

# VISHWA HINDU PARISHAD OF AMERICA

**IMPACT:** Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) is a Hindu far-right organization and the US offshoot of India's Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), designated as a "militant religious organization" by the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) World Factbook for a number of years. VHPA's leaders have a history of making anti-Muslim remarks, it has platformed far-right Hindu nationalists and recently has targeted American Muslim politicians and rights organizations who call attention to the persecution of Muslims and rising Hindu nationalism in India.

- Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) is the cultural wing of **Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS)**, the Hindu supremacist paramilitary organization and the ideological parent of India's ruling **Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)** government. The group has been deeply involved in stoking communal tensions and promoting anti-minority hate and violence, particularly against Muslims. The **US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)** has **listed VHP as a "militant religious organization" for a number of years in its World Factbook**. In early June 2018, an archived version of the CIA World Factbook site notes VHP as a "militant religious organization," however, a couple of weeks later the sub-section where this was listed was removed along with the mention of the VHP.
- VHP **played a central role in the 1992 demolition of Babri Masjid**, a 16th-century mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, that the Hindu far-right claims was built on top of the birthplace of the Hindu god, Lord Ram. Following the demolition, there were subsequent riots that killed more than 2,000 people, mostly Muslims. **VHP is also accused of orchestrating the violence during the 2002 anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat state, killing over 1,000 Muslims.** A **UK government inquiry into the pogroms found that the violence was pre-planned and that "the VHP and its allies acted with the support of the state Government."** In recent years, VHP leaders have been advocating for the genocide of the country's Muslim citizens.
- On its website, the **VHPA says it is "inspired by the same values and ideals" as VHP in India but claims it's "legally separate and operationally independent."** A previous version of the VHPA website had a separate section highlighting the co-founders of VHP and eulogized its work. Archived content of VHP India's website between 1998-2004 shows VHPA as part of its "family of organizations."
- "There are VHP Units, registered under its name according to the laws of the respective countries, in USA, U.K., Canada..." the VHP website claims. Another organizational chart from 2003 shows that VHP India coordinates activities of global VHPs, including VHPA, through its Working President (External), who is the chief international coordinator.
- According to **Dr. Audrey Truschke, Associate Professor of South Asian History at Rutgers University, VHPA follows "its Indian parent group in encouraging militant, including violent, behavior among Hindus,"** while Assistant Professor of Political Science at Drew University, Dr. Sangay K. Mishra notes in his book, Desis Divided: The Political Lives of South Asian Americans, that the group is "aligned closely with Hindu nationalist politics in India."
- Established in New York in 1970 and then incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1974, **the VHPA was co-founded by Dr. Mahesh J Mehta and three other workers of RSS. Mehta, who himself served as a full-time worker of the paramilitary group, was inspired by RSS's second chief MS Golwalkar to start the VHPA.** Known for his anti-Muslim and anti-Christian hate, Golwalkar, who admired Hitler, referred to Muslims as India's top internal threat and proposed the holocaust as a solution to address it.
- **Mehta**, who served as VHPA's President for multiple terms and remained Chairman of its Advisory Board until he died in 2021, **co-founded numerous Hindu far-right organizations in the US, including the Hindu Swayamsewak Sangh (HSS), the American wing of RSS; the Overseas Friends of BJP, the registered foreign agent of BJP in the US,** where he served on its national executive council. He was also the Vice-President and a member of the Board of Trustees of VHP.

- With 21 chapters across the country, the VHPA operates as a hydra-headed infrastructure like VHP in India with more than 20 different organizations, projects, and programs mainly operating in the realm of Temple relations, advocacy, students, and youth outreach. Prominent organizations and projects of VHPA include the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation, Hindu Students Council, HinduPact, American Hindus Against Defamation, Hindu Mandir Executives Conference, and the Hindu University of America. It also runs a network of children's schools (Bal Vihars) and organizes youth camps and conferences.
- Over the decades, **VHPA leaders have promoted various conspiracy theories and tropes that generate fear, suspicion, and hatred toward Muslims**, including that Muslim men are paid money to entrap Hindu women, they are producing more children in order to overtake Hindus, Muslim women have no real status in Islam, they are less patriotic and raise the bogey of "Muslim appeasement." VHPA's **website features articles that say "fundamentals of Islam clearly divide humanity" and "many ayats (verses) in the Quran are indeed hateful."** Its Hindudvesha website has categories like "Destructive Islam." An archived version of VHPA's website claims that Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs are categorized as Hindus.
- VHPA group played an important role in providing support to the violent Hindu nationalist movement in India that culminated with the demolition of the Babri Masjid. In 1987, VHPA started "Ram Janmabhoomi Mukti Yagna," a series of rituals to liberate "Ram's birthplace." The Wire reported that on December 6, 1992, "a crowd of almost 150,000 people gathered to listen to speeches by BJP and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leaders," following which the crowd stormed and demolished the Babri Masjid. In 2009, the **Liberhan Commission, an inquiry commissioned by the Indian government to investigate the circumstances around the destruction of the masjid, found that several BJP and VHP leaders were "culpable in the demolition of the mosque."**
- In the aftermath, **VHPA's then-President Mahesh Mehta justified mosque demolition in a speech delivered at a student-led event at Columbia University**, while on its official website, the group wrote, "What got destroyed on 6th December 1992 at Ayodhya was no mosque and no second wrong was ever committed," adding that, "undoing any wrong is an act of justice and is essentially a noble act.... the tearing down of the Babri structure (a symbol of Mogul supremacy) [was] the undoing of a continuing wrong that was started in 1528."
- In 1993, VHPA held the "Global Vision 2000" conference, which was attended by VHP leader Uma Bharti who told the crowd that, "After December 6th, the tiger has been let out of the cage." At the conference, the then-BJP President Murli Manohar Joshi called the Babri Masjid demolition his life's "most memorable day."
- Following the deadly 2002 anti-Muslim Gujarat pogrom, **then-VHPA leader Dr. Madhu Jhaveri wrote, "How can "peaceful coexistence" with those who do not believe in "peaceful coexistence" result in peaceful coexistence,"** and added, "our own brainwashed elite (secular Hindus) are busy branding us fanatics if we react." Gaurang G. Vaishnav, the then-General Secretary of VHPA went a step further and said "Hindus of Gujarat have not killed in the name of religion. Hindus have reacted to the "Aat-tayees" as any society would after years of impotence and tolerance. Our scriptures describe Aat-tayi as one who plunders, takes away other's women folk, rapes, or sets fire to others property. And our scriptures are very categorical about the punishment to be meted out to the Aat-tayees. It is punishment by death." **Both Jhaveri and Vaishnav currently serve on VHPA's advisory board.**
- In 2002, **VHPA also ran a campaign against the airing of a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) documentary on the human cost of the Gujarat pogrom and the role of Hindu nationalist groups in the violence.** VHPA described the documentary as "blatant propaganda against Hindus," and told its members to send letters and emails to PBS in protest.
- VHPA has a history of **platforming Hindu militant leaders from India who promote Islamophobia and openly support violence against the country's Muslims and Christians.** The **group frequently hosted Ashok Singhal**, a senior VHP leader with a history of anti-Muslim rhetoric, was frequently at its events, including the first-ever Dharma

Sansad (religious conference) organized by VHPA in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania in 1998, as well as an event on August 2015 in Massachusetts.

- Singhal is considered as the leading architect of the mass campaign that led to the razing of Babri Masjid and the subsequent violence. **In October 2002, months after the Gujarat pogrom, Singhal said it was a “successful experiment” and “what happened in Gujarat will happen in the whole of the country.”**
- Many VHPA events have featured anti-Muslim voices like **Uma Bharti, Murli Manohar Joshi, Mohan Bhagwat, Sadhvi Ritambhara, Subramanian Swamy, and others.** In one such event in New York in 2002, The Ganesh Temple Society told a reporter that they were “misled and manipulated” by VHPA to host an event for Ritambhara, a Hindu militant leader, who has been called “the single most powerful instrument for whipping up anti-Muslim violence” in India, whereas Swamy in 2020 told Vice News that Muslims are “not in an equal category” to Hindus. **In 2011, when Harvard University dropped Swamy’s courses for writing an article advocating for disenfranchising Muslims and demolishing their places of worship, VHPA ran a campaign seeking his reinstatement and said, “his op-ed echoes the frustration of the average Indian.”**
- In **April 2021, VHPA planned to host an event with Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati, a Hindu militant monk who has been spearheading a genocidal campaign against India’s 200 million Muslims.** The event was called off due to pressure and increased scrutiny from the American civil society groups.
- In **July 2021, VHPA organized an event on Kashmir in Washington DC, which featured Cliff Smith, a senior staffer at the Middle East Forum (MEF), a right-wing anti-Islam think tank. The event was also attended by Krishna Gudipati, a VHPA worker who participated in the January 6 insurrection at the US Capitol.**
- In **May 2022, Vishnu Shankar Jain, a far-right lawyer and petitioner in dozens of court cases staking claims over mosques alleging it be Hindu temples, including the Taj Mahal, appeared as a guest at VHPA’s virtual event,** where he called these attacks on Muslim places of worship as “revolution that is unfolding across India.”
- Over the decades, **VHPA has sent millions of dollars to support various projects run by multiple Hindu far-right organizations in India, including the VHP Foundation, the Vishwa Hindu Jankalyan Parishad, the Bharthi Seva Samithi, and the Bhartiya Jan Sewa Sansthan.** A major chunk of the money flows through Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation USA, a non-profit established by VHPA in 2002 to support the RSS-backed Ekal Vidyalaya single teacher-run schools in India. According to the 990 tax documents, EVF has raised more than \$60 million over the past decade.
- Mostly operated in tribal and rural areas, Ekal schools have been accused of promoting Hindu nationalist agenda and anti-minority hate. A 2009 report by a Committee set up by India’s federal Ministry of Human Resource Development revealed that “the training to the teachers of Ekal schools was mainly to spread communal disharmony in the communities and also to inculcate a fundamentalist political ideology... creating enmity amongst communities on the basis of religion.” VHPA leader Ramesh Shah is the current CEO of the Ekal Abhiyan Trust Board, which oversees the Ekal Vidyalaya operations in India.
- In 2001, VHPA distributed a biographical film praising Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a 20th-century Hindu nationalist ideologue who was accused in the murder of Mahatma Gandhi and advocated for treating India’s Muslims as ‘Negroes’ and supported the use of rape as a political weapon.
- **VHPA targets American Muslim politicians, critics, and religious freedom and human rights watchdogs like the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and Amnesty International for raising concerns over Hindu nationalism and the issue of Muslim persecution in India. In June 2022, the group called Congresswoman Ilhan Omar a “radical Islamist” for introducing HR 1196 that condemns “human rights**

violations and violations of international religious freedom in India, including those targeting Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits.”

- In an April 2022 appearance on India’s News 18 channel, Utsav Chakrabarti, VHPA’s HinduPACT Executive Director, attacked American Muslim organizations for their advocacy on the persecution of minorities in India and falsely accused them of colluding with “radical jihadists from groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda.” The same year, **VHPA launched a campaign to oppose Congresswomen Jan Schakowsky and Ilhan Omar’s H.R. 5665 Combating International Islamophobia Act**, which the group among multiple things, said would be “used to legitimize child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).”
- VHPA has continued to lead campaigns to restrict academic freedom. **In August 2021, it ran an email and social media campaign to stop “Dismantling Global Hindutva,” an online conference led by scholars and academics** from various American and international universities. As a result, many organizers and participants reported receiving death threats, according to The Guardian.
- VHPA **supports various anti-Muslim policies and measures of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi**, including the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has called “fundamentally discriminatory in nature.” CAA provides fast-track citizenship for different religious groups, except Muslims, while NRC is a government-led exercise to identify “illegal migrants.” USCIRF has said that implementation of both CAA and NRC “could lead to the widespread disenfranchisement of Indian Muslims.” Between 2020 and 2022, VHPA has run multiple campaigns to defeat resolutions introduced by various city councils across the US to condemn the CAA and NRC.
- VHPA **also opposes legislations that seeks to ban discrimination based on the caste system**. In September 2022, the Teaneck Democratic Municipal Committee (TDMC), a Democratic Party unit in New Jersey passed a resolution calling on the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to investigate “foreign hate groups that have domestic branches with tax-exempt status” including VHPA.

*This factsheet was produced in collaboration with Raqib Hameed Naik, US-based Kashmiri journalist who covers human rights, religious minorities, and Hindu nationalism.*