

# EKAL VIDYALAYA FOUNDATION

**IMPACT:** Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation (Ekal-USA) is a Houston, Texas-based non-profit organization with over 70 chapters across multiple U.S. cities. It serves as the sister organization of Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of India (Ekal-India), a Hindu nationalist group that operates single-teacher schools in India. Ekal-India has been accused of promoting hatred towards religious minorities.

- According to the Ekal Global website, **the movement was started in the 1980s to provide “education to tribal children,”** which has since become a project for the “holistic development of children.” According to a [2014 piece](#) in the Hindustan Times, the schools also include “Hindu prayers, Indian values and promoting nationalism.”
- **Ekal-India operates on a “one-teacher school” model, where a single instructor teaches a curriculum designed by the organization to students in rural and tribal areas of India.** According to a 2020 piece in [Caravan Magazine](#), Bhaurao Deoras, a full-time worker with the [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh \(RSS\)](#) and the younger brother of the third RSS chief, Madhukar Dattatreya Deoras, first developed the concept of these single-teacher schools.
- RSS, a [Hindu supremacist paramilitary organization](#) and the [ideological parent](#) of India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has been deeply involved in [stoking communal tensions](#) and promoting anti-minority hate and violence, particularly against Muslims.
- In **Odisha state, Pratap Chandra Sarangi, a senior leader of the BJP, played a crucial role in promoting Ekal schools.** A 2019 [piece](#) in the BBC noted that in 1999, Sarangi was the State convener of the [Bajrang Dal](#), the militant youth wing of the RSS, which was accused of leading a Hindu mob that killed the Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two children. However, according to the piece, “an official inquiry found no evidence that any one group was behind the attack.”
- **In the US, the support for Ekal Vidyalayas in India was first officially announced by the Governing Council board of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) in October 1999.** 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. VHP members are accused of demolishing Muslim places of worship and incidents of mass violence, including its role in [orchestrating](#) violence during the 2002 anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat state, killing over 1,000 Muslims.
- In the 1999 [press release](#) by VHPA, the organization noted that “a number of individuals and organizations have already shown an interest in contributing to the Ekal Vidyalaya project, with one organization alone expecting to sponsor over a thousand Ekal Vidyalayas.”
- **In 2001, the financial support took the form of a full-fledged sister organization of Ekal-India in the US. Ramesh Shah, a resident of Texas, who served as a senior executive in VHPA and former president of Overseas Friends of Bharatiya Janata Party (OFBJP), a registered foreign agent of BJP in the US, officially registered Ekal-USA as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.** In early 2002, Ekal-India reported [receiving](#) over \$274,000 in support from Ekal-USA.
- According to VHPA’s [website archive](#) from 2003, the [group mentions](#) that “VHP and other Parivar organizations [family of Hindu nationalist organizations] have embarked on an ambitious program to provide vanvasi children education through EKAL VIDYALAYAS (Single Teacher Schools).” All four contact persons mentioned on the page are senior leaders of VHPA and three are its [current governing council members](#), the apex body for devising policy at VHPA.
- During the 2014 and 2019 general Indian elections, Ramesh Shah traveled to India to [campaign](#) for the victory of the then-prime ministerial candidate, [Narendra Modi](#).
- **RSS leader Mahesh Mehta, who was inspired by RSS’s second chief, MS Golwalkar, to start the VHPA, also played an instrumental role in establishing Ekal-USA.** Mehta [defended](#) the 1992 demolition of the [Babri Mosque](#) by a mob of Hindu nationalists in a speech delivered at a student-led event at Columbia University.
- Subhash Gupta, a former VHPA Governing Council member, and [Houston chapter president](#) of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, the US affiliate of RSS, served as the Chairman of Ekal-USA and continues to be on its advisory board along with Ramesh

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- Until 2021, the CEO of Ekal Abhiyan, the parent of Ekal-USA in India, was Bajrang Bagra, who also served as the National Coordinator of Ekal Abhiyan for VHP. After stepping down, Ramesh Shah was chosen as the CEO of Ekal Abhiyan, while Bagra was appointed the International General Secretary of the militant Vishwa Hindu Parishad.
- According to the Ekal-USA website, the funds raised in the U.S. go to eight organizations: the Friends of Tribals Society, the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of India, the Ekal Global Foundation, the Bharat Lok Shiksha Parishad, the Shree Hari Satsang Samiti, the Arogya Foundation of India, the Ekal Sansthan, Ekal Gram Sangathan, and the Ekal Gramothan Foundation. Collectively, these groups run more than 74,401 single-teacher schools across the country in coordination with the VHP.
- A 2019 piece in The Economist found that Ekal Vidyalaya private schools have grown “by targeting remote regions where Christian missionaries have made inroads.”
- **After the 2004 anti-Christian violence in Alirajpur, Madhya Pradesh, where Christians were beaten and their properties torched and vandalized, Indian peace activist Harsh Mander wrote in Hindustan Times that “the manufacture of fear and hatred against this tiny minority is the result of long years of effort by several front organizations of the Sangh Parivar...In a massive mobilization, tens of thousands of pictures of Hanuman were distributed in every tribal home, and he was re-invented as a tribal king. Triangular saffron flags were hoisted in hutments in every remote tribal hamlet. Single-teacher Ekal Vidyalayas were opened by the Seva Bharati, and the local teachers indoctrinated into the ideology of the Sangh Parivar through a series of camps.”**
- During the same year, Pravin Togadia, the then-general secretary of the VHP, announced the setting up of “Ekal Vidyalayas and other service projects in 25,000 villages of the country.”
- In October 2008, Ekal-India organized the Ekal Kumbh event in New Delhi, where over 10,000 tribals from different parts of the country were brought together. The event was inaugurated by the RSS supreme leader Mohan Bhagwat.
- In December 2011, the then-VHP President Ashok Singhal, known for his inflammatory anti-Muslim speeches, told a gathering at VHP’s Dharma Sabha event that people must remain “vigilant and foil the designs of missionaries ” and pitched for adding more Ekal Vidyalaya, which he said would help in “organizing the Hindus and fight against the divisive and secessionist forces.”
- In an interview with Newslandry, Indian journalist and executive editor at *The Caravan* magazine, **Hartosh Singh Bal, who has extensively covered Ekal schools, said that these schools “are less about education and more about the indoctrination of tribals.”** Bal’s investigation of Ekal Vidyalaya operations in Madhya Pradesh state in 2004 revealed that Ekal officials held positions in other Hindu nationalist groups like VHP and Sewa Bharti, the service wing of RSS.
- The **2019 Caravan report further found that teachers recruited for Ekal schools are “selected only if they subscribe to the RSS way of thought.”** It quotes a VHP leader claiming that Ekal schools are open to Muslim or Christian students on the condition of accepting that “they are by birth Hindus.”
- **A September 2023 investigation by The Diplomat found that the curriculum of Ekal Vidyalaya schools is “firmly rooted in Hindu nationalism.” The report found schools “harnessing hate” against Muslims and Christians.** “Muslims and Christians need to be shown their rightful place in society, they can either accept Hindu supremacy or convert to Hinduism. Ekal prepares children to identify enemies of Hinduism at an early stage,” Mahender Yadav, the supervisor of Ekal schools in Sitapur district in Uttar Pradesh state, told The Diplomat.
- The report also found that after being inspired by his teacher, a student from an Ekal school in Uttar Pradesh’s Sitapur district joined Bajrang Dal, a militant Hindu nationalist organization known for its role in numerous incidents of hate and violence

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targeting religious minorities.

- A 2014 [Hindustan Times report](#) notes that in north-eastern states of India, such as Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh, the “anti-Christian sub-text is strong in all the branches” of Ekal Vidyalayas.
- In 2005, the Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development’s (MHRD) [investigation](#) into Ekal Vidyalayas run by EVF-USA major funding recipient Friends of Tribal Society (FTS) in the Jharkhand and Assam states concluded that the single-teacher schools were run in collaboration with VHP and “creating disharmony amongst religious groups and creating a political cadre.”
- According to a 2005 piece in [The Hindu](#), the investigating committee also found that the names of students on the Ekal Vidyalaya register were copied from other state-run schools and concluded that grants given by the government “were being diverted to generate hatred toward minorities, and condition the minds of children.” One Ekal teacher named Manney Singh Kandiyan, from Tantnagar block of Singhbhum district in Jharkhand, [claimed](#) in front of the inquiry committee that “he, with his other colleagues, destroyed a half-built church in 2002”. Immediately afterwards, the federal government announced the removal of Ekal’s name from the grant recipients.
- According to a 2018 Hindustan Times report, Shree Hari Satsanga Samiti—an RSS-inspired organization funded by Ekal-USA—run schools in West Bengal state’s Alipurduar district [laid the ground](#) for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to benefit during the elections electorally. The group was also involved in [mass marriages](#) of tribals in West Bengal, which the local officials allege was a ploy to convert tribals who follow the Sari/Sarna religion to Hinduism.
- In Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, EVI’s annual Ekal Global Learning (EGL) tour for its volunteers, supporters, and officials from Ekal’s international branches includes [interactions](#) with [Village Defense Committee](#) (VDC), the mostly Hindu locals armed by the state in 1990’s to aid the Indian security forces. According to a 1999 [Human Rights Watch](#) assessment, VDC members are “responsible for extrajudicial killings, assaults, and other abuses.”
- In **2021, a report on [Al Jazeera](#) revealed that Ekal-USA received a direct payment of \$7,000 and a loan of \$64,462 under the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)** established for COVID-19 relief funding by the United States Small Business Administration (SBA), a federal agency that helps small business owners and entrepreneurs. The Coalition to Stop Genocide in India, a broad coalition of Indian American activists and United States-based civil rights organizations, [asked the Office of the Inspector General](#), which probes fraud, waste, and abuse of SBA programs, to “open a formal investigation into the matter.”
- 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 EVF-USA.** The resolution mentioned that EVF has “direct and indirect ties to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the rightwing Hindu nationalist paramilitary organization in India whose ideology are part of Nazism and European fascism.”
- In July 2024, Ekal’s former CEO Bajrang Bagra issued an [anti-Muslim diktat](#) calling on people to “remain vigilant and immediately inform the local administration if they find anyone from the minority community selling puja items near temples and other Hindu religious places.” Following this statement, the Muzaffarnagar district police in Uttar Pradesh state issued an order asking hotels, food shops, and roadside eateries to display owners’ names. After facing criticism from human rights organizations, which labeled it as “[economic apartheid](#),” the Supreme Court of India, hearing multiple petitions challenging the order, put it on [hold](#).

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

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