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# **Hindu militarism and partition in 1940's Uttar Pradesh: Rethinking the politics of violence and scale**

**William Gould**

**University of Leeds, Leeds, UK**

**Professor of Indian History, University of Leeds**

**Address: School of History, Woodhouse Lane, Leeds. LS2 9JT, UK**

**Email: [w.r.gould@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:w.r.gould@leeds.ac.uk)**

## **Abstract**

Uttar Pradesh and its urban centres were not in Partition's immediate hinterland or a key subject of its high politics, but were pivotal, this paper argues, at an alternative scale of political mobilisation around volunteer movements. Central to this process were the spatial dynamics of organised violence in the early to mid 1940s, not least because of how pivotal organised killings were by 1947. By exploring the provincial patterns of the development of volunteer movements, their spatial and their inter-communal associations over time, and their ideological content (using a case study focussed on P.D. Tandon), the article argues that there were longer-term associations between organised volunteer activities and instances of pre-Partition violence that foreshadowed the large-scale attacks of the summer of 1947. This potentially affects the way historians read Partition violence as a specific 'moment' of communal antagonism and the significance of these movements' ideologies of violence to India's long Partition.

**Keywords:** violence, volunteers, Partition, Uttar Pradesh, urban, Tandon, Congress, Muslim League

Between 9 and 11 November 1946, in retaliation for attacks on Hindu pilgrims travelling from the Garhmukteshwar fair in Meerut district in United Provinces (from 1950 Uttar Pradesh) a huge and apparently co-ordinated attack took place on a number of Muslim villages. According to reports of the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee, the attack led to 416 deaths and over 500 arrests. Mridula Sarabhai—a Congress worker who was later to head up operations to recover abducted women following Partition—described how, during the violence, no Hindu slogans were chanted, but instead the battle cries of the Congress rang out, and the Congress flag flown. For Sarabhai, the explanation was that this was a ‘well organized, anti-national group, sailing under the name of the Congress’.<sup>1</sup> Congress observers were baffled as to why this had happened, not least because the upcoming Congress session in Meerut on 23 November now seemed in peril. Something had to be done, evidence gathered and reports made. The Congress reporters noticed, in particular, that the Hindu extremist outfit the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) had come to be associated with Congress volunteer movements.

For Sarabhai, the associations between Congress and RSS were clear, and in some ways obvious, especially through what were described by British colonial officers as ‘semi-military’ organisations. Recent work on the nature of Partition violence has asked questions about the scale of casualties in 1947, and has begun to explore the idea that a significant proportion of the inter-communal violence was ‘organised’, perhaps along the lines of Garhmukteshwar. Saumitra Jha and Steven Wilkinson’s exploration of the role of returning combatants from various spheres of conflict, suggests that there is a clear correlation between spatial instances of ‘ethnic cleansing’ and the home districts

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of Mridula Sarabhai, secretary, All India Congress Committee, AICC file 20/1946, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML), New Delhi.

of soldiers who saw action (as opposed to those who did not), on return from fighting.<sup>2</sup> Jha and Wilkinson's detailed analysis chimes with some of the recent popular histories of Partition and the 1940s,<sup>3</sup> and with those dealing with gendered violence,<sup>4</sup> in terms of the magnitude and targeted nature of violence. But the latter also suggest there are three further characteristics to the violence that warrant further historical analysis: firstly, the sense in which the attacks of August–September 1947 were part of a longer-term context of wartime mobilisation in which the conditions for ethnic conflict had changed compared to pre-war years.<sup>5</sup> We might describe this as part of a wider cycle of violence that preceded Partition in northern India,<sup>6</sup> although there were distinct forms in **UP**, as we will see below. Secondly, much of the historical work on communal violence around Partition has emphasised the inter-relationship between different cities and districts, in how revenge attacks were organised. This suggests that historians need to think about how violence was communicated across different spatial contexts. Thirdly, work on 1940s Partition, while acknowledging its organised nature and its scalar properties, has also emphasised how its magnitude was driven by local and sometimes intimate instances of inter-communal conflict.

This article argues that all of these features of 1940s politics (organisation, wartime mobilisation, inter-spatial communication and localism) provided a key context for the nature and characteristics of inter-ethnic violence that erupted in the mid 1940s. It does not dismiss the array of other explanations for violence in 1947, including the timing of

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<sup>2</sup> Saumitra Jha and Steven Wilkinson, 'Does Combat Experience Foster Organizational Skill? Evidence from Ethnic Cleansing during the Partition of South Asia', in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, no. 4 (November 2012), pp. 883–907.

<sup>3</sup> Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 72–3.

<sup>4</sup> Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (**New Brunswick**: Rutgers University Press, 1998); and Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (London: Hurst, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Khan, *The Great Partition*, pp. 31–5.

<sup>6</sup> See Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 60–89.

Partition negotiations,<sup>7</sup> border preparation and political conditions of regions of the Punjab.<sup>8</sup> Instead, it deliberately moves away from the key regional foci of Partition to explore the broader hinterland of pre-Partition conflict, via volunteer activities, in one of the central regions of future Muslim emigration to Pakistan—the United Provinces. That UP politics was pivotal to the processes underpinning Partition has been well established in the historiography.<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this paper, UP was suggestive of all four features outlined above. Firstly, as we will see in the first section of the paper, it was one of the most important provinces for the development (on a provincial scale) of military-style volunteer movements, which pre-figured the ‘organised’ violence of 1947. These volunteer movements developed as organs of community defence around some of the key political and electoral events of the war and early post-war years. As detailed in the second section, their growth in the early years of the war was to have consequences at the end of 1945/early 1946 during the provincial elections. They were also increasingly perceived as organisations that took on quasi state functions, either of policing or militia activity, which had implications for the meanings of state sovereignty in 1940’s colonial India. Most significant however, was the scale of UP as a provincial space in relation to demographic patterns of volunteer movement: this article will suggest that patterns of community recruitment into the movements correlate with city-wise incidences of violence, and the communication between those different spaces.<sup>10</sup> Finding direct causal connections between these movements and

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<sup>7</sup> On the relationship between the high politics of Partition and the timing of violence, see Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 214–6.

<sup>8</sup> Talbot and Singh, *The Partition of India*, Chap. 3.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of United Provinces Muslims 1860–1923* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993); Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh: A Study in Imperfect Mobilisation* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978); and William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> See for example, **Sarah Ansari, William Gould and Taylor Sherman**, ‘The Flux of the Matter: Loyalty, Corruption and the Everyday State in the Post-Partition Government Services of India and Pakistan c. 1946–1952’, in *Past and Present*, No. 219 (May 2013), pp. 237-279 pp. ?. **Full names of all authors needed** & page nos.

the incidence of violence is difficult, not least because such questions of causality are always problematic. Rather, this article argues that the types of violence seen—i.e. around political events and elections—points to volunteer movement involvement which shaped the forms of violence. Finally, the political culture of UP allowed for forms of institutional resource-sharing at a local level, particularly between the ‘Hindu’ organisations and the Congress-related movements, which shadowed a larger-scale positioning of Hindu revivalist politics within the Congress movement itself. The final part of section two of the article will explore this in the politics of key UP Congress leaders, principally P.D. Tandon.<sup>11</sup>

### **I. The United Provinces, the war and volunteer movements**

The emergence or growth of semi-military style volunteer movements was, therefore, partly explained by the political conditions of UP itself, and by the broader international context of authoritarian parties and global conflict. The rise of European fascism and then global war from the late 1930s and 1940s, as we will see in explorations of the movements themselves in this section, provided direct and indirect precedents for volunteering at an organisational and ideological level. This article will not deal with the ideological influence of European fascism in the interwar period which has been recently covered by Ali Raza and Franziska Roy,<sup>12</sup> but will focus more on their rapid organisational growth and political expansion (both in spatial and demographic terms) in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

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<sup>11</sup> For more detail on this political culture within the UP Congress, see Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics*.

<sup>12</sup> Ali Raza and Franziska Roy, ‘Paramilitary Organisations in Interwar India’, in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 38, no. 4 (2015), pp. 671–89.

Volunteer organisations **movements** transformed in important ways over the late 1930s and early 1940s, from movements related to specific forms of city policing and social service, often via association with political parties or festival organisers, into potential national militias with quasi-state functions.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the 'service'-oriented youth and volunteer movements of the Congress gradually developed a competitive association with more militant communal groups like the RSS or the Muslim League National Guards (hereafter MLNG), although more informal associations predated that period. The most important and best-organised volunteer movement in the interwar period, from which other smaller outfits derived inspiration, was the Congress-linked Hindustan Seva Dal (hereafter HSD). Formed in 1924 but based on service organisations of earlier in the decade, the HSD was a centrally commanded service/militia group with provincial and more local units across India, and a separate women's wing. The notion of 'volunteering' implied service without pay, a commitment to a specified period of membership, and a pledge to freely work with all other creeds and races.<sup>14</sup> When it was renamed in 1931 as the Congress Seva Dal (hereafter CSD), it had as its objects the need to 'instill self discipline, sacrifice, self reliance, simplicity, service, tolerance and aptitude for corporate and co-operative work, to become ideal citizens of India, promote national unity, improve the health and physique of the Indian people through physical culture and training'. In times of emergency it was to act as a peace and relief brigade.<sup>15</sup> In some cases then, from well before the war years, volunteer movements relating to the Congress were conceived as alternative foci for state power. This pattern reflected the political development of the Congress itself in

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<sup>13</sup> Physical fitness and discipline in Indian wrestling has a long history in cities like Banaras, combining physical wellbeing with spiritualism. See Joseph A. Alter, *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> 'Hindustan Seva Dal: Dal Worker's Pledge', in Hindustan Seva Dal General Correspondence, All India Congress Committee (AICC) collection, First Installment G8/1931, NMML.

<sup>15</sup> 'Congress Seval Dal', in Hindustan Seva Dal General Correspondence, AICC collection, First Installment G8/1931, NMML.

the interwar years, but as we will see below, it was a principle eventually shared by a number of other Hindu- and Muslim-oriented volunteer groups by the 1940s.

In their origins, many of the miscellaneous and city-based Hindu and Muslim groups emulated the work of the HSD or CSD, or themselves worked independently as part of the Congress in specific localities. These local associations between the Congress organisation and other such volunteer movements was made clear in 1931 with the formation of the CSD, when instructions were released to specify that other movements working in the name of the Congress should not be recognised. To prevent such overlaps and confusion, membership of the CSD was (formally) restricted to those who had a minimum period of Congress membership, and/or who had taken part in Non-Cooperation or Civil Disobedience.<sup>16</sup> Police intelligence in the interwar years, and particularly over the period of Civil Disobedience, certainly did see the pooling of resources between Congress civic policing functions and Hindu organisations, especially around festivals.<sup>17</sup> These other local groups also evolved out of urban-based volunteer corps, originally set up to protect communities during religious festivals in the early to mid 1930s. For example, Kanpur was home to a volunteer movement set up by Hindu vegetable sellers in the Sabji Mandi to defend vendors against perceived Muslim competition. In Banaras, Muslim and Hindu defence corps formed at the time of the Holi and Ramlila festivals, and various Mahabir Dals (Groups of the Brave) were formed in that city too, building themselves on the local akhara or gymnasium culture.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, many of the volunteer movements that developed in these cities had also begun to resemble patterns in Delhi—the mohalla-wise organisation of community-

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<sup>16</sup> 'Instructions to PCCs,' by Jawaharlal Nehru, 16 July 1931 in Hindustan Seva Dal General Correspondence, AICC collection, First Installment G8/1931, NMML. **Is the name of the reference 'Instructions to PCCs', & is the author Nehru?**

<sup>17</sup> For more detail on this, see Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics*, Chap. 2.

<sup>18</sup> See Nandini Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth Century India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).



based outfits in particular spaces of the city, which is explored by Stephen Legg in this volume.<sup>19</sup>

Most of these smaller organisations could be quite short-lived, with specific functions, but the intelligence bureau was somewhat justified in including Congress volunteers alongside the so-called communal groups. These too joined in the policing of religious festivals, using some of the same ideas of sangathan (organisation) and competing, essentially with the Hindu groups. Both categories of volunteer organisation also used similar forms of organisation and nomenclature for 'seva' (service), including military-style terminology (volunteers were called sainiks, and there were officers, quartermasters and adjutant commandants), uniforms (the HSD wore blue shirts and khaki shorts), song-books and rules (for example, the Seva Dal Sapatapadi)<sup>20</sup> and detailed regimes of physical culture (lathi drill, lathi vaiyaktic, lezim drill, bugling, national songs, Indian clubs, jui-jitsu).<sup>21</sup> Different movements had different social bases: Joseph Alter has shown how the activities of the akhara were popularised amongst middle- and lower-middle-class small-town dwellers and appealed to the specific political world-views of that section of North India's population.<sup>22</sup> This was the likely social basis too, for the CSD, given its demands of unpaid volunteering in cities. On the other hand, Nandini Goptu has pointed out that there was also a burgeoning set of lower-caste movements presenting themselves as defenders of Hinduism in Kanpur.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen Legg, 'A Pre-Partitioned City? Anti-Colonial and Communal *Mohallas* in Interwar Delhi', in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 42, no. 1 (Jan. 2019), [Add DOI when available](#)

<sup>20</sup> Report of N.S. Hardiker, in 'Hindustan Seval Dal', AICC Collection, First Installment, 9/1930, NMML.

<sup>21</sup> 'Hindustan Seva Dal: Dal Worker's Pledge'.

<sup>22</sup> Alter, *The Wrestler's Body*.

<sup>23</sup> Goptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor*, Chap. 3.

Arguably, there were some important psychological and status-related reasons for the growth of these movements too. Official reports noted that 'in some measure, the volunteer organizations owe their popularity, if not their origin, to the lure of uniform. It is impossible not to observe the pathetic anxiety of all volunteer bodies to model themselves on the pattern of the Military and Police forces'.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, there were also overarching ideological factors in the development of movements for physical culture. Volunteer movements associated with the Congress incorporated ideas and rituals of individual discipline. Gandhi, Bhagwan Das, and some of the leading local Congressmen linked to volunteering, such as Mahabir Tyagi, all related their own physical wellbeing to religion, juxtaposing physical with spiritual fitness.<sup>25</sup> These ideas were derived from concepts of individual spiritual strength drawn from an array of sources—the most mainstream being Gandhian 'swaraj', Tilakite philosophies of action, and the physical structure and discipline connected with militant Hindu and Muslim organisations.

Recent work on the HSD has argued that by the early 1930s its activities were attempting to build military and security structures parallel to those of the state itself, with the aim of eventually making colonial administration obsolete.<sup>26</sup> These latent characteristics are more readily observable from the late 1930s, when their function and purpose had begun to change in fundamental ways. Whereas volunteer movements grew out of specific local urban disputes in the early 1930s,<sup>27</sup> at the outbreak of World War II, they started to connect and network across **the province**, and

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<sup>24</sup> 'Report covering the first half of 1939', L/PJ/8/678, India Office Records, British Library, London (hereafter IOR).

<sup>25</sup> Correspondence with Bhagwan Das, 31 March 1940–6 December 1942, Sri Prakash Papers, **Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML)** NMML; Sampurnanand Papers, **National Archives of India, NAI**; Narendra Dev Papers, NMML; 'Letter to Parasram Mehrotra', 9 June 1932, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. L available at <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm> (accessed on 25 October 2018) (publishing details?), p. 25; and Tyagi, Mahabir, Meri Kaun Sunega.(Delhi: Rajapala, 1963) full publishing details needed. **What is NAI?**

<sup>26</sup> Raza and Roy, 'Paramilitary Organisations in Interwar India', pp. 671–89.

<sup>27</sup> Gooptu, The Politics of the Urban Poor.

crucially the communal competition inherent in earlier years took on party political characteristics. This process was begun **by the context** of provincial Congress ministries in areas like UP, which suggests that such movements were also linked to networks of political patronage over the 1930s and 1940s—the Congress ‘system’ in formation. In other words, the development of volunteer organisations through the late 1930s and early 1940s related to the shifting bases of state sovereignty. By October 1939, shortly after the declaration of war, the building of volunteer movements started to increase rapidly. The total number of organisations fluctuated a great deal between 1938 and 1942, a period for which the UP government kept some estimates as to the size of organisations, and certainly there appeared to be a cultural and functional change with the outbreak of war in late 1939.

Evidence for this provincial widening out can be found in three things: firstly, the organisational aspects of the movements as challenges to the colonial monopoly of securitised space; secondly, the new scales of factional and patronage politics they connected to; and finally the growing competition between Hindu and Muslim organisations. From 1938, provincial and nation-wide training centres for volunteers were set up. Throughout 1938, **Intelligence** noted that volunteer movements had been particularly successful in UP, within an actual ‘military department’ of the **PCC**, with specific training camps (along military lines) in locations across the province, in some cases led by the education minister, Sampurnanand.<sup>28</sup> This reflected dramatic demographic changes: the UP Seva Dal, by the late 1930s under the leadership of R.S. Pandit, increased membership from 3,000 to 25,000 in just 6 months.<sup>29</sup> Equally, the **Muslim National Guards** had clearly made huge strides in recruitment in the Congress-led administrative provinces—in UP for example, it increased from 15,076 to 18,448 in the space of six months up to the end of the Ministry period in September

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Volunteer Movement in India (I)’, October 1938, L/PJ/8/678, IOR.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Report covering the second half of 1939’, L/PJ/8/678, IOR.

1939.<sup>30</sup> This formalised military-style training was not set up on the same basis for the smaller, localised miscellaneous Hindu groups, which suggests that the challenge to state sovereignty was not organised in the same ways for the latter, with the exception of the Hindu Mahasabha (see below). Nevertheless, there were clear examples of co-ordination and emulation between the Congress and Hindu groups at local levels.

In December 1938, the PCC in UP set up a 'semi-military' training camp for the whole province in Ayodhya, which was intended as a nucleus for an All-India corps.<sup>31</sup> Officials noted that its appeal remained mostly in UP itself, however its organiser, Nand Kumar Deo Vashishta, discussed the hope that it would raise a force of 100,000 by 1940, which would be trained on police and military lines. At one such camp, Vashishta was reported to have claimed that 'as soon as Congress had effected a strong corps capable of administering law and order', Congress ministries would 'create a crisis, and order city and district CCs to take administration into their own hands'.<sup>32</sup> By June 1939, towards the end of the Congress Ministry period, training camps had spread across the province—to Aligarh, Mathura, Ghazipur, Jhansi, Jaunpur, Kanpur, Farrukhabad, Budaun, Unao, Bahraich, Meerut, Azamgarh, Pilibhit and Gorakhpur.<sup>33</sup>

These forms of organisation were absolutely about the challenge to colonial control of public security and the spaces those instruments of governance implied. The UP was exercised, for example, by Nehru's insistence that despite official orders to ban 'military style' drilling in early August 1940, military style Congress volunteer processions should still take place in Kanpur and Allahabad. At first, the local Congress committees had sought permission under the Police Act, but this was opposed by Nehru, who took

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> 'Note on Volunteer Movements in India (II)', December 1938, L/PJ/8/678, IOR.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> 'Report Covering the Second Half of 1939', L/PJ/8/678, IOR.

part in the Allahabad procession on 15 August accompanied by Seva Dal and other volunteers armed with lathis.<sup>34</sup>

**Volunteer movements were also connected to other forms of political patronage.**

Just as the Congress became the base point for a range of other parties that had to cut deals with its committees and leadership for influence in a given locality, similarly, political volunteer movements by their nature allowed institutions to share members and resources more than they might have done otherwise. Volunteer movements, then, **were shaped by patronage networks** which, by the late 1930s **were forming province-wide**. That the movements were used for short-term and electoral purposes was demonstrated by their highly flexible nature and their transience. An Intelligence Bureau note observed: 'The country is full of mushroom organizations, created to meet the exigencies of the moment and then forgotten, seldom properly organized or systematically developed, without central control or financial backing...owing allegiance to nobody, or what is worse, to a local faction or a faction's busybody'.<sup>35</sup>

The volunteer movements were also significant in the development of factional and electoral politics. We can see this, to an extent, in the support bases of figures such as Algu Rai Shastri, who linked movements across the entire province.<sup>36</sup> And in a general sense we can see it in the correlation between the volunteer movements' activities and elections. In the eastern part of UP for example: according to official figures, the growth in volunteer movements in one short period and in the specific district of Gorakhpur was directly related to Assembly bye-elections.<sup>37</sup> Not surprisingly then, by the time of the 1945–46 elections, it was clear that some of the Hindu

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<sup>34</sup> 'Special Branch Quarterly Report to Government on the Volunteer Situation in U.P.', 8 May 1941, Police CID Box 82, file 1240/1941, Uttar Pradesh State Archives (UPSA).

<sup>35</sup> 'Report Covering the First Half of 1939', L/PJ/8/678, IOR.

<sup>36</sup> See 'Representations against Algu Rai Shastri, Azamgarh district (East), cum Ballia district (West)', AICC Papers, Election files, file 4617A 1951, NMML.

<sup>37</sup> 'Special Branch Quarterly Report to Government on the Volunteer Situation in U.P.', 8 May 1941, Police CID Box 82, file 1240/1941, UPSA.

volunteer organisations were assisting the Congress in election work, as we will see in more detail in section 2.<sup>38</sup> This was directly reported in the Meerut region, and when we look at election complaints for this area in the 1951 state elections, again we see suggestions of a relationship between volunteer organisations and election activity.

By the outbreak of **war**, and coming to the end of the Ministry period, the growth and provincial organisation of the Congress movements affected both Muslim organisations and Hindu ones in a competitive sense as we will see later. At the outbreak of war, the UP Congress Volunteer Board set up a National Defence Board, which led to a response from the Muslim League which divided the province into four areas for the MLNG. In addition, from 1940, there was an increase in local miscellaneous Hindu organisations. By the end of June 1940, a collection of organisations in UP had recorded an estimated membership of 9,400, including the Bajrang Dal, Hanuman Dal, Kesri Dal (Allahabad), Hindu Sangh (Kanpur and Lucknow), Arya Vir Dal (Ghazipur and Lucknow), and Hindu Raksha Dal (Jhansi). Perhaps most importantly, we see a correlation between forms of rapid growth of both Hindu and Muslim organisations in certain districts, particularly in the west of the province, as the data in the next section shows.<sup>39</sup>

These province-wide activities shadowed a similar political drive by the Hindu Mahasabha and Hindu Sabhas, also in connection to wartime military recruitment, and the changing activities of the Muslim League. Soon after the Lahore meeting of the Muslim **in March 1940**, in which the famous **Resolution** was circulated **setting out a proposal for separate sovereign Muslim states**, UP observers noted the increased publicity surrounding Hindu movements and especially those sponsored by the Hindu

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<sup>38</sup> The Leader (Allahabad) (20 February 1946).

<sup>39</sup> 'Special Branch Quarterly Report to Government on the Volunteer Situation in U.P.', 8 May 1941, Police CID Box 82, file 1240/1941, UPSA.

Mahasabha.<sup>40</sup> Just as the Congress volunteer bodies began to respond to the war, so the UP Provincial Hindu Sabha stepped up its organising of a Provincial Hindu Militarization Board in 1941.<sup>41</sup>

## **II. Volunteer activity and instances of communal violence—scale and location**

The changes in volunteer movements of the late 1930s and early 1940s were inter-related: ties to factional politics, changes in function and enhanced communal competition reflected wider political and international developments. This section will explore how these changes also had effects on inter-religious violence. There has been plentiful research over the last 15 years or so exploring the extent to which civic or political conditions shape the forms and terms of communalism, both as representation and violence. Paul Brass, for example, argued that the conjunction of governance and the needs of political mobilisation 'produce' particular forms of Hindu–Muslim confrontation in contemporary India.<sup>42</sup> Ashutosh Varshney examined the specific urban locations where violence was rare and related them to the successful functioning of the institutions of civil society.<sup>43</sup> Steven Wilkinson has gathered a huge amount of data to explore the incidence of violence in relation to certain kinds of electoral conditions.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> 'Proceedings of the Departmental Committee Convened to Consider the Question of Action on an All-India Basis in regard to Khaksar and Similar Volunteer Organizations', 4 May 1940, L/PJ/8/678, IOR.

<sup>41</sup> A resolution was passed in Bombay on 10 March, calling on all subsidiary Hindu Sabhas to form Militarization Boards. *The Leader* (Allahabad) (12 March 1941).

<sup>42</sup> Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu–Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). For another cross-site study comparing Jaipur and Ajmer following the Babri Masjid violence, see Ajay Verghese, *The Colonial Origins of Ethnic Violence in India* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016). **Please okay crx to the references** – WG - OK

<sup>44</sup> Steven Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

All of this work shares frameworks that examine such violence in situ, as a function of specific local conditions pertaining at a fixed historical moment. It is little concerned with questions of temporality, even though that has been a key theme in the effects of nationalist discourse on violence.<sup>45</sup> Very little work on ethnic conflict however has explored notions of spatial/inter-spatial change or continuity, such as the movement of the resources of violence, both physical and ideological. Looking at the stages in the development of the volunteer movements gives us a sense of how forms of organised violence were increasingly associated with expanding political frameworks in which violence followed spatial patterns. This section of the article will explore this by locating connections between the nature, growth and shape of movements in the early 1940s, and the ensuing violence around the 1946 elections. Principally, it aims to show how local movements scaled up to respond to regional political changes and to national changes at the centre of Indian politics. It does not argue that the existence of volunteer groups in all cases 'created' individual instances of violence—a question which requires locally specific studies; rather, it suggests that the patterns of volunteer movement growth affected the forms and spread of violence at specific political moments.

The flexibility and peculiar kind of localism of the movements was indicative of how volunteering rose and fell in relation to political events and changes in UP, and was also a result of the symbiotic relationship between communal violence and the rise of volunteering. This is perhaps best illustrated in a very well documented riot that took place in February 1939, in the large industrial city of Kanpur—a site previously marked by one of the largest riots of the decade in March 1931. In Kanpur in 1939, an apparently simple dispute over music before a mosque escalated into a large-scale riot as a result of the rapid mobilisation of Muslim League and Congress volunteer

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<sup>45</sup> See Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).



movements. The result was, according to police and newspaper accounts, more of a 'pitched battle' across the city's Meston Road on 12 February. On 19 February, The Pioneer reported that the same groups that had been rapidly mobilised during the violence were now doing 'relief work'.<sup>46</sup> By 22 February, new volunteer corps were being organised under the auspices of the Hindu Sangh, which continued to have a role in the promotion of the rights of local Hindu communities in negotiating terms of peace between communities in the city.<sup>47</sup>

Kanpur shows that the relationship between volunteer organisations was part of the reproduction of violence itself, in the sense that rapid mobilisation could exacerbate, change or even initiate an incidence of violence. The existence of organised corps affected the form of violence—in the case of cities like Kanpur, turning it into 'pitched battles'. Furthermore, volunteer movements were a means of force for local political leaders, for whom such violence was a dynamic of institutional authority. In other ways, such groups were sometimes formed around the process of post-riot reconciliation and peace. There was no contradiction in this process, as the evidence of 1939 Kanpur suggests (or indeed the earlier riot in the same city in March 1931). These were not 'civic' peace initiatives of the kind suggested by Varshney,<sup>48</sup> and grew more often out of two things: firstly, the policing of religious festivals and other gatherings, on which occasions, rather like the state police, violence could be exacerbated by the presence of security forces;<sup>49</sup> and secondly, the bringing together of volunteer organisations as part of a post-conflict peace-making process, which was typical of some of the larger

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<sup>46</sup> The Pioneer (19 February 1939).

<sup>47</sup> H.C. Mitchell, Confidential Diary, 25 February 1939, Mitchell papers, MSS.EUR.F.255/5, IOR.

<sup>48</sup> Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*.

<sup>49</sup> This is most clearly argued in Paul Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Brass, *The Production of Hindu–Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*. The contemporary examples provided by Brass have an array of historical parallels, where policing itself exacerbated instances of violence, especially in urban parts of UP. See Veena Das, *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

inter-war conflicts in colonial North India.<sup>50</sup> Volunteer-related communal violence also had the effect of connecting all-India with regional or provincial affairs. This was also well illustrated by the reaction to events in other parts of India—as we have seen in Meerut in November 1946.

But perhaps the most revealing changes in patterns of communal violence come about when we look at the spatial relationship between the growth and competitive development of volunteer organisations and incidents of communal violence in particular districts. Looking at the relationship between areas of volunteer organisation mobilisation and communal violence in the mid 1940s, there are some interesting patterns:

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**Table 1:** Membership of volunteer organisations by district, 1942, showing increases since 1940

Source: Police CID Box 82 file 1240/1941, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, where?

Key: Cong = Congress; MLNG=Muslim League National Guards; Khsar = Khaksars;  
M Dal = Mahabir Dal

The data used in Table 1 is the most detailed material we have for a province-wise assessment of the sizes of volunteer organisations. It is drawn from police intelligence reports, even though they have a number of flaws in terms of accuracy. Nevertheless the intelligence gathered could be reasonably viewed as internally consistent, being

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, the development of peace committees in the cases of the riot in Kanpur in 1931 which developed out of Congress leaders/organisations that, according to the official evidence, had been implicated in the violence itself. See 'Hindu–Muslim Riot in Kanpur, 1931', L/PJ/7/75, IOR.

based on stable systems of reporting, albeit only covering (in this form) the period from 1939 to 1942. Added to the data is the population figure for the largest city of each district, since for the most part volunteer movements were urban phenomena, and this demography affected the relative ratios of different organisational memberships. This was a critical period in the playing out of India's war mobilisation: the main political parties were establishing their responses to the outbreak of war, and we also capture a period before the rapid deterioration of conditions for the Allies with the fall of Burma in 1942 and the decision of the Congress to launch Quit India in the summer of the same year. The tables illustrate district by district membership figures at the end point of mid 1942, collecting data from Congress-related groups, the Muslim League National Guards (MLNG), the Khaksars (another Muslim organisation, originating in Punjab), the Mahabir Dal, and other miscellaneous Hindu organisations.

The first significant pattern to note from Table 1 is that there were relatively large increases in volunteer membership in the western districts of the province as a whole between 1939 and 1942. For example, 8 out of 10 districts in the west of the province showed volunteer numbers increasing, compared to 3 of 10 and 4 of 10 in the central and east of the province respectively. Secondly, in these western districts, compared to central and eastern parts of UP, there was a closer ratio between 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' volunteer organisation numbers. The ratios of 4:1 and 5:1 Hindu:Muslim memberships in Dehra Dun and Meerut respectively were the most unbalanced, with the majority of other districts falling between parity and 2:1. Central and eastern areas had a greater predomination of Hindu-related compared to Muslim-related organisations overall; this was partly a function of demography, with larger Muslim populations in the western towns. But when combined with overall expansions in those areas, it takes on a new significance. Overall, it is likely that the expansion of volunteer movement activity, and the incidence of communal competition, were mutually inter-dependent in western UP. In other words, since the movements were more likely to

develop along community lines in those regions, they were also likely to have a greater popular appeal. This is supported by the political commentaries made in the UP governors' reports through the late 1930s, which signalled the increasing importance of League–Congress competition during the Congress Ministry period.<sup>51</sup> In addition, as we will see below, there was a closer alignment between political factions in the context of elections and volunteer groups in the western cities. Finally, more speculatively, it is likely that the development of a new 'wave' of violence to the west of UP, in Delhi and Punjab following the increasing deadlock in negotiations, had an effect on the western parts of UP—something also suggested by the opening case study of Garhmukteshwar.<sup>52</sup>

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**Figure 1.** Map of the United Provinces, showing occurrences of large-scale riots between January and July 1946

Source: APS 1946; map reproduced with permission of Cambridge University Press, from Francis Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims 1860–1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 9.

Furthermore, there is clearly a relationship between this activity in the west of the province, in terms of competition between Hindu and Muslim organisations, and the

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<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Haig to Linlithgow, 23 March 1938; 27 March 1939; and 10 April 1939, MSS.EUR.F.125, IOR.

<sup>52</sup> For another account of this riot and its connections to the wider Partition violence, see Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 92–119.

subsequent importance of western districts in the violence of the mid 1940s, specifically 1946, around the time of, and shortly following, the elections of 1945–46.

If we consider the point that volunteer groups, as section 1 showed, related to developing political factions in the province, and adapted ‘policing’ functions during elections, this moment would appear to be significant in exploring pre-Partition inter-religious violence. Figure 1 shows that of the 14 major communal riots that took place between January and July 1946, 11 took place in western districts. In other words, there would appear to be a correlation between the rapid increase in volunteer activity, Hindu–Muslim volunteer competition and the incidence of this form of violence. The pattern of western UP organisation, growth and consolidation of Congress/Hindu groups, and the occurrence of violence in that region from the early part of 1946 onwards, suggest that these ‘competitive’ and ‘consolidating’ aspects of volunteer activity were contexts for violence and its increase. Over time there was a shift to the west in the significance of volunteer activity, and this increase took place more evenly across all community organisations when compared to the central and eastern areas of UP..

This data alone is probably not sufficient to conclusively tie organised volunteer mobilisation to incidences of communal violence; detailed reports on the riots in question would be needed for this. A cautious exploration of other qualitative and contextual material, however, suggests that the growth and development of volunteering, especially in relation to elections, was a very likely reason for a small-scale conflict growing into something larger. Steven Wilkinson has argued that ethnic violence takes place in towns on a large scale (in our case, a large enough scale to be official reported) where a town’s police force is relatively unable or unwilling to act.<sup>53</sup> We have already seen how volunteer movements increasingly sought to take on the

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<sup>53</sup> Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*, pp. 5–7.

role of policing during elections and other public events. This role seemed to increase over the period leading up to the 1946 elections, and particularly on the part of communal organisations, either in alliance with the Congress or as protectors of Muslim interests. RSS activities, for example, showed a particular increase by 1943 in the western districts of Meerut, Aligarh and Budaun.<sup>54</sup> According to intelligence reports, the RSS had assisted the Congress in election work in some of these areas around late 1945; then throughout the spring and early summer of 1946, it emerged that the RSS was very strongly involved in election work in the western UP districts of Aligarh, Meerut and Pilibhit.<sup>55</sup> It was in these areas, again, that we saw not simply communal violence, but 'well organised' instances of it, culminating in the serious and co-ordinated attack in Garmukhtesar, Meerut. Other examples of such organised attacks that link directly to volunteer movements in western UP include a clash deliberately initiated (according to police reports) by the MLNG in Meerut in September 1945 against the Congress-oriented Jamiat-ul-Ulema, which led to a larger Hindu–Muslim conflict;<sup>56</sup> and in Aligarh in April 1946, following communal violence there, police reported that RSS speeches were detailing a forthcoming 'war' between Hindus and Muslims, which in turn contributed to the growth of drilling activity by the MLNG and the setting up of a Muslim Defence Committee.<sup>57</sup> The growing activities of the MLNG were also linked to riots and violence in July 1946 in Aligarh, Muzzafarnagar, Budaun, Agra, Shahjahanpur and Lucknow—all cities in the western region of UP except for Lucknow.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> APS, 5 November 1943. What is APS? See above in answer to first query

<sup>55</sup> APS, 5, 19, & 26 May 1944; 10 August 1945; 22 February 1946; 15 March 1946; and 5 April 1946.

<sup>56</sup> Fortnightly Report for the First Half of September 1945, Frampton Papers, Centre for South Asian Studies, Cambridge, UK (SAS). Please confirm this is UK not USA yes, UK

<sup>56</sup> APS 16 August 1945; 25 January 1946.

<sup>56</sup> APS 13 November 1940.

<sup>57</sup> APS, 12 & 19 April 1946.

<sup>58</sup> Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of June 1946, 12 July 1946; and Fortnightly Report for the First Half of July 1946, 22 July 1946, Frampton Papers, SAS.

Secondly, Wilkinson's work on contemporary elections suggests that state authorities need a particular 'incentive' to prevent violence against minorities around elections; in other words, it must be in the interests of the parties involved to garner minority votes in a particular constituency or area for violence to be averted.<sup>59</sup> This was probably also a pattern in violence during late colonial elections—at least in a negative sense, with forms of ethnic mobilisation around communal divisions leading to election-specific conflict.<sup>60</sup> In the lead up to the 1945–46 elections in western UP, it is clear that the growth in volunteer organisations related to community defence at the time of elections. In early 1946, complaints coming into the UP government appointments department from local Congress committees suggested that policemen in Bulandsahar and Muzzafarnagar districts (again, western districts) were working alongside MLNG members to intimidate voters.<sup>61</sup>

### **III. P.D. Tandon and the Hind Rakshak Dal**

A third area which supports the argument that volunteer movements were pivotal to different forms of violence in the early to mid 1940s can be seen in the strategies of specific UP political leaders in the two years preceding Partition. Exploring the intelligence reports on volunteering, it is clear that there were specific political patrons or promoters of drilling and semi-militaristic organisation who repeatedly appeared in police reports. There is a clearly identifiable group of Congress leaders in UP who were, to an extent, supporting forms of Hindu mobilisation and who were active in volunteering of the kind recorded in the intelligence files. Algu Rai Shastri and Mahabir

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<sup>59</sup> Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*, pp. 6–9, 138–40.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, the violence that took place around the 1926 elections in Allahabad, which according to official reports was driven via Hindu mobilisation; 'Statement of Communal Riots in the UP in 1922–7', L/PJ/6/1890, IOR.

<sup>61</sup> 'Prohibition of Government Servants from Taking Part in Elections', Appointments, Box 260, File 861/1945, UPSA.

Tyagi were two such figures.<sup>62</sup> Shastri's interest in volunteer mobilisation directly corresponded to the run-up to and occurrence of the 1945–46 elections. In August 1945 he toured Azamgarh district for Congress volunteer recruitment purposes;<sup>63</sup> by January 1946, during the elections themselves, he was openly advocating membership of drilling organisations and made speeches condemning Gandhian non-violence.<sup>64</sup>

But perhaps the most significant and beguiling figure was the challenger to Nehru, Purushottam Das Tandon, customarily given the title 'Rajarshi' or royal saint. Connecting the politics of the locality and province to the national level (where by 1950 for a while he successfully usurped Nehru as Congress president), Tandon eventually championed an alternative political trajectory to what historians have seen as the Nehruvian consensus in India. Tandon's perspective presented two important trends: firstly a deliberate and distinctive critique of what he saw as mainstream Congress non-violent anti-colonialism, which had implications for how volunteer movements could associate with concepts of national freedom and the connection between sovereignty and violence; and secondly, a clearly ethnicised notion of citizenship identity, which then had a knock-on effect following Independence.

Throughout the mid 1940s, again coinciding with the last elections of the colonial era, Tandon advocated a position that critiqued Gandhian non-violence and promoted the encouragement of a politics of community defence. At first, Tandon's interest in volunteer movements grew out of Congress-related activities. Intelligence sources observed that on 6 July 1940, he met with Krishna Kant Malaviya to discuss the need

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<sup>62</sup> Algu Rai Shastri was a Congress leader whose early career in the 1930s was based in western UP—principally Meerut—where he was a prominent Arya Samaj leader too. After Independence, Shastri became an MP for the Azamgarh constituency. Mahabir Tyagi was a prominent Congressman from the early 1920s who also built his political career in western UP from the district of Dehra Dun, and was associated with the Arya Samaj in that region.

<sup>63</sup> 'Confidential Report', 'Fortnightly Report for the First Half of November 1945', 20 November 1945, Frampton Papers, SAS.

<sup>64</sup> APS, 16 August 1945 & 25 January 1946.



to establish a 'National Defence force'. And perhaps most notoriously, on 5 November 1946 at Allahabad University, Tandon tried to persuade Indian students to follow the example of their German counterparts in their admiration of the Führer.<sup>65</sup> By 1945, his direct anti-Gandhian principles had come out into the open. Between August 1945 and February 1946, he inaugurated camps in Allahabad, Baraon and Rae Bareli for training Congress volunteers with weapons, and he engaged in direct vocal opposition to what he described as Gandhi's policy of 'appeasement'.<sup>66</sup>

Arguably, Tandon's volunteer movement activities could be seen as the epitome of the inter-district organisation that had come about by the mid 1940s, and which characterised forms of organised communal confrontation leading up to Partition. Most significantly, the movements Tandon supported showed how ostensibly secular volunteer groups, in the context of the mid 1940s, could lead to forms of consolidation between the Congress and overtly 'Hindu' groups. This process was perhaps best illustrated in a new volunteer body which Tandon helped establish from June 1947—the Hind Rakshak Dal (HRD). The HRD espoused an idea of homeland defence in which homeland was conjured up less as a physical territory than as a cultural edifice—a theme which Tandon came back to repeatedly. Unfortunately, we have relatively little information on the HRD itself and its scope and scale, yet it was referred to intermittently in the press and was the focus of correspondence between Tandon and a range of other organisations in UP and further afield. The timing of the establishment of the HRD coincided with the decision in the government negotiations to agree to the partition of India at the start of June. The movement can therefore be seen as a direct and rapid response to the precipitate changes at the centre. It also represented the

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<sup>65</sup> APS, 13 November 1940.

<sup>66</sup> **ibid.**; 'Fortnightly Report for the First Half of July', 20 July 1945, Frampton Papers, SAS; and APS, 1 June, 24 August, 28 December 1945, and 1 March 1946. On 16 January 1946, Tandon had also addressed the students of Banaras Hindu University, where he declared that non-violence had proved to be ineffective for freedom. See 'Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of January 1946', 5 February 1946, Frampton Papers, SAS. **Is this ibid correct?**  
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consolidation of an anti-Pakistan position that had been evident in the volunteer movements of earlier years as well as a tendency for a new line of anti-Gandhian politics within the UP Congress.

The HRD drew on a broad constituency of multi-sited anti-Muslim causes for the first time too, but again, in line with the spatial pattern suggested earlier, its activities were concentrated in western UP. In the responses to Tandon's proposals for the HRD, we can see processes of Congress–Hindu consolidation and re-legitimation at work too. Both local UP Congress Committees and individuals wrote to Tandon offering support. One letter from the Bareilly Town Congress Committee asked for the Swang Sewak Samiti in Bareilly to be allied with the Rakshak Dal. The Congress Committee in Mathura and the Students Congress Corps also sent their support.<sup>67</sup> Many North Indian responses to the HRD came from these western districts of UP and from a range of cultural institutions too. A number of educational institutions as well as educationalists offered support, including the Hapur Agricultural College in Meerut and the D.S. High School in Aligarh. This theme of consolidation led, in one case, to a Dalit organisation agreeing to ally with the Dal as a new form of Hindu defence; volunteers of the Harijan Sainik Shala in Sitapur decided to work along the lines suggested by Tandon for the HRD in June 1947. The organisation chalked out a scheme to start up a Dal in every 4 or 5 villages in the district.<sup>68</sup>

Connections to the Hindu far Right were equally enthusiastic, illustrating the broad fantasies of a violently-defended and exclusively Hindu future. Kalyan Chand Mohilay, secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha and resident of Allahabad, wrote to Tandon suggesting a more widespread introduction of military training for young men. One RSS member, Bhaskeranand, heavily criticised Gandhi for the carnage of Partition and

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<sup>67</sup> Student Congress Corps to Tandon, 3 August 1947, Tandon Papers, file 93, NAI.

<sup>68</sup> National Herald (18 June 1947).

suggested the setting up of a shadow cabinet which would include the **RSS Gurujii**, Dr. B.S. Moonje, Tandon and Acharya J.B. Kripalani.<sup>69</sup> Another Hindu Mahasabha supporter, T.S. Sharma of Kanpur, wrote to Tandon to support his scheme, with the prayer: 'May God guide the man in authority not to place any obstacles in the way so that even belated steps can be taken to prevent the threatened extinction of the Hindu race'.<sup>70</sup> Other organisations across India tapped into this conceptual territory of Hindu India too. There was a declaration of support from the Andhra Socialist Party, which declared: 'Muslim nationalism is rising. We must guard against it'—in this case a reference to the problem of Hyderabad.<sup>71</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In these ideas of community defence, figures such as Tandon and other volunteer movement organisers were promoting institutions that paralleled the state, and by extension an alternative notion of sovereignty. This bears some resemblance to what Thomas Blom Hansen has described as quotidian notions of violent justice—where sovereignty is not found in law or legitimate rule, but in 'tentative and always emergent [forms of] authority grounded in violence'. This is violence that is 'performed and designed to generate loyalty, fear and legitimacy'.<sup>72</sup> In the colonial world, different kinds and registers of sovereignty overlapped and co-existed—a situation generated by the actual fragmented and distributed forms of local authority. We can see late colonial and early post-colonial India as a playing out of what Hansen sees as 'a twilight zone of exception and lawlessness, allowing for unrestrained violence and

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<sup>69</sup> Kalyan Chand Mohiley to P.D. Tandon, 18 November 1947, Tandon Papers, file 29, NAI.

<sup>70</sup> T.S. Sharma to Tandon, 22 June 1947, Tandon Papers, file 313, NAI.

<sup>71</sup> Parthasavathy to Tandon, 22 June 1947, Tandon Papers, file 8, NAI. The Andhra Socialist Party were here responding to events in the princely state of Hyderabad, in which the militant Muslim Razakars supported the non-accession of the state to the Indian Union.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, 'Sovereignty Revisited', in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 35 (2006), pp. 295–315. **Full citation needed**

exploitation...an imaginary canvas on which liberal arguments [for] the necessity of rights and rule of law...could be made'.<sup>73</sup> The mid 1940s is particularly crucial for examining the shifting grounds of these registers.

In this sense, the HRD and organisations like it, rather than being invested in the idea of the state, were invested in more distributed and alternative notions of sovereign power. Arguably, volunteer movements generated zones of 'exception' in areas and times in which the boundaries of power were shifting, such as 1946–47. At this time, formal sites of sovereignty were rapidly changing, opening up what we might describe as 'informal' sites—fantasies of shadow cabinets to protect the Hindu hearth, the formation of militias, and the intermittent but unstable pooling of resources between factional leaders and communal organisations. At another level, this was the growing exercise of community policing, in which segments or zones of state sovereignty were increasingly seen as ineffective.

The development of volunteer organisations in regions such as UP were important in changing the forms of violence that took place in the last few years of colonial rule in India. When we look in detail at these movements, there seems to be a relationship between volunteer movements and spaces of violence in a region (especially around elections or other events of public engagement, such as fairs), bringing together a sense of how violence or potential violence was networked. By region, there were significant patterns in the appearance and growth of movements and the forms of conflict that subsequently appeared. Arguably too, the forms of conflict that we see in the volunteer movements were important antecedents for both Partition and for contemporary conflicts. In particular, historians have asked how non-militarised groups managed to create such large-scale casualties as seen in 1947. Research on the specific violence around Partition has pointed to the importance of demobilised troops

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

with military training.<sup>74</sup> This paper argues that some of these patterns of violence were quasi-military and pre-dated the moment of Partition itself.

Looking at volunteer movements also gives us an insight into the distributed forms of quasi-state power in this period in India. The movements associated with the Congress transformed from ones set up to help police religious festivals and areas of the city, to political support organisations that explicitly took on security and policing functions. They were also employed at the times of elections and were, as intelligence reports noted, linked to party political factions in some instances. In this respect they were indicative of the ambiguous role of the local state in policing urban violence through this period. On the other hand, the period of 1945–50 was a unique moment in the appearance of semi-fascist organisations in this way, and the working out of citizenship as ‘ethnicised’. Tandon’s political thought was pivotal to this accommodation, and suggests ways in which we can explore the emergence of forms of fascism in moments of mass conflict. If sovereignty is at one level an exercise in the assertion of legitimacy, then the HRD helped to establish, for a time, a new kind of legitimate space for militant Hindu chauvinism and fascism which was given the trappings and associations of the all Indian secular Congress.

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<sup>74</sup> Jha and Wilkinson, ‘Does Combat Experience Foster Organisational Skill?’