

with terror?

On Saffron Outfit Grows Louder

been nebulous. It has had a few national convenors who have attracted notice like Jaibhan Singh Pawaiya, Vinay Katiyar and Surendra Jain, two of whom have been BJP MPs as well. The current convenor, Prakash Sharma, is less well known, but VHP claims the organisation is not as loosely structured as the popular impression is.

As an organisation allied to the Sangh Parivar, it has come to be handy for channeling the fury of an underclass whose utility as foot soldiers is useful on occasion while allowing BJP to promptly dissociate itself from any outrageous act of violence. The Bajrang Dal and its cadre are like unwashed cousins at a family wedding who everyone pretends are not present at all, but who might have their uses in settling a land dispute.

But Bajrang Dal does crash the party every now and again as Karnataka chief minister B S Yeddyurappa found out, after initial indulgence towards its lumpen mobs. As the BJP government hastily moved to arrest Dal workers last week, it did so as in response to political pressure and spiraling violence, after initially grumbling about "conversion activities" of church groups. This is because most Parivar leaders feel all church organizations are essentially engaged in "harvesting Hindu souls". There is a failure to appreciate that many church orders are almost exclusively devoted to callings like education.

But a senior RSS leader expressed concern over the attacks in Bangalore. "VHP or Bajrang Dal people are not involved in these incidents. But still they are happening," he said. Almost any group of discontented young men were rallying under the Bajrang banner, indulging in hooliganism. The RSS would soon be deliberating on the issue.

It is unclear whether RSS brass will actually check the Bajrang Dal but even if what the leader says is correct, it only shows that once violence is triggered, it is difficult to turn it off like a switch. And, given the profile that it has acquired, it is not easy to shrug off the Bajrang Dal's actions. The BJP could not wish away Ashok Singhal & Co and VHP remains bitter over being "betrayed" by BJP on the Ram temple.

Neither BJP nor RSS have ever tried to squarely face up to the need to define their relations with VHP or Bajrang Dal. Neither has disowned the Dal, even part of it. Would they disown the more obscurantist agenda of the two organizations? BJP has opted for a piecemeal strategy of going along with the view that VHP is a "cultural" organisation while looking the other way whenever the Bajrang Dal flexes its muscles.

This is fairly typical of the RSS's tactics in describing itself as completely apolitical. While it is true that RSS has a lot less direct interest or even facility with politics, it is far from being otherworldly.