organizations across the globe that have flourished in places where the government is weak or non-existent by providing service delivery to ingratiate themselves with the masses. However, it is only by comparing cases of where such organizations succeed vs. where they fail that we can discern policy solutions to deter their spread. This is what my research seeks to draw attention to. Globalization and retrenchment of the welfare state create the political opportunity structure for such organizations to become active in urban spaces. However, whether or not they succeed depends on local microlevel dynamics, particularly the nature of associational life at the community level. This study certainly illustrates the problematic nature of civil society whereby it can enable and legitimate extremist sectarian organizations through democratic means. Yet, it also demonstrates that we need to look within civil society again to determine how to challenge the influence and spread of such sectarian organizations. By examining the useful role of political linkages in enabling representation and access for poor neighborhoods and marginalized populations, this study also illustrates the continuing relevance of patronage institutions and party politics in the developing world.
This study thus makes an important contribution to the extant literature on civil society, governance, and conflict in a globalizing world. In doing so, it emphasizes two important counterintuitive results with respect to the literature on civil society as well as patronage politics. In the case of India, civic engagement of the sort that the Hindu nationalist NGOs have promoted successfully can produce adverse results for inter-group relations and intra-state conflict, contrary to the developmental and social capital producing effects that civil society is purported to have in general. More importantly, what this dissertation demonstrates is that violence is only the end of a long process of persistent mobilization by Hindu nationalist organizations among local communities. Therefore, to understand where and when violence occurs in India, it is first necessary to understand the conditions that contribute to the success of these exclusionary Hindu nationalist organizations within urban spaces, and their sustained activities and mobilization at the neighborhood level through which they have managed to transform the nature of inter-ethnic relations in various places in India.

Similarly, while recognizing that many civil society organizations can play a number of potentially positive roles, we also need to remember that poor and socio-economically disadvantaged groups such as informal sector workers, urban slum dwellers are usually much less able to create and join formal organizations or exercise influence over public policy merely by becoming members of associations. It is important to understand the socio-economic and political conditions under which grassroots organizations do become effective. Urban poor are not helpless. Class-based or workplace based collective action in the traditional sense may not be a possibility for many of these informal sector workers who are no longer members of organized unions,
but they still share community space and it is the ties at the level of the neighborhood that can help them come together to make demands on the state quite effectively. The key of course is whether they are able to create linkages to party workers and state officials. But these networks can induce parties to provide services in return for political support. Related to this is the fact that support for sectarian organizations, when it does emerge among urban poor communities, arises often because of the failure of the urban poor to organize effectively and engage with the political parties, thus causing a service gap. With the state failing to provide adequate public goods, the urban poor communities often have no choice but to consume the services provided by non-state providers such as the Hindu Right, which often forces them into partaking in its ideologically oriented mobilization activities in order to benefit from the services.

The most important counterintuitive finding based on my research as explained above is that local patronage-based associational networks, under the right circumstances, not only facilitate effective welfare service provision to marginalized neighborhoods but in fact deter the rise of sectarian organizations. Newly emerging literature on patronage and clientelism has begun to move away from conventional political science predictions about the exploitative side of clientelism and begun to highlight the potential benefits that such long-term exchange relationships can bring to both sides. However, on the policy side, particularly among NGOs and civil society activists, such linkages still carry negative connotations. Instead of exploring their potential to assuage the service delivery needs of urban poor communities, they are mostly seen as a hindrance to the true political awakening and participation of the marginalized citizens. The developmental/citizenship rhetoric more often than not explicitly stresses the need to avoid engagement with
political channels. While careful nuanced analyses and ethnography is required to evaluate the long-term impact of such networks on the sustainability of service provision and benefits to the poorer sections of the city, my research is an attempt to highlight this as a fecund area of research both in theoretical and policy terms.

6.5 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

6.5.1 THE QUESTION OF GENERALIZABILITY: COMPARISONS TO OTHER CASES

Are the findings of the dissertation generalizable to make cross-regional comparisons meaningful? Is the proposed causal mechanism applicable to other cases within India?

In order to examine the potential for generalizability of the causal mechanism across other Indian states, I will, as part of my future research, be tracing the rise of a similar Hindu nationalist organization, the Shiv Sena, particularly the way it has used social services successfully to entrench itself in the poor urban neighborhoods in urban Mumbai. As several scholars have indicated, there are many similarities between the Shiv Sena and the RSS [Katzenstein, 1977; Appadurai, 2000, 2001; Hansen, 1999, 2001]. The party organization that emerged as a force to contend with in the 1960s in Maharashtra, and established a stranglehold over local and state-level politics, has emulated the
organizational style, activities, and militant tactics of the RSS to a large extent. Many of its members have RSS origins. The party has not just allied politically with the BJP at the state level but also openly and explicitly expressed its chauvinistic, xenophobic, and anti-Muslim sentiments at every chance. In fact, one might argue that it has actually gone one step further than the RSS by consolidating its support base based primarily on the lower class/caste, and unemployed youth, something that the RSS has struggled to achieve even with its welfare provision initiative. The Sena’s local branches created a disciplined cadre of party workers that was unmatched by any other party or organization in the state, and much of its support was concentrated in labor dominated areas at a time when the textile industry was experiencing decline and economic turmoil [Katzenstein, 1973]. The Shiv Sena strengthened its relationships with local communities through neighborhood Shakhas that developed patronage networks and provided services and material incentives, particularly among poor slum neighborhoods that were suffering the consequences of economic decline and weakening of the labor union movement [Katzenstein 1977; Lele, 1995]. This strategy of service provision, that has continued into the present, is pinpointed as the reason why the organization has been able to completely dominate the local urban spaces in the state, particularly in the city of Bombay [Eckert, 2002]. Preliminarily, one can argue that the problems of economic transition coupled with weak associational life allowed the chauvinist nationalist organization to establish itself among local communities, particularly lower class unemployed youth, by providing them not just tangible services but also channels of upward economic and political mobility and heeding their aspirations when no other organization had proved capable of doing this.
Further investigation and fieldwork would be required to identify the similarities and differences with Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, particularly with respect to the nature of (or lack of) associational life amongst local communities in Bombay city and the rest of the state, and the factors that promoted the rise and success of the Shiv Sena in these pockets. I observed firsthand right-wing welfare tactics used in neighborhoods, and variation in support for such activities/organizations, in Chennai and Bangalore. Interviews with local party leaders, bureaucrats and non-governmental organizations helped me understand how service delivery works, where it fails and how associational networks fill the gap. Similarly, as part of my future research agenda, I intend to focus on the organizational structure and functioning of the Shiv Sena party networks and welfare initiatives at the urban local level in Mumbai to test my hypotheses. In-depth interview with party elites as well as ethnographic study/participant observation of how the Shiv Sena structure operates in urban Mumbai will help me improve the reliability and validity of my micro-level causal narrative. The comparative analysis will help reveal the points of similarity between the origins and functioning of local associational networks in Karnataka and Maharashtra, as well as how they differ from Tamil Nadu, thus bringing us closer to an understanding of why different states tend to differ in the levels of local associational engagement. This will help in analyzing whether the findings are generalizable to other cases in India. What the brief discussion of the Shiv Sena case so far demonstrates is this generalizable notion of the emergence of radical sectarian organizations during times of economic turmoil and transformation when other mediating organizations are absent to help open up communication channels with party structures to facilitate the provision of goods and services to poor communities.
The other interesting cases are those of West Bengal and Kerala, states traditionally dominated by communist and Left parties, which have remained unaffected by Hindu nationalist politics for the most part. Kerala also has an excellent record when it comes to redistributive policies and social development outcomes. Scholars like Kohli (1987), Herring (1983) and Heller (1999) have attributed this to the ideology and organization of Left parties. However, while Kerala has enjoyed excellent social development indicators, West Bengal has not. It has consistently lagged behind Kerala despite years of Communist rule. Yet, West Bengal has resisted the influence of right-wing social service organizations just as well as Kerala. I argue that we need to look beyond party ideology and examine state-society relationships instead. In the case of Kerala, it is the vibrant associational life and political participation from every section of society that is able to hold the state accountable so effectively that alternative service providers are never needed to fill any service gap. But Kerala is unique in that it is perhaps the only Indian state where formal associational engagement has remained consistently high. West Bengal may not have the same level of political mobilization or formal associational life, but it is entirely plausible that informal associational ties operate at the urban grassroots level. The causal mechanism that I have demonstrated empirically in Tamil Nadu may constitute a powerful alternative explanation for the lack of RSS success in West Bengal. While formal unionization and associational life in West Bengal has been weak with respect to the informal labor sector (Bardhan, 2011), yet recent survey data on local politics and governance at the village level across West Bengal indicates high rates of political participation on several dimensions on the one hand, while on the other left-dominated village committees have consistently dispensed
recurring short-term welfare programs to weaker sections of the community (Bardhan, Mitra, Mookherjee, and Sarkar, 2008). One may hypothesize that informal associational networks, combined with the Communist party’s disciplined cadres that penetrate the grassroots, create clientelistic networks that have dominated local level politics and interactions, thus preventing the entry of Hindu nationalist organizations into the local sphere in West Bengal. It is not ideology that is key in this case but rather these networks that provide tangible material benefits and help reduce the need for right-wing welfare associations in the process. In fact, Bardhan et al. (2008) compare their survey results to a similar one conducted in Karnataka to study local village-level politics in Karnataka (Crook and Manor, 1998) that indicates much lower levels of political engagement and participation on the part of the citizens. While these results are based on local governance and participation at the village level, they are consistent with my own empirical observations about the nature of associational life in urban Karnataka. Most studies on West Bengal have tended to focus on village level politics and governance, and there is a noticeable lack of similar analysis looking at urban level dynamics. Further data on the nature of informal associational networks and clientelistic networks at the urban local level is required to carefully test the proposed causal mechanism in the case of West Bengal, but this is definitely an interesting case that can shed light on the potential for generalizability of the proposed theoretical framework to other cases.

The other interesting avenue for future research would be to explore the validity of my theoretical framework in a global perspective and to examine whether the model that I have proposed can be applied to cases beyond India. Can this framework be used to understand the rise and influence of faith-based welfarist organizations in other regions of
the world, such as say the success of Islamist welfare groups in many countries in the Middle East? While many scholars have pointed to the welfare activities of such organizations to understand their popularity and resurgence in many countries, the interesting question to ask would be whether there are similar variations in the success of such organizations at the local level, and whether they may be explained by similar microlevel dynamics.

Though the brief case study sketches that I have provided above are by no means comprehensive, I have attempted to identify cases both within and beyond India where I could test my hypotheses about the value of informal associational networks, clientelistic linkages (or lack thereof), service provision, and the spread of sectarianism.

6.5.2 INTER-STATE VARIATION IN ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE

My dissertation has proposed the existence of a relationship between the nature and functioning of local associations among urban poor neighborhoods, and the resulting success of Hindu welfarist organizations. An obvious question that follows is this: **What explains the different structure of local associational patterns in the two states?**

Why does Tamil Nadu have a unique pattern of informal patronage institutions operating in urban poor communities while Karnataka does not? Why do the urban poor have a long tradition of engaging with political parties through such local community
level networks in Chennai, whereas such networks have failed to emerge or be effective in Bangalore? My theoretical framework, for the purpose of the dissertation, takes these networks as given, and then explains why they have continued to flourish, and their crucial role in resisting outsiders and new entrants. It does not explain why they emerged in the first place in Chennai, or why they have declined and ceased to be effective as pressure groups in Bangalore.

Lower caste mobilization may be the precursor of vibrant associational life. It may become intertwined with the development of political parties themselves. As I mentioned towards the end of chapter four, we may need to trace back to the Dravidian movement and the British colonial policy that encouraged associational life pre-1947 in the case of Tamil Nadu to explain this difference. Associations emerged as a direct result of colonial policy, which made “backward caste” identity the basis for distribution of economic and political benefits. While some of these associations transformed themselves into political parties, it also triggered greater political awareness and engagement at the local level, spurring such networks. Political parties that derived their support from such networks encouraged them in turn, further encouraging a dense associational life at the microlevel. Was it the lack of backward caste mobilization on par with the Dravidian movement that caused associational life to be weaker in Karnataka? Tamil Nadu and Kerala are two Indian states that experienced extensive and deep-rooted transformations in the social and political institutions early on due to lower caste mobilization. While Karnataka, also in southern India, was not completely unaffected by these social movements, it does not seem to have engendered a similar course of political development and social change in the state. A comparative historical analysis of the
trajectory of lower caste mobilization in Karnataka, and how it diverged from Tamil Nadu’s experience, would be a great starting point to understand the question of variation in associational life in the two states. While Karnataka has definitely not been left untouched by a clientelistic brand of politics, state-society relations have often depended not on community-based associations but rather on political fixers and middlemen (Manor, 2000). While they definitely played an important role in linking the marginalized communities to the political powers that be and operated as conduits, they were never backed by informal associational networks at the grassroots level. Political parties have tended to use these fixers extensively, but it has never translated into the kind of pressure group politics emerging from local associational groups as in Chennai.

6.5.3 INTRA-STATE VARIATION IN THE SUCCESS OF THE HINDU ORGANIZATIONS

Closely related to the above line of questioning is the puzzle of intra-state variation in the spread and influence of the RSS organizations. My interview data and analysis of primary and secondary sources has revealed interesting intra-state variations in the success of Hindu welfarist organizations. This was discussed in the Karnataka chapter, where the RSS presence and success is stronger in the southern region as compared to the north [See Figures 3.6 and 3.7]. My data indicates the relative absence of right wing Hindu organizations in the North Karnataka district in Karnataka state. The
Hindu organizations have failed to entrench themselves too deeply in this region even though Karnataka overall has been a case of success for them. Similarly, though Tamil Nadu overall has been a state where the Hindu nationalist organizations have not been successful, they have enjoyed some limited success in the southern part of the state, particularly in social organization and self-reliance [See figure 4.5].

Why has the RSS had variable success within the two states? Why has it been able to establish itself in the southern pockets in both states as compared to the northern regions? In the case of southern Karnataka/Bangalore, data clearly shows that associational networks among the urban poor have not been strong enough or well linked to political parties, thus enabling the RSS to establish themselves through service provision. Why did the RSS then fail in Northern Karnataka? Is the quality and functioning of associational networks different here than in the southern region? Similarly, in the case of Tamil Nadu, what explains their limited success in the southern districts? Is it an absence of associational life altogether in these areas, or is it the failure of associations to engage with the political parties? As far as the latter case is concerned, I pointed out Subramanian’s (2001) argument that Kanyakumari is the only place where Dravidian parties have been traditionally weak, and correspondingly associational linkages have not been strong either. Hence, it has been easier for RSS/BJP to establish itself here. However, this correlation needs to be investigated in further detail. Are associational networks absent altogether, or have the associational networks simply chosen to build linkages with parties other than the Dravidian ones? Moreover, as figure 4.5 indicates, their influence already seems to be waning in southern Tamil Nadu. By 2009, the number of projects in education and self-reliance suddenly see an abnormally
huge jump in these areas (the figures show such a huge change that one is led to suspect
the veracity of these statistics to some extent), and yet the greatest casualty seems to be
their social organization initiatives. I have argued that this is not surprising and is
consistent with my own findings to an extent. In the case of Karnataka however, further
detailed research and mapping of associational life and clientelistic politics is required to
establish why the RSS is not able to succeed in the northern regions. My data on
Bangalore certainly indicate that the causal mechanism has validity and can explain intra-
city variation in the success of the RSS quite well. As discussed briefly in chapter 3,
 intra-city variations in the nature of associational life cause variation in the influence and
 spread of RSS organizations within the city. Most of the RSS welfare efforts are
 concentrated in southern Bangalore, precisely the area where local groups are weak and
disempowered. Local associational life is much stronger in northern Bangalore, as are
linkages with local politicians, thus preventing the entry of the RSS in these places. This
indicates that the variation in success can definitely be attributed to the nature of
associational ties amongst the urban poor communities and their ability to engage with
the political intermediaries. To conclusively establish this as the reason for why the RSS
fails to succeed in North Karnataka requires further data.

I hope to be able to conduct further fieldwork to answer this question. It would
require studying in detail the urban poor neighborhoods in these two cases to assess
qualitatively the strength of Hindu welfare networks as well as the functioning of local
associational networks. Extending my analysis thus will allow me to understand why
patterns of associational life differ within the same state, thus helping isolate reasons for
why associational networks emerge and function successfully in some cases but not
others, while contributing to a nuanced analysis of how this variation can affect the chances of success of Hindu welfarist organizations even within the same state.

6.5.4 ROLE OF POLITICAL COMPETITION

I have argued that political competition at the state level determines whether or not state-level political parties engage with and respond to local associational networks. Their need for electoral support in a competitive environment induces them to inculcate and promote patronage networks, allowing for the incorporation of the demands of the urban poor who trade votes for benefits. My empirical findings from Karnataka show that consecutive governments in the last decade have increasingly made crucial policy decisions such as dealing with unauthorized slums, opening up land for development for private builders and the IT industry, drawing up a master plan to create modern planned urban spaces in consultation with the corporate world or the middle class constituencies while disempowering the urban poor voices in administering such issues that affect their livelihood. One important future research question is why political parties in Karnataka at the state government level have chosen to bypass the local level institutions and chosen to work through para-statal bodies instead. In India, the urban poor have for long been considered to be vote banks. The turnout amongst these sections in the elections has tended to be very high, in contrast to the developed world, and to the benefit of political parties. In this scenario, why would parties suddenly change their wining formula and
shift focus to the politically fickle and numerically weak middle class by deliberately undermining local level institutions? This question merits careful attention in order to provide a complete explanation for why the Hindu sectarian groups succeed in Karnataka. As this trend has become more and more visible since the BJP has become part of the state government in 2004, the answer to this question may follow from the issue discussed below. One might argue that BJP deliberately undercuts existing local patronage networks in order to allow these to be supplanted by RSS organizations that would strengthen their own mass base at the grassroots level. There is definitely evidence that many of the policies that the BJP has implemented since its coming to power have often created favorable policy spaces and government patronage for such organizations to flourish.

6.5.5 POSSIBILITY OF BJP PATRONAGE DRIVING RIGHT WING PROLIFERATION AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

I have argued that civil society associations predated party development in the case of Tamil Nadu. Various caste associations mobilized politically, thus culminating in the backward caste Dravidian movement, which then eventually resulted in the emergence of the DMK. A splinter group of the DMK led by M.G. Ramachandran then formed the AIADMK party, but one of the building blocks of the party was the MGR fan clubs operating at the grassroots levels across the state. I have argued that it is the
pressure from such informal associations and their close ties with the political parties that induces the parties to consider them as important electoral support bases and provide services to retain these vote banks. It establishes a positive feedback loop where political parties’ policy incentives further reinforce the strength of these informal networks.

While we get this positive feedback loop in the case of Tamil Nadu that strengthens associational networks at the local level, the case of Karnataka is a little different, where the BJP has been in power in the state for the past decade. Several scholars have pointed to the decline of the Congress as a reason for the success of the Hindu nationalists. I have argued that this in itself cannot be an explanation for the rise of Seva Bharati and its welfare activities, and its success amongst urban spaces. However, by enabling the success of the BJP electorally, Congress decline may have indirectly bolstered the chances of success of the RSS affiliates. It has been argued that whenever the BJP has been in control of the government either at the centre or in the states, it has deliberately implemented policies to ease the entry and smooth functioning of Hindu right organizations. This is an alternative explanation that has merit and deserves closer attention, particularly in the case of Karnataka.

It may be argued that Karnataka is stuck in a vicious circle instead since the BJP’s control of the government. The BJP deliberately undercuts patronage channels and creates the political administrative space for the RSS organizations to flourish at the grassroots level. This is an accusation that has been leveled at the BJP both when it was in control of the national government and more recently when it gained control of the government in Karnataka. For instance, Jaffrelot (2005) argues,
“The second aspect of the Hindu nationalist social welfare strategy lies in the goodwill shown by some official bodies. The public authorities, under pressure because of the budget deficit, are cutting investment in the social sphere and are very willing to pass on their responsibilities to private organizations. This is happening particularly quickly in the states where the BJP came to power in the 1990s (MP, Rajasthan, HP, UP, Delhi, Gujarat, and Maharashtra) whose governments clearly supported RSS projects; but this encouragement – sometimes associated with financial aid – was already perceptible within central government dependent bodies before the BJP came to power in 1998. In 1991, the government awarded Seva Bharati the ‘Certificate of Merit’ and a 50,000-rupee award. The Ministry of Health and Family welfare pays SB an annual subsidy of 6000 rupees and the Delhi Development Authority has provided them with eight offices in the capital even before the BJP took over in 1993.” [p. 221]

Similarly, in the case of Karnataka, a sample of such allegations can be inferred from Sanjana’s (2008) Tehelka news report:

“With the BJP coming to power, there are greater possibilities in terms of political space that the Sangh can now capture. Part of this process is the BJP campaign on the Baba Budangiri, a Sufi shrine that the BJP says is actually the Dattatreya Swami peetha. The BJP mobilises people in thousands every year at the site, making it a high pitch issue for
the right wing bloc. Also, several ministers, including the chief minister, the home minister, the law and parliamentary affairs minister, the transport minister, and the rural development and panchayati raj minister, are known to have strong RSS backgrounds. Key officials function on the directions of the Sangh Parivar organizations like the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad… *The real conversion happening in Karnataka is that of the RSS-BJP, who are using aggression to consolidate their hold in a once secular state.*” (para. 10, emphasis added)

There is no doubt that the RSS and the BJP complement each other and mutually reinforce each other’s activities. While the BJP has consciously facilitated and even promoted the activities of the RSS organizations often through policy initiatives, it would however not be mistaken to say that the BJP also needs the organizational hierarchy, cadres, and grassroots mobilization of the RSS and its affiliates to come to power in the first place. For instance, Thachil (2009) focuses on the RSS’s welfare activity among marginalized tribal populations and posits a link between the Sangh’s social service activities and increasing political support for the BJP among this segment. Even in Karnataka, scholars and journalists have commented upon this link. For instance, Sanjana (2009) wrote this in *Tehelka*, following about BJP’s exceptional performance in Karnataka in the 2009 national elections, a tremendous win that came at a time when the party was flailing in other states [The elections resulted in a Congress landslide, while the BJP yet again performed poorly reminiscent of the 2004 national elections, except in Karnataka]:
“One of the fundamental, and perhaps expected, reasons for the BJP’s stellar performance in these elections (winning 19 seats has been their best-ever performance in the state) has been the close relationship that it has maintained with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and its affiliates, such as the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Party sources openly admit that the BJP candidates in several instances were nominated by the RSS. Political greenhorns like Ananthkumar Hegde and Nalin Kumar Kateel, who had spent a few years in the BJP, were nominated as candidates on the basis of their sustained participation (and hence influence) within the Sangh. They were placed in areas where the Sangh enjoyed considerable sway — coastal Karnataka and parts of central Karnataka. Support on the ground was mobilized by the Sangh cadres and the candidates won, even if by slim victory margins.” (para. 4)

Moreover, as numerous documented reports as well as interviews indicate, the virulent mobilization by the RSS and the VHP around divisive issues in the state has stirred up trouble amongst communities for much longer before the BJP captured state power. Provocative actions of these organizations centered on two disputed sites in coastal Karnataka have been the focal points of annual clashes and communal incidents in the state since the late 1990s. In fact, these are the kind of activities that have strengthened the local grassroots presence of the RSS and its affiliates in these regions, culminating in the electoral victory if the BJP in more recent years.
6.5.6 LINK BETWEEN PATRONAGE NETWORKS AND THE TRAJECTORY OF GLOBALIZATION AT THE SUB-NATIONAL LEVEL

There is substantial variation within India in how different states respond to globalizing pressures, as well as variation in their economic performance. For instance, fieldwork observations in Chennai city reveal how it has become a manufacturing powerhouse, employing a large proportion of low-skilled and unskilled labor in production activities. On the other hand, Bangalore’s economy has expanded mainly through the investment in the high-skilled Informational Technology and Services sector. Thus, different states, and cities within them, seem to have evolved different strategies with respect to coping with globalization, and responding to domestic demands related to economic policy. My initial results about the functioning of clientelistic associational networks indicate that these could be acting as important pressure groups on regional political parties, producing the variation we observe in globalization policies and outcomes across cities and states. I hypothesize that the power of strong associations operating as patronage networks has induced political parties to pursue economic policies and investment strategies that recognize the interests of the working class population in Chennai, whereas the absence of such pressure groups has put the Bangalore economy on a completely different growth trajectory. This is a future project that I intend to evaluate in detail using survey analysis and elite interviews to examine whether and how citizens’ preferences are expressed through such networks in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and whether/how they structure incentives for state-level parties to act with respect to economic policy, thus helping us pinpoint the causes of intra- and inter-state variation.
6.6 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In conclusion, this dissertation highlights the importance of informal associational life amongst urban poor neighborhoods on the one hand as well as the role of patronage channels in facilitating the delivery of services desired by the urban poor. However, attributing too much merit to patronage channels might be overly optimistic. At the end of the day, even though they may be effective, the poor lack the ability to hold political parties accountable outside of elections. While they may be effective in delivering services necessary to fill the service gap created by otherwise inadequate state policies, we must acknowledge that long term economic and development needs, poverty alleviation, better social protections for the informal sector workers are not going to come about through these patronage channels. While associational life in combination with political linkages may be able to improve the living conditions in these neighborhoods to some extent, they are not a panacea for what are deep-rooted structural problems that need to be addressed through responsible legislation and policy intervention to improve the social position of this marginalized sector of citizens.

What I would like to emphasize though is that the nature and functioning of informal associational life definitely deserves much more attention than it has received in the literature. India, except for states like Kerala, is characterized as having weak associational life and therefore amenable to capture by political parties. Many recent works have also characterized civil society as being dominated by the middle class, thus crowding out and marginalizing the urban poor. However, most studies about civil society and associational life never carefully analyze the informal neighborhood level ties
that help in bringing citizens together and engage with political parties effectively. There is no doubt that globalization across the world has engendered legislations that have had a deleterious effect on the working class, their living and working conditions, as well as their ability to organize for collective action. Shrinking public services, declining formal sector jobs and decimated labor unions have pushed large proportions of the working class into the informal sector, which is neither protected by labor legislations nor accorded social protections by the state. While most studies have focused on the inability of the informal sector to stand up to the unfair practices and legislations in a globalized market economy, there are some studies that have begun to point out spaces where the informal sector has shown itself capable of collective action and political efficacy. For instance, Agarwala (2007) discusses new forms of collective action amongst informal sector women workers in the beedi (tobacco) and construction industries in Indian states. Even though they have tenuous relationships with their employers as far as work related benefits such as minimum wages or job security are concerned, they have managed to demand and receive welfare benefits such as education, healthcare, and pensions from the state by working through informal unions. State governments that have an interest in promoting rapid liberalization have been willing to bargain with the informal sector workers in return for guaranteed availability of flexible and cheap labor.

While my research, as it stands currently, by no means maps this trend on a large-scale basis or even captures its richness and minute workings in their entirety, it is an attempt at drawing attention to the fact that these are important channels through which the urban poor claim and receive services. To simply dismiss them as asymmetric and exploitative is an injustice to these everyday forms of political mobilization that have
empowered the urban poor, and they deserve to be analyzed in much greater detail. My dissertation tries to focus on this form of collective action that is exercised through informal channels and is transforming state-society relationships, and is not just a means to secure better material benefits for the urban poor but also as an antidote to sectarian welfare organizations that use social services to establish themselves among these communities.
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