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Volunteers for the Hindu nationalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or R.S.S., marching in September in Nagpur, India.

## From Shadows to Power: How Hindu Right Reshaped India

By MUJIB MASHAL  
and HARI KUMAR

NAGPUR, India — In Prime Minister Narendra Modi's most important speech of the year, his annual Independence Day address in August, he used the stage to honor the group that changed his life and is remaking India.

That it was Mr. Modi's most forceful and public nod in his 11 years in office to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh — the far-right Hindu nationalist group known as the R.S.S., which had molded his personal and professional life since he was a young boy — was a reflection of what a king-making power the group has become as it celebrated its 100th anniversary this year.

The R.S.S. originated as a shadowy cabal for the revival of Hindu pride after a long history of Muslim invasions and colonial rule in India, its early leaders openly drawing inspiration from the nationalist formula of Fascist parties in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. It has survived repeated bans, including being accused in the assassination of Gandhi, to grow into the largest right-wing



The R.S.S. has molded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's life since he was a boy.

juggernaut in the world.

More than a decade of Mr. Modi, one of their most ambitious and capable recruits, at the helm of national power has brought the organization the kind of success and acceptability that many of its leaders say they never dared imagine. While there have at times been tensions with the strongman premier, the R.S.S. is closing in on its dream to rebuild India's secular republic as a muscular, Hindu-first nation.

The R.S.S. has infiltrated and co-opted India's institutions to such a degree that its deep roots will ensure it remains a powerful force long after Mr. Modi is gone. It reaches inside India's society, government, courts, police, media and academic institutions through a vast umbrella of affiliated groups, placing core members into all of them. It makes and breaks political careers. It commands loyalty across the nation by offering young men a path to relevance and influence in their communities through Hindu-nationalist activism.

Though the R.S.S. still cultivates an air as a secret society, it has been proudly more public in recent years. Its members and its influence are everywhere.

When you see Mr. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party dominate critical elections, you are seeing the R.S.S.'s political machine at work, with the central group shaping the fates and fortunes of the party's candidates. And when you see Hindu vigilantes parading through Muslim neighborhoods or ransacking churches, you are seeing the R.S.S. affiliates exercising their vision of supremacy.

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## Afrikaner Felt He Was Invited. ICE Jailed Him.

By MIRIAM JORDAN

Benjamin Schoonwinkel took President Trump at his word.

The United States would welcome South Africans like Mr. Schoonwinkel, white Afrikaners who Mr. Trump said had become victims of government discrimination in the decades since apartheid ended and the country's Black majority gained political power. Afrikaners who claimed past persecution or fear of future harm could come to the United States as refugees, Mr. Trump declared, even as his administration was closing that door to the rest of the world.

In September, Mr. Schoonwinkel boarded a flight from Johannesburg to Atlanta, and on arrival told U.S. border agents that he was seeking asylum.

But he hadn't come through the refugee program, as the Trump administration had intended. Rather, Mr. Schoonwinkel, 59, had chosen to travel on a tourist visa and to seek asylum.

Instead of being allowed to enter the country, he found himself in handcuffs. Within two days, he was in a federal detention center in rural Georgia, where about 2,000 people who have been swept up in Mr. Trump's immigration crackdown are being held. He has

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## French Symbol: Femme Fatale to Cause Célèbre

The actress, singer and activist Brigitte Bardot, who has died at 91, personified France in a literal way: In 1969, she became the first celebrity to be used as the model for

MARIANNE, the symbol of the Republic that has adorned the country's City Halls as well as

official documents, stamps and coins since the French Revolution. Just over a year earlier, she had kicked off her TV special "Le Show Bardot," wearing little besides thigh-high boots and a French flag, as the national anthem played and then quickly morphed into a peppy new pop tune.

B.B., as she was known, was a new France: bold, free and unconventional.

Yet Bardot wasn't a consensual figure. You might even say she was among the first problematic stars of the modern era: Admired and reviled in turns, or even simultaneously, she was a star accused of being a bad actress, a cranky, unfiltered misanthrope doubling as an emblem of modernity and liberation, and a tireless crusader for animal rights who cottoned to the far-right National Front and was convicted multiple times for "inciting racial hatred."

Bardot did not need anyone to cancel her, though: In a way, she did it herself, quitting acting in 1973 before she turned 40. Unlike many star retirements before



Brigitte Bardot, at her villa in St.-Tropez in 1962, died at 91. She retired from acting to defend animal rights. Obituary, Page A12.

and since, this one stuck. Many may argue that this left her with enough time on her hands to get in trouble, but for better or for worse, she wanted agency, and she got it.

Long before she became Marianne, Bardot carried an even heavier burden: She was synonymous with womanhood itself. After all, the movie that made

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Haitham Salem was held 11 months without charge. Upon his release, he learned his family was dead. PAGE A4

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