

## INTRODUCTION

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The discourse on religion and violence continues to expand and to provide insights into moral crises, human rights abuses, and global politics. In the first essay of this issue, “Sacrificial U.S. War Culture: Cognitive Dissonance and the Absence of Self-Awareness,” Kelly Denton Borhaug notes that the United States continues to expand and develop its militarization, which remains well above and beyond the participation of other nation-states. Denton-Borhaug introduces terms such as “sacrificial war-culture” to explain the rise of pro-military rhetoric and culture that has developed in post-9/11 United States. She argues that the rise of this war-culture is no accident. U.S. presidential administrations have employed rhetoric that blends Christian sentiments and sacrifice with national duty and military interests. This blurring of religious and military interests creates a sacrificial sacred canopy in which war becomes a necessary sacrifice. It also leads to a loss of self-awareness over issues such as structural injustice and institutionalized violence.

Much of the analysis of religion and violence involves scriptures. However, Iselin Frydenlund finds in her look at Sri Lankan militarism that rituals are as important, if not more important, than religious scriptures in order to understand the relationship between Buddhism and violence. In “Buddhist Militarism beyond Texts: The Importance of Ritual during the Sri Lankan Civil War,” Frydenlund draws upon extensive ethnographic work (2000–2008) to illustrate a blind spot in understanding Buddhist militarism. She argues that Sri Lankan Buddhist monks exhibit an implicit militarism, namely a general acceptance of the state as institution, including its military powers. The ability to perceive this Buddhist monastic support of military maneuvers and activities requires a break from textual analysis and a step into ethnographic research. By visiting monastic institutions and observing Buddhist rituals, one is able to witness the material culture in monastic residences and Buddhist monastic rituals for the military. Through this approach, Frydenlund

finds that ritual communication can show patriotism without compromising monastic purity.

When Narendra Modi became elected as India's prime minister (2014–), many analysts were concerned with the direction he might pursue. While acting as Chief Minister of Gujarat, he provided rhetoric that scholars believed fueled anti-Muslim riots that took place across his state. Hundreds died and thousands of people were moved to refugee camps. Since taking on his role as Prime Minister of India, there has been concern of religiously motivated violence against non-Hindus. But is it Hinduism which justifies this violence and, if there is, is this a new phenomenon?

Ankur Barua argues in “Encountering Violence in Hindu Universes: Situating the Other on Vedic Horizons,” that throughout the centuries, Hindus have regulated, enacted, resisted, negated or denied violence in complex ways. The patterns of religious justification for violence shifted over time—from early references Vedic sources to the *Purāṇas* and eventually the Hindu movements under British colonialism. Barua points to the emergence of a Hindu depiction of the “Muslim Other” during the 1800s, which became more pronounced in the twentieth century. The nascent Hindu Mahasabha espoused two themes—the Muslim as the hostile Other and the narrative of a Vedic golden age ruled by egalitarian principles. And the introduction of Savarkar's political ideology Hindutva, which has become a powerful ideological force in modern Indian politics, crystallized the figure of the hostile Muslim. One of Savarkar's critiques of Gandhi concerned Gandhi's support of Muslims, which Savarkar characterized as Hindu feebleness. In this manner, Barua encourages readers to view the current anti-Muslim sentiments in Hindu nationalist parties like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as part of a historical trend.

It is not just Muslims who are persecuted in India, but also Christians. James Ponniah provides a powerful examination of anti-Christian narratives and their impact on communal violence in “Communal Violence in India: Exploring Strategies of its Nurture and Negation in Contemporary Times.” There has been a continual rise of Hindu rhetoric in politics and the “Hinduization of public spaces.” Ponniah argues that this outgrowth would not be possible without the Indian government, which not only justified anti-Christian violence but also made it happen. While prominent Hindu swamis like Lakshmananda call converts to Christianity “enemies of the nation,” Christian communities have responded by advocating secular policies, mobilizing political platforms for religious freedom, and forming unified initiatives with Hindu religious leaders and movements. Ponniah finds that Indian Christians have a lack of confidence in their government retraining

Hindu radicals, and this lack of confidence has propelled them to seek out new strategies to protect their rights.

While this journal issue addresses the relationship between violence and a variety of religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity) within the United States and South Asia, there are themes that permeate throughout. Each of these articles addresses the growth of militarism and religious nationalism. In their own distinct ways, the authors point to rising trends that have gone under-acknowledged or overlooked, but necessitate further work and exploration.