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Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

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Abstract

Communal group conflicts and religiously inspired violence have frequently been looked upon as reactions to experiences of alienation, states of anomy, relative deprivation. Communal violence in India has been interpreted as a rejection of "foreign ideas" like secularism, democracy, or the threats and promises of globalisation. This paper suggests that communal violence in India has to be seen in relation with the rise of Hindu-nationalism and its claim to inclusion and membership.

It is a proactive project which aims at enforcing a majoritarian idea of the state along a unity defined by religious affiliation.

The references to religious values with which violence is commonly justified create non-negotiables, which are a means to portray the conflict as a permanent one, and thereby consolidate the social dynamics mobilised by way of it. Violence is organised in a manner which creates experiences of participation and empowerment among the members of the movement. Moreover, the dichotomisation inherent in violence furthers the integration of different discontents under one banner and therefore contributes to the project of unification undertaken by Hindu-nationalism.

Keywords

Introduction

In spring 2002, 2000 people were killed during communalist riots in the Indian state of Gujarat. This was the most large scale event in an escalating cycle of violence between Hindus and Muslims in India, the beginnings of which are located differently by either side. As most often in such riots, and due to the partisan role of the state agencies, almost all of those who died were Muslims. The pogroms were said to be, and justified as such by the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, a 'reaction' to a fire in a train, in which 57 'volunteers' (*kar sevaks*) of the Hindu-nationalist organisation VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad – World Hindu Council) died.

The volunteers' train came from Ayodhya, the city in which the VHP wants to build a temple for the god Ram. Until 1992, the site was occupied by the Babri mosque, built by the Moghul emperor Babur in the 13th century. Today only ruins remain of the Mosque. For on December 6th, 1992, 300,000 volunteers had followed the call of the VHP and razed the mosque to the ground. The Hindu-nationalist organisations claimed this piece of land which, they maintain, is the birthplace of the god Ram. The dispute about the land in Ayodhya has been smouldering for decades. The VHP claims that it is not to be decided by court, as it concerns the deepest religious feelings, and matters of faith can not be negotiated.

Communal group conflicts and religiously inspired violence have frequently been looked upon as defensive reactions to given circumstances. Experiences of alienation, states of anomy, relative deprivation, and also exclusion seem to explain their emergence. Time after time, sociological approaches in the tradition of Durkheim have held rapid socio-economic change, urbanisation, individualisation, the devaluation of tradition and religion (Weber's 'disenchantment of the world'), and the modern age as such (as a process of social differentiation) responsible for experiences of anomy and, therefore, for the growing relevance of identity politics.

Frequently, communal violence in India, too, were interpreted as a reaction to, or rejection of, 'foreign ideas' like secularism[1], mass democracy[2], or the threats and promises of globalisation, etc. Authors like Ashis Nandy have claimed that the modern institutions of mass democracy and secularism were distorting the modes of social relations of Indian society and were therefore responsible for the violence accompanying modern politics in India.[3] Saberwal[4] and Madan[5], too, hold that Indian society is governed by traditional and deeply religious norms which cannot be accommodated by the procedures of the modern state. These explanations of communal violence are partly rooted in the critique of modernity inherent in theories of post-coloniality. They contain a certain culturalist bias in their insistence on the incompatibility of modern political institutions and Indian society. This culturalist bias is mirrored in the analysis of state crisis in India proposed by scholars of the liberal school. They, too, insist that it is the traditions of Indian society which corrupts and undermines the operation of modern political institutions.[6] Others, like Heuzé, Masselos and Patel, have pointed towards the role of the social dislocations and upheavals which have accompanied economic liberalisation and the impact of globalisation on India to explain the increase of communal

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1 A. Nandy, The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance, in *Mirrors of Violence, Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, in V. Das (ed.), Delhi, 1990, pp. 69-93. T.N. Madan, Secularism in its Place, in *Politics in India*, in S. Kaviraj (ed.) New Delhi, 1997, pp. 342-348.

2 A. Nandy und D. L. Sheth (eds.), *The Multiverse of Democracy*, New Delhi, 1996.

3 A. Nandy, The Politics of Secularism cit.

4 S. Saberwal, On the Diversity of Ruling Traditions. In: Sudipta Kaviraj (ed.): *Politics in India*, Delhi 1997, pp. 124-140.

5 Madan, T.N. Secularism cit.

6 cf. Visvanathan, S. and H. Sethi, *Foul Play: Chronicles of Corruption 1947–97*, New Delhi 1998.

violence and the appeal of identity politics.[7] Although the community provided by Hindu-nationalist organisation might offer precisely this reassurance for some segments of the movements' members, over all the relation of Hindu-nationalism to the processes of globalisation, especially economic liberalisation in India since the 1990s appears to contradict such interpretations. As Hansen has shown convincingly, the appeal of Hindu-nationalism is part of a struggle to gain recognition as one among equals in the global arena, to affirm India's claims to be recognised as a global player, a superpower – and shed the association of poverty, underdevelopment and passivity that plague the aspiring Indian middle classes.[8] Rather than Hindu-nationalism wanting to hold 'the global' at bay and protect Hindu tradition,[9] it actually is a claim to inclusion and membership – at the cost and by the means of the exclusion of all those who appear to hold back India on her way to global glory.

This gives us an indication that the current communal violence between Hindus and Muslims in India cannot be understood simply as a defensive reaction – against globalisation, against alien 'western' institutions or against modernity as such. Rather, the conflict has to be understood in relation to the Hindu-nationalist project. This is no defensive project. It is a proactive project which aims at enforcing a majoritarian idea of the state along a unity defined by religious affiliation.[10]

If we consider the identity politics of Hindu-nationalism as a proactive project, the evaluation of the role which violence plays within this project has to be undertaken anew. Moreover, the references to religious values with which violence is commonly justified need to be considered in their role for the movement.

The non-negotiability of religious values has been cited time and again to explain why conflicts referring to values are more difficult to settle than conflicts over divisible goods.[11] Non-negotiables and indivisibles are not simply 'there', however. A look at numerous conflicts – the one in India as well as in Yugoslavia or Northern Ireland – shows that it is not the non-negotiability of values that creates the conflict; rather, conflicts, no matter from what they arise, create non-negotiables. Frequently they are not the source of conflicts but rather a means within them, a means to make a conflict a permanent one.

The assumption that conflicts are to be settled neglects the fact that conflicts are often carried out for the sake of the social dynamics mobilised by way of them. This is due to the fact that in many

7   S. Patel, Contemporary Bombay, the Power Base and Popular Appeal of the Shivsena, in: *'NCSAS Discussion Paper'* No. 3 (1997); G. Heuze, Cultural Populism, The Appeal of the Shiv Sena, in *Bombay, Metaphor of Modern India*, in S. Patel und A. Thorner (eds.), Bombay, Delhi, 1995, pp. 213-247; Masselos, J, The Bombay Riots of 1993: The Politics of an Urban Conflagration, in: Howard Brasted, John McGuire, Peter Reeves (eds.): *Politics of Violence,* 1996: New Delhi, 111-126.

8   T.B. Hansen, Becoming a Light onto Itself, Nationalist Phantasies in the Age of Globalisation, in: *Economic and Political Weekly,* 10 (1996), March 9, pp. 603-616.

9   There are a few organisations within the Sangh Parivar which did follow a truly anti-globalisation idea, suggesting protectionist economic policies as well as the banning of Western media. Some of their demands are echoed in the repeated symbolic fights over such commercial events as Valentine's day. Largely these voices have been sidelined since the 1990s, probably because of the interests of the BJPs constituency, the middle classes which benefited from economic liberlisation and the access to western consumer goods. Former Prime Minister Vajpayee once summed up the BJPs positions as: 'Computer chips yes, potato chips no.' However, today potato chips are eaten alongside papads.

10 Cf. Ludden, D., Introduction: Ayodhya: A Window on the World, in: Ludden, David (ed.): *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, New Delhi, (1997) pp. 1-23; S. Sarkar, Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva, in *Making India Hindu*, in D. Ludden (ed.) Delhi, 1996, pp. 270-293; Thapar, R., Syndicated Moksha? in: Seminar, (1985) 313, pp. 14-22; S. Randeria, Hindu-Fundamentalismus, Zum Verhältnis von Religion, Politik und Geschichte im modernen Indien, in: „Sozialanthropologische Arbeitspapiere", 67 (1995); T. Basu, P. Datta, S. Sarkar, T. Sarkar, und S. Sen, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags, A Critique of the Hindu Right*, New Delhi, 1993.

11 T. Hanf, *Koexistenz im Krieg, Staatszerfall und Entstehen einer Nation im Libanon*, Baden-Baden, 1990, p. 43; A.O. Hirschman, Wie viel Gemeinsinn braucht die liberale Gesellschaft, in: „Leviathan", Jg. 22,3 (1994), p. 295; A. Obershall, *Social Conflicts and Social Movements*, Engelwood Cliffs, 1973, pp. 50, 119.

conflicts there are those who profit more from the conflict than from resolving it. This is not limited to the much-cited war profiteers, who economically gain from – particularly violent – conflicts.[12] There are other things to be attained in a conflict: respect and power, loyalty and identity.

Conflicts mobilise; they generate the issues around which social movements group. They constitute opponents, but also communities. This is how we must interpret matters in India: The construction – and violent realisation – of the enmity between Hindus and Muslims, between Hinduism and Islam, is part of a nationalist project aiming at the unification of the Hindu population. In the course of this, Muslims become substitute enemies, operational Others. It is Schmitt's distinction of friend and enemy which here constitutes a people's identity.13 The thesis thus is that, firstly, references to religious values create a certain non-negotiability of the conflict. This is important to make permanent the mobilisation achieved by the conflict. Violence, on the other hand, is organised in a manner which creates experiences of participation and empowerment among the members of the movement. Moreover, the simple dichotomisation inherent in violence makes possible the integration of different interests and different discontents under one banner and therefore contributes to the project of unification undertaken by Hindu-nationalism.

Hindu-nationalism

Hindutva (Hinduness), the pivotal postulate of Hindu-nationalism, posits the unity of all Hindus beyond differences in rite, in the specific forms of belief of different *jatis* (castes) and sects.[14] It is unity in diversity, unity also in inequality: the Adhikari Bheda. It is the concept of the harmonious-hierarchical structure of the Hindu caste system, in which everything and everybody has their proper place and their proper task.

The idea of unity in diversity has found many forms in India: a republican one in Nehru's concept of the state; a multicultural one in the thought of the Bengali poet Tagore; Ramakrishna, a religious reformer who first phrased it associated it with the syncretistic traditions of Bengal. But in Hindu-nationalism, as it was framed in the 1920s and 1930s by its founding fathers Hedgewar and Sarvarkar, the call for unity and harmony implied the denial and suppression of social conflicts within Hinduism – such as caste conflicts. Ever since the founding of the RSS, the organic concept of the nation with the Brahmin head, the Kshatriya arms, the Vaishwa stomach and the Shudra feet of Hindu society has been the vital element of Hindu-nationalist ideology. Evoking unity and union, therefore, was always also directed against the political articulation of demands for equality within the group which is defined as 'Hindu'.

The historical process of a consolidation and incipient canonisation of Hinduism forms part of the background of the genealogy of Hindu-nationalism. The development of the religious and social order on the Indian subcontinent from a highly diverse religious landscape with only vague borders to a clearly defined structure named Hinduism[15], which is demarcated from other religions, was ultimately a process of modernisation in which colonial-administrative, cultural-ritual, and political developments interlocked. For the category of Hindu is not naturally a religious one: At first, it was a denomination applied from the outside, and from a geographical perspective; it described all the

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12 G. Elwert, Gewaltmärkte, in *Soziologie der Gewalt*, T. von Trotha (ed.), Opladen, 1997, pp. 86-101.

13 C. Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre*, Berlin, 1983 (1928), p. 124.

14 In a much disputed decision in 1995, the so-called Hindutva judgment, the Indian Supreme Court called Hindutva the 'way of life of all Indians' – and in this way agreed with the Hindu-nationalist groups' claim. A detailed discussion of the judgment can be found in Cossman/Kapur Secularism's last Sigh? The Hindu Right, the Courts and India's Struggle for Democracy, in: 'Harvard International Law Review', 38 (1997), No. 1.

15 R. Thapar, Syndicated Moksha? in: 'Seminar', 313 (1985), pp. 14-22.

people who lived 'behind the Indus'[16]. In the 1911 census there were still approximately 200,000 persons who, for instance, called themselves 'Hindoo-Mohammedans'.[17] Furthermore, what later established itself as a religious category involved a great variety of *jatis*, castes, of ritual practices and a multitude of gods[18], which knew no common self-designation and were not united as a unitary religion.

The colonial administration and its need for classification had their share in the definition of a uniform category.[19] With increasing modernisation, group size and numbers became politically and administratively relevant. 'Enumerated communities'[20], created largely by the colonial census, determined group affiliations unambiguously and, above all, exclusively and made multiple or situational identifications impossible. At the same time, the colonial state retreated to a neutral position with regard to the religious affairs of the groups defined by its own classifications and did not interfere in these matters.

Precisely this led to a codification of specific versions of different social practices.[21] It was then, for instance, that the foundation for the religious personal statute was laid, which allowed everyone to settle their family law issues according to the rules of their religion – only, however, according to the laws of practices recognised as a religion by the colonial administration. The introduction of separate constituencies for Muslims in the late 1930s was meant to guarantee their political representation in the colonial committees, but also resulted in increasing attempts of political mobilisation along religiously encoded group boundaries.

Administrative, cultural-religious and political projects in a narrower sense therefore reinforced one another in consolidating group boundaries. Administrative categories incorporated – selectively – the classifications of religious self-representations, but exactly those forms of self-representations which complied with the principles of classification of a modern administration system[22]: written form, unambiguity[23], and quantifiability are their criteria. The categories originating in these administratively and politically motivated (and therefore specific) representations of Indian society then again influenced forms of political organisation. For the colonial state privileged some forms of social organisation, and ruled out others. Based on the assumption that they were ultimately not political and moreover profoundly characteristic of the 'nature' of the Orient, community and religious formations frequently had wider options to act in public space than more strictly political organisations.[24]

The colonial privileging of religious and community organisations, which has often been interpreted as a practice of 'divide and rule' and which has been held responsible for the increasing tensions between Hindus and Muslims[25], would never have been possible, however, had it not been

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16 R. Frykenberg, The Emergence of modern 'Hinduism' as a concept and as an institution, A reappraisal with special reference to South India, in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, in G. Sontheimer und H. Kulke (eds.), New Delhi, 1989, pp. 29-50.

17 S. Randeria, Hindu-Fundamentalismus, cit. p. 11.

18 S. Sarkar, Indian Nationalism cit. p. 277. T. Basu et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, cit. p. 7.

19 G. Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 23-65.

20 S. Kaviraj, The Imaginary Institutions of India, in Modernisation of Culture and the Development of Political Discourse in the Third World, in *International Development Studies*, in P. Kaarsholm (ed.), Roskilde, 1992, p. 50.

21 D.H.A. Kolff, The Indian and the British Law Machines, Some Remarks on Law and Society in British India, in *European Expansion and Law*, in W. Mommsen und J.A. de Moor (eds.) Oxford, 1992, p. 231.

22 P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, Delhi, 1995, p. 223.

23 D.H.A. Kolff, *The Indian and the British Law Machines*, cit., pp. 215-216, 231.

24 S.B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community, Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, Berkeley, 1989, pp. 284-291.

25 e.g. G. Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*, cit.

able to connect to existing group differentiations.[26] The differences between Muslim and Hindu political elites began to increase from the late 19th century on. From the very beginning, Indian nationalism – since the year 1885 organised in the Indian National Congress – held Hindu religious traits. Key personalities supported the positions of the Hindu Right. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, for instance, the Maharashtrian Congress politician, revived several religious and regional rites, like Ganeshotsav, the festival of the elephant head god, or the birthday of Shivaji, a western Indian warrior-king, who had successfully fought the armies of the Mogul emperor Aurangazeb.[27] This way he managed, on the one hand, to circumvent the colonial ban on political gatherings by mobilising people for religious events. At the same time he used the festivals to counter Islamic public rites – particularly Muharram, which was then celebrated widely also by Hindus – with specific Hindu festivals and thus shape a clearly Hindu public.[28]

While the Indian National Congress was able to increasingly present itself to the British colonial government as a representative of the entire Indian population, the references to a Hindu India (and an implicit identification of India and Hinduism) remained conspicuous in the political rhetoric. The communalism of the majority, as Nehru remarked about the many overlappings of the nationalist and Hindu-nationalist movements of the early 20th century, easily appeared as 'national', whereas Muslim particularisms were regarded as separatist.[29]

With the religious tone Gandhi introduced into the independence movement of the Indian National Congress from the 1920s on the fears of Muslim elites to be excluded from a political say in an independent India intensified. The Muslim League consolidated as the political representative of the Muslims of British India and accentuated their demands for autonomous political representation *within* India.[30] The 'Two Nations Theory', proposed by Jinnah and seized by the British colonial government, confirmed the colonial idea of an endemic conflict between Hindus and Muslims and justified the partition of the subcontinent.[31]

Independent India inscribed secularism in its constitution (art. 27 and art. 28). It committed itself to religious freedom (art. 25) and constituted a protection of minorities (art. 29 and art. 30). It adopted the principle of personal statute and in the Hindu Civil Code took up the broad definition of Hinduism, which legally included Jains and Sikhs into this category.[32]

From the very beginning, secularism in India received two conceptions. Gandhi rejected the separation of state and religion as being impossible, particularly in India. To him secularism meant equal rights for all religions. Nehru, on the other hand, pursued the classical liberal model of

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26 S.B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*, cit.; C. Bayly, The Pre-History of Communalism, in: 'Modern Asian Studies', 19 (1985), No 2, pp. 177-203.

27 P. Spear, *A History of India*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 172.

28 C. Jaffrelot, The Politics of Processions and Hindu Muslim Riots, in *Community Conflicts and the State in India*, in A. Basu und A. Kohli (eds.), New Delhi, 1998, pp. 58-92.

29 Nehru in a speech to the All India Congress Committee on 11.5.1958, quoted from G. Noorani, *BJP, Child of RSS and Heir to Hindu Mahasabha*, in: 'Mainstream', 27 (1991).

30 A. Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman, Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge, 1985; M. Hasan (ed.), *India's Partition, Process, Mobilisation and Strategy*, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 25-26; H.M. Seervai, *Partition of India, Legend and Reality*, Bombay, 1989.

31 For the history of the partition of the subcontinent and the different roles played by the Indian National Congress with Nehru and Gandhi, the Muslim League under Jinnah, and the British colonial government under Mountbatten, see particularly A. Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, cit.; H.M. Seervai, *Partition of India, Legend and Reality*, Bombay, 1989.

32 Group specific rights beyond the personal statute, however, were not linked to religious groups, but to caste affiliation (Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST); later also quotas for Other Backward Castes (OBCs)). Linguistic minorities also enjoy protection.

secularism as separation of state and 'church'. Gandhi's view predominated and was legally institutionalised.[33]

The Hindu Right's understanding of secularism follows this view but transforms it: Derived from the concept of Hinduism being 'not a religion but a way of life' and thus being able to integrate people of all religious orientations without proselytising them, tolerance is considered the fundamental principle of Hinduism. 'When Hinduism is no religion and is a way of life to say that a Hindu state is anti-secular is wholly incorrect (…) Hinduism is secularism par excellence.'[34] Equating Hinduism with secularism as well as presenting Hinduism not as a religion, but as a way of life claims representation of all Indian citizens, but at the same time limits membership through religion. For in Hindu-nationalism, affiliation to Hinduism, and therefore to India is defined by the *punyabhoomi*, the holy land. Crucial for this vision of the nation was the territorialisation of religion. In his text 'Who is a Hindu', Sarvarkar in 1923 equated 'fatherland', *pitribhoomi*, with 'Holy Land', *punyabhoomi*.[35] All those who had their sacred sites on Indian soil could be considered legitimate Indians. Christians and Muslims, whose sacred sites were not on Indian soil, were by this definition excluded from legitimate participation. The definition of affiliation to India and the legitimate participation in the political community were based on a territorial understanding of religion.

From the very beginning, the Indian nation was, in the eyes of the central organisation of Hindu-nationalism, the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh – National Volunteers' Organisation)[36], *Hindu Rashtra*, land of the Hindus.[37] 'Only the Hindu has been living here as a child of this soil', the movement's chief ideologist Golwalkar wrote.[38] He acuminated Sarvarkar's definition, referring explicitly to German National Socialism:

> Germany shocked the world by purging the country of the Semitic races - the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by.[39]

The lesson to be learned by Hindus and Hindusthan was, according to him, that:

> the non-Hindu people in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu-culture and language, must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of the Hindu

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33 B. Cossman und R. Kapur, Secularism's last Sigh? Cit.

34 Quoted from *Organiser* 21.1.1996, the mouthpiece of the *Sangh Parivar*; cited from B. Cossman und R. Kapur, Secularism's last Sigh?, cit., p. 153; P.C. Upadhyaya, The Politics of Indian Secularism, in: 'Modern Asian Studies', 1992, pp. 830-837.1997. p. 139.

35 Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists, because their holy sites are situated on Indian territory, are legitimate Indians.

36 The RSS was founded in 1925 in Nagpur. Founding father Hedgewar first and foremost considered it an instrument of 'cultural work' and of character building (Basu et al., Khaki Shorts, cit., p. 24). The RSS expanded into a wide-ranging organisational network addressing all kinds of social and political matters (Basu et al., Khaki Shorts, cit., pp. 34-50; C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu-nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s*, New Dehli, 1996; also W.K. Andersen und S.D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron, The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*, New Delhi, 1987). Their political wing, earlier the Jan Sangh, today the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP – National People's Party), was founded in 1951. The 'World Hindu Council' (VHP), the international wing of the *Sangh Parivar* dedicated to cultural work, and its youth organisation, the Bajrang Dal, were established in 1964. More sub-organisations with specific purposes, including a trade union (founded in 1955), several women's organisations (starting in 1936), or the educational network *Vidya Bharati* with its primary and secondary schools, have gained importance particularly in their integrating potential. The leaders of all organisations, also of the BJP, India's former governing party, originate from the RSS.

37 The RSS never participated in the anti-colonial movement; its nationalism was not directed against the foreign rule. In the 1930s, Hedgewar joined Gandhi's Satyagraha movement and was arrested temporarily. He generally disregarded the independence movement as generating unrest.

38 M.S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts, Bangalore*, 1996, p. 124.

39 M.S. Golwalkar, *We or our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur, 1938, p. 27.

nation (…) or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights.[40]

While in the late 19th and early 20th century disobedience of low castes, the changing role of women and generally the contestation of the caste system was debated as a threat to the unity of Hindus[41], in the subsequent period internal conflicts were increasingly neglected in favour of the confrontation with Islam. Hedgewar had still regarded the demands of the low castes for equality as equally threatening as Muslims.[42] But by the 1930s, and in the writings of RSS leader Sarvarkar, Islam had turned into the paramount threat to Hindus and Hinduism. The aggressive inclusivism of the early Hindu-nationalism changed into an aggressive exclusivism, which veiled the inclusivist project towards the unincorporated castes and sects.

The construction of the 'other'

The idea of the Muslims of India being 'foreign' referred to the subcontinent's conquest by the Moguls. Political history was represented and interpreted as religious characteristic: as the aggression of Islam. The essentialisation of Islam was mirrored by the essentialisation of Hinduness: Was Islam essentially aggressive, Hinduism was essentially tolerant. The orientalist glorification of the spiritual (Hindu) India[43] and the idea of Hinduism's superiority rooted in this inherent tolerance made its entrance into the nationalist discourse as early as 1893 with Vivekananda's Chicago address[44]. It has taken deep root there: The dogma that 'Islam is aggression and Hinduism is tolerance' is commonly taken for granted in urban India. It regularly mixes with the appeal to the Hindus to defend themselves. For the Hindus are, it is said, due to their innate tolerance unable to defend themselves and their culture against those who supposedly are so very different: the Muslims, whose religion is aggressive, hegemonial and intolerant. The 'intolerant Muslim' in this concept is also the strong Muslim. The reverse side of the 'tolerant Hindu', however, is the weak and 'cowardly Hindu'; the positive and the negative side of this self-image are closely connected. The inherent tolerance of Hindus turns into a weakness which must be overcome.[45]

The RSS has always represented an image of Hinduism that is compatible with the ability to defend oneself. In its Shakhas, the local 'branches', it has been conveying ideological as well as physical drill from the very beginning.[46] This drill was influenced by traditional Indian martial arts from the *Akharas*, but in the RSS it was combined with a type of militarism which not only in its uniforms waqs reminiscent of fascist outfits.[47]

The *Sangh Parivar*'s call for violence is often seen as an attempt to construct a Hindu identity which abandons orientalist visions of the passivity and spirituality of the East.[48] The call for violence, however, reproduces the orientalist images by justifying itself with reference to the alleged essential tolerance. To overcome the assumed weakness of Hinduism by way of violence does not mean the abdication of tolerance. Since tolerance is essential to Hinduism, it is dissociated from practices.

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40 Ibidem, p. 52.

41 S. Sarkar, Indian nationalism, cit., p. 288.

42 Ibidem.

43 R. Inden, *Imagining India*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990.

44 Vivekananda, *Chicago Addresses*, Delhi, 1996 (1893).

45 Even Gandhi and his principle of non-violence for many – and naturally most of all for Hindu-nationalists – embodies weakness. Not without reason was Gandhi assassinated by a long time member of the RSS.

46 C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu-nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s*, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 35-38.

47 T.B. Hansen, *Becoming a Light onto Itself*, cit., p. 608.

48 T.B. Hansen, Recuperating Masculinity, Hindu-nationalism, Violence and the Exorcism of the Muslim ,Other', in: 'Critique of Social Anthropology', 16 (1996), No. 2, 137-172.

Rithambra, *sadhavi* (ascetic) and one of the most militant speakers of the *Sangh Parivar*, said, for instance, during an election campaign of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh:[49]

> (…) We are going to build our temple there [in Ayodhya, JE] not break anyone's mosque. Our civilisation has never been one of destruction. Intellectuals and scholars of the world wherever you find ruins, wherever you come upon broken monuments you will find the signature of Islam. Wherever you find creation, you discover the signature of the Hindu. We have never believed in breaking but in constructing. (…) We are not pulling down a monument but building one. (…)We have religious tolerance in our very bones,

This paradox construction, which first forms a religion's character through a historical memory (shaped, of course by present concerns and relations) of conquest and violence and then detaches these constructed characteristics from any kind of correspondence to reality and thus renders them independent of actions, is, typical for essentialisations. Each word of an 'essence' abstracts from concrete practices.

Furthermore, Hindu-nationalist violence is neutralised in a discourse of defence. Hedgewar had already institutionalised para-military drill in the Shakhas of the RSS on account of the alleged necessity of defending India against Muslim attacks. The statements of BJP politicians, RSS ideologists and VHP activists concerning the Gujarat pogroms in spring 2002 without exception invoked this necessary defence, too; and participants in the violence insisted that Hindus had always been exposed to Muslim attacks and it was 'about time to strike back'.[50] Each pogrom, each riot is accompanied by justifications of this type.[51] 'Nations which do not raise even a finger to resist, perish', remarked Bal Thackeray, leader of the Shivsena, in his mouthpiece *Saamna* (15.12.1992), and justified the riots of 1993 in an interview with *Time Magazine* as follows:

> Muslims started the riots, and my boys are retaliating. Do you expect Hindus to turn the other cheek? I want to teach Muslims a lesson. (…) They [the Muslims] are not prepared to accept the rules of this land. They don't want to accept birth control. They want to implement their Sharia in my motherland. Yes, this is the Hindus' motherland. (…) Have they [the Muslims] behaved like the Jews in Nazi Germany? If so, there is nothing wrong if they are treated as Jews were in Nazi Germany. (…)

The discourse of defence is the rhetoric figure *par excellence* to resolve the cognitive discord between tolerance and aggressiveness. After all, one can be non-violent in principle, even if one doesn't want to renounce one's right to self-defence. Here, self-defence is collectivised and generalised: Firstly, every Muslim becomes a symbol of threat, so that even an attack on individual, defenceless Muslims can be justified as self-defence; secondly, even the smallest conflict can turn into a symbol of the alleged existential threat to Hindus and Hinduism.

> Hindutva is not a wave. It is a question of survival of our future generations; it is the breath of our life! If a Muslim is thrown out of any country, there are other Muslim nations where he can take refuge. Where will Hindus go? Except for our Hindu nation and neighbouring Nepal, there is no other place we can go to. That's why we have to protect our Hindu land, and if need be, sacrifice our lives to save Hindutva. [52]

The generalisation of the threat relies on a diversified enemy image of 'Muslims': Today, Hindusthan is endangered by the mere presence of Muslims, by their supposed disloyalty; by 'their' terrorism, but also simply by their many children and their poverty. The diverse expressions of an existential conflict, in which any form of everyday life can become a symptom of threat – the birth of a child or a Muslim beggar, Muslims voting or their retreat from public institutions – may serve many different interests as an enemy image.

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49 Quoted in S. Kakar, *The Colours of Violence*, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 204-205.

50 Interviews of the author in April, 2002.

51 Cf. the reports of different investigating committees, e.g. the Srikrishna Commission Report 1998.

52 Bal Thackeray in a speech, quoted in V. Purandare, *The Sena Story, Mumbai*, 1999, p. 341.

Most of all it is the construct that India's Muslims have 'conquered' the state: The Indian governments under leadership of the Congress Party are said to have been 'pampering minorities'; they had been granting them special privileges, because Muslims were useful as voters. Thereby the rights of the Hindus were virtually sold out.

The confluence of the anti-Muslim and the anti-state or anti-Congress Party discourse is crucial. The legitimate political order is equated with the majoritarian claim of ownership to India; the Hindu-nationalist organisations become advocates of these – religious-culturally legitimated – claims, while all other political parties and the current secular order are 'traitors' to the Hindus. The Hindu-nationalist organisations become the sole representatives of a just order, the only advocates of the rightful claims of Hindus. The majoritarianism of Hindu-nationalism defines the entity it claims to represent[53]; it defines its legitimate claims; using the politics of enemy images it determines the superior relevance of these claims over other possible social and political claims. It then maintains to be the sole advocate of these claims and, therefore, to be the only legitimate political representation of the 'people', as defined by Hindunationalism.

The parliamentary rise of Hindu-nationalism

The timing of the parliamentary rise of Hindu-nationalism shows clearly how intricately connected the projects of ideological and political unification were. The Hindu-nationalist organisations began to massively expand their parliamentary influence and their following, when after decades of dominance, the power of the Congress Party started to crumble. The so-called 'Congress system'[54] lost its integrational strength, which had always been based on the incorporation of local elites and on the consideration of different spheres of interests via their networks of patronage[55], after Indira Gandhi had centralised the party organisation and this way excluded local elites from active political participation.[56]

Independent political organisations began to represent their constituencies, usually based on caste affiliation, in the parliaments and through electoral successes achieved an increasing shift in political influence. When in 1990 V.P. Singh's government introduced by law the recommendations of the Mandal Commission regarding quotas for 'Other Backward Castes', the BJP suddenly vastly increased their following among high caste voters, who were formally disadvantaged by the quota policy. Particularly the urban middle classes, who feared to be affected by the reservation of positions in the public service supported the party from then on. For the first time, the assertion that caste politics was threatening the unity of Hindus reached a broader public. But it also became obvious that this claim addressed very particular, namely urban middle class high caste interests.

For some time the following of the BJP remained limited to this urban middle class high caste electorate.[57] Thus the party faced the problem of how exactly they could expand their vote base beyond this narrow constituency and integrate the social groups into the project of Hindu-nationalism, whose independent political mobilisation seemed to endanger the unity of the Hindus. The BJP stood in direct political competitions with the emerging caste based parties for 'all the votes which had been

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53 S. Randeria, Hindu-Fundamentalismus, cit., p. 3.

54 R. Kothari, The Congress 'System' in India, in: 'Asian Survey', 4 (1964), 12 December, pp. 1161-1173.

55 F. Frankel, Decline of a Social Order, in *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, in F. Frankel und M.S.A. Rao (eds.), Delhi, II (1990), pp. 482-517.

56 A. Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent*, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1990, p. 386.

57 Ch. Jaffrelot, BJP and the Caste barrier; Beyond the „Twice Born'? In: T. B. Hansen and Ch. Jaffrelot (eds.): *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India*, Delhi, 1998, 22-71.

let loose from the shredded net of Congress control,'[58]. The suggestion of an existential conflict which had been at the centre of Hindu-nationalist thinking became increasingly dominant in political discourse. It depicted the conflicts between different castes, which were now vociferously articulated by lower caste politicians, as irrelevant or at least as secondary in the face of a paramount threat constituted by the Muslim presence in India. This did not mean the abandoning of caste difference, but rather the re-articulation of the organic visions of caste relations as those of a healthy body, with its Brahmin head, its Kshatriya arms, its Vaishwa body and its Shudra feet.

The ideological construct of unity, as it was laid out in Hindutva, was not sufficient to persuade the lower castes of a common interest with the higher castes.

The plausibilisation of Hindu-nationalist positions

The plausibility of a conflict with Islam among those who were meant to be integrated into the Hindu-nationalist fold by it was not obvious. Why should social conflicts which affected people on an everyday basis, which determined their life chances and possibilities, fade in their experienced relevance in favour of a conflict which was relatively unreal in their everyday lives? The experience of caste violence[59] and discrimination was, and still is, much more common than conflicts with Muslims.

What 'made sense' in this postulated conflict is not necessarily the conflict itself; the plausibility lay in the specific forms of social organisation associated with it.

This becomes most obvious in the organisation of the conflict in violent actions: Violence has a specific role in non-negotiable conflicts, because it achieves exactly the unity which is the concern of the conflict. Violence is able to define unity absolutely, because it firmly establishes group boundaries. Violence forces people to submit to its categories as there is no other place for them to feel safe. Violence ignores individual hybrid, multiple or universalist identifications; it classifies friends and enemies (and sometimes a third group, the audience) on its own account.

In Indian history, particularly the experience of partition, communal violence continued to confirm and realise the perception of an existential conflict between Hindus and Muslims. After each riot residential areas are segregated further.[60] Economic chains of cooperation are interrupted, entire industrial sectors restructured.[61] As a result, networks of solidarity as existed in neighbourhoods, but also in the trade unions or in leisure clubs disintegrate. In many cases social work is taken on by religious organisations which do not necessarily engage in communal incitement, but rather convey religious practices which are 'cleansed' of the many syncretisms shaping Indian Hinduism and Indian Islam. Today, for instance, the Tabligh movement is very active on the Muslim side. Many attached

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58 Ludden, D., Introduction: Ayodhya: A Window on the World, in: Ludden, David (ed.): *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, New Delhi, (1996) p 18.

59 J. Breman, Silencing the Voice of Agricultural Labourers in South Gujarat, in: 'Modern Asian Studies' 33 (1999), pp. 1-22.

60 YUVA (Youth for Voluntary Action), Planned Segregation, Riots Evictions and Dispossession in Jogeshwari East, Bombay, 1996; J. Eckert, 'Riots, That's something that happens in the slums.' Land, städtische Unruhen und die Politik der Segregation, in *Schlichtung von Landkonflikten*, in E. Alber, J. Eckert (eds.), Eschborn, 1999.

61 T.B. Hansen, The Vernacularisation of Hindutva, The BJP and Shiv Sena in rural Maharashtra, in: 'Contributions to Indian Sociology', 30 (1996), No.2, p. 192. V.N. Rai, *Combatting Communal Conflicts*, Delhi, 1998, pp. 73-75. J. Masselos, The Bombay Riots of 1993, The Politics of an Urban Conflagration, in *Politics of Violence*, in H. Brasted, J. McGuire, P. Reeves (eds.), New Delhi, 1996, pp. 118-121.

The destruction of the Muslim carpet industry in Benares in the early 1990s had such serious repercussions on the Hindu carpet dealers that they – who might at first have believed to be able to eliminate rivals – decided to address a petition to the governor of Uttar Pradesh in order to prevent further attempts at mobilisation on the part of Hindu-nationalist groups. But the discrediting of violence, even if only because of its negative economic consequences, has always been of short duration, as the Gujarat pogroms of spring 2002 have again given horrible proof of.

themselves to its firmly apolitical puritan concept of religion, particularly after the riots, because the organisation's political reserve seemed to offer protection, to support the retreat into the community. But the expansion of the Tabligh movement and its puritan concept of Islam also resulted in less regional or religious festivals being celebrated by both groups together, in Muslims not taking part in Hindu festivals even as guests. This way, contexts disintegrate which used to be shared: local festivals, neighbourhood, or work relations. This makes it easier to spread rumours, to stroke fears and prejudices.[62] It therefore frequently heightens communal tension exactly because of the increased segregation.

The actual experience of conflict is, however, not the only reason for the plausibility of it. Violence can also bring about unity beyond such forced affiliations, because it can subsume various types of conflict under the umbrella of the friend-enemy scheme and in this way forge new political alliances. It often succeeds in addressing all kinds of divergent interests and social and political matters, and unites them into one single struggle.

The example of the Shivsena[63], shows this very clearly. It is mainly established in the state of Maharashtra and there had a crucial role in integrating poor and low caste sections of the population into the project of Hindu-nationalism.

The Shivsena represents a violence-oriented, violence-celebrating type of actionism, and ever since its founding in 1966 it has presented itself as a protest movement. The Shivsena took on the role of recapturing the state on behalf of its legitimate citizens, the Hindus, and to guard it from the grasp of the 'foreigners' (here also of the Italian-born leader of the Congress party, Sonia Gandhi).

The fundamental principle of organisation of the Shivsena is its strong local anchorage. Like the different organisations of the *Sangh Parivar*, it establishes itself in a rather dense network of local associations, the Shakhas. The latter undertake numerous cultural and welfare responsibilities; in this context, the Shivsena organises daily social services, which complement the inefficient or non-existing infrastructure of the state and make good on the promises of development which once legitimated this state. Its members, who call themselves the 'soldiers'(Sainik) of the movement get active in minor emergencies, provide ambulances, collect money for local infrastructural measures etc. But they not only offer help; they also organise cultural activities in which their specific idea of Hinduism is spread, their intentions are popularised and mixed with the religious and cultural symbols of everyday culture. Even though for many people the reason to participate in these activities is not that they approve of the political message, but that they want to celebrate a festival or need help or make use of educational offers, the interpretation patterns of the conflict are reproduced in them: the religious and regional celebrations become communalist matters; neighbourhood festivals take on a note of territorial claims of ownership and reproduce criteria of exclusion; the numerous martial arts groups associated with many of the local branches of the party become more than a mere leisure activity, but gain an aura of 'national defence'. At the same time, all these activities are not explicitly centred on the political message, and precisely for that reason they are even more effective: They are simply part of everyday practice and leisure activities. These local cultural organisations successfully combine their political agenda with the institutions, practices and narratives characterising local everyday life. They span all spheres of life, thereby providing offers to all generations and integrating them in a 'family'.

For the expansion of Hindu-nationalism beyond the urban middle classes, to which the organisations of the *Sangh Parivar* had been limited for decades, the Shivsena's ability to open up

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62 The Mohalla movement made it their business to restore such everyday contexts in order to prevent the violent escalation of conflicts (J. Eckert „Reconciling the Mohalla', in: Thomas Scheffler (ed.): *Religion between Violence and Reconciliation*, Beiruter Texte und Studien, 76, Beirut/Stuttgart: Orient-Institut/Steiner, 2003, p. 365 - 389).

63 The Shivsena is not part of the *Sangh Parivar*, but since the 1980s has become one of the most successful Hindu-nationalist parties.

possibilities of participation in these social and cultural activities was crucial.[64] The factual diffusion of power to the level of the Shakhas concerns large parts of the Shivsena's operations. It thereby involves its every member directly into the organisational life and lets them participate in local power and its profits.

This element of participation becomes particularly obvious in the mobilisation of women in Hindu-nationalism. Most explicitly this was expressed by the Mahila Aghadi, the women's wing of the Shivsena: Violence and the power obtained from it could be presented as emancipatory, as 'empowerment' of the Indian woman: 'Bring her out of the kitchen', demanded Sudha Churi, former president of the Mahila Aghadi. Through the organisational structure, but also through the violent agitations, women could be offered a new public role, which due to its ideological embeddedness in the 'traditionalism' of Hindu-nationalism evaded violating conservative norms or family structures, like other public activities might have done. It was the delight in the power over husbands, who have to submit to the arbitrations of the Shivsena's family courts, because otherwise they risk being beaten; but also the delight in organising and arranging things, in taking decisions and carrying them through, in owning a voice, a public role and local power. The latter was always connected to the party's violent agitations, to the threats and the fact that the local power of every single party member was at all times covered by the collective power of the organisation – the latter, however, being produced precisely by those social and cultural local activities. At the neighbourhood level of the Shakhas, the Shivsena's collective power became the individual power of the Sainiks, who can demand obedience locally. The delight in acting, is not specific to the Shivsena; but the possibilities of acting offered by the Shivsena are specific to its politics of direct action. They are produced through their internal structure, i.e. the importance of the local Shakhas and their relative autonomy of action, but even more than that they are produced through the institutions and positions of power which the party has formed by way of their violent actions in the public space.

The air of Youth that the Sena - and most of its leaders - surrounds itself with is a part of this cult of achievement and of action. The Sena preaches self reliance and Thackeray has frequently stressed that he is the people's leader precisely because he exhorts them to achieve rather than promising charity and alms. Thus the Shivsena - rhetorically - renounces the paternalism of conventional politics. It is thus not only the fight for one's rightful due, for the entitlement which the Sena has propagated, but also a call to take fate into your own hands. Here the 'angry young man', that most popular figure of the Hindi film, turns into the self-made man who makes not only himself but also his world. It is the regeneration and rejuvenation of society through the efforts of the Sainiks and their leader, the forever 'young and angry man'.

This type of politics, therefore, not only offers identity constructs, but spaces of real, practical possibilities of action and power. By means of the possibilities of acting which are created by direct action and which continue to produce these actions, the Shivsena fulfils some of the ethos of participation and empowerment which the (anti-colonial) democratic discourse has established as legitimation of the post-colonial state.[65] All the more so because in its activities it combines the majoritarian claim of ownership to India with criticism of the state: The Shivsena acts like a vigilante of the 'just order'; it claims to protect the real legitimate order by violating the 'illegitimate' laws of an 'illegitimate' government with numerous agitations.

In its militant agitations it integrates all types of different, and partly contrary, conflicts and dissatisfactions towards the state as well as towards the Congress Party, which it so tightly identifies

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64 J. Eckert, The Power of Action, in *Reinheit und Gewalt*, in S. Conrad, J. Eckert und S. Reichardt (eds.), Sociologus 1&2, Berlin, 2001, pp. 89-122.

65 P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, cit., p. 216.

with the state.[66] It pools claims to participation of a rising middle class and the discontent with the administration of poorer groups. It integrated these contrasting issues and re-interpreted them as communal conflicts: Each conflict in which on one side a Congress politician, or the potential electorate of a Congress politician, was involved was turned into a conflict in which the Congress Party and its representatives became symbols of the state, and the Shivsena became the advocate of the rights of the 'people' – that is, of the Hindus. With this concept it was successful, because through this binary scheme, the movement was offering new alliances and coalitions to different parties. These different parties in turn were strengthened by these alliances in their specific opposition towards the Congress Party (or towards a conflicting party associated with Congress in this binary constellation of conflict). Communal agitation, therefore, served the expansion of Hindu-nationalism, as it freshly articulated caste and class relations and created electoral alliances that could be used to counter the structures of incorporation of the Congress system.[67]

By means of their local electoral successes, which were founded on the offers of social services as well as on communal mobilisations, the Shivsena facilitated a rise in politics for persons from social groups who used to be largely excluded from this sphere. In Maharashtra, political mobility had for a long time been blocked by the Congress Party's monopoly on political posts and career opportunities. The so-called 'Congress system'[68], due to which a few influential families of the Maratha caste had dominated in Maharashtra[69], was effectively dismantled by the Shivsena's expansion. The party's offers to political newcomers were essential to integrating the opposition against the Congress Party. This way, under the broad umbrella of Hindu-nationalism the Shivsena became the vehicle of the opposition or, rather, of various oppositions against the Congress Party. The criticism of an inefficient and corrupt polity thus becomes the legitimation of majoritarian claims, which substitute not only the state, but also the norms of legality and legitimacy that are principally valid in it.

It is exactly the various violent actions and the specific form in which the violence was justified and organised, that resulted in the expansion of Hindu-nationalism and in the spreading of Hindu-nationalist organisations. The violence organised through the enemy image, firstly, succeeded in communalising local social conflicts and in subsuming them under the 'conflict of religion'. Secondly, violence managed to integrate different and frequently contrasting discontentments towards the Indian state as well as to communalise the criticism of the state. Thirdly, violence could realise offers of participation and 'emancipation' and open up new spaces of action which parliamentary forms of politics could not.

The integration of the discontent of different social groups and their reinterpretation in the Hindu-nationalist frame, have established the majoritarian concept of the Indian polity beyond its initial constituency. Hindu-nationalist mobilisation and the omnipresence of majoritarian patterns of legitimation have brought about a sustained shift in the criteria of political legitimacy, of standards of normality and the right to plural and particular claims. They have not dissuaded other forms of political articulation, and have not unified the Hindu population as much as they desired. However, they have normalised perceptions of a conflict with Muslims and the perception of India as ultimately a Hindu state. They have substituted the republican idea of the state by one of a religiously encoded majoritarianism, and have furthermore successfully advanced the canonisation of Hinduism.[70]

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66 Similar processes can be observed in other regional contexts, e.g. in Uttar Pradesh (A. Basu, Why local Riots are not merely local, Collective Violence and the State in Bijnor 1988-1993, in: 'Theory and Society', 24 (1995); Z. Hassan, Communal Mobilisation and Changing Majority in Uttar Pradesh, in *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, in Ludden, David (ed.), New Delhi, 1995, pp. 81-97).

67 T.B. Hansen, The Vernacularisation of Hindutva, cit., p. 206.

68 R. Kothari, The Congress 'System' in India, cit.; F. Frankel, Decline of Social Order, cit.

69 J. Lele, Caste, Class and Dominance, Political Mobilisation in Maharashtra, in *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, in F. Frankel und M.S.A. Rao (eds.), Delhi, II (1990), pp. 115-211.

70 R. Thapar, Syndicated Moksha? cit.

Divisions of labour

When the BJP came to power at the centre in 1998, leading an alliance of various regional parties, it projected an image of efficient statesmanship and ideological moderation. Especially Prime Minister Vajpayee was considered a moderate and an experienced national politician. Rather than this indicating a general moderation of Hindu-nationalist ideology when in positions of power, I want to suggest that out of the diverging compulsions of the different mobilisation strategies, a division of labour emerged between militancy and statesmanship. The national BJP took on the role of self-confident national leadership, while some of its regional party organisations, as well as the other organisations of the Sangh Parivar, above all the VHP and its youth organisation, the Bajrang Dal continued their vociferous and militant campaign which donned the mantle of opposition. Disputes and tangible conflicts within the 'family' ensued about the 'rights of Hindus', the future of Ayodhya, or matters of law and order. However, in the long term this division of labour served the diverse strategies of mobilisation and expansion. Through their conflicts they ensured symbolically the fulfilment of the complementary stances of ensuring order and threatening uncompromising militancy within the same ideological fold. Militancy and order: both are essential ideological ingredients of Hindutva; militancy in the strife to realise an essentialist vision of the Hindu nation; order in the vision of a harmonious 'authentic' society replacing a corrupt establishment, replacing moreover the assertion of pluralist and antagonistic claims and related 'western' disorders.

This division of labour between militancy and statesmanship made possible the posing of the national BJP's brand of Hindutva as moderate, as creating order rather than disorder; as establishing harmony rather than riots. Parts of the BJP's constituency did not take favourably to the disorder caused by the communal riots that ravaged India in the wake of the BJP's yatras announcing the political progress of the Hindutva agenda. Particularly the trading and industrialist community feared the disruption of the momentum of liberalisation and the increase in viable joint ventures. While Hindutva and its radical pronouncements did not lose its appeal as a thought system about political legitimacy, and possibly as a vague political model, the violence connected with it was experienced as 'disturbing'. The moderation forced upon the national BJP by its political compulsions and democratic aspirations complemented the militancy constantly threatened by the VHP and particularly its youth organisation, the Bajrang Dal, as well as regional parts of the BJP and other regional Hindu-nationalist parties such as the Shivsena. They publically ensured that the upholding of law and order would not take priority over the causes of Hindutva.

In 2004 the BJP was – to the surprise of all – voted out of power at the national level. As the current victories of the party in regional elections show, this was not due to a decrease in the appeal of Hindutva.

The politics of non-negotiability

There has been much debate in India about whether communal violence is an expression of a Hindu-nationalist mass movement, or whether it is cleverly manipulated and orchestrated by the Hindu-nationalist organisations.[71] Both are true: Hindu-nationalism and its twin, communal violence, are mass movement and orchestration at the same time.

Similes of volcanic eruptions frequently accompany the analysis of communal violence in India.[72] Governmental Inquiry reports, courts and judges as well as senior police officers express the view that riots between Hindus and Muslims are 'like epileptic seizures'[73], like a disease or social pathology which is fundamentally incurable. Different academic studies of communal violence in India have

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71 A. Basu, Why local riots are not merely local, cit., pp. 35-78.

72 E.g. Srikrishna Commission Report 1998, Mumbai: published by Jyoti Punwani, Vrijendra, Bombay, no date p. 4.

73 Ibid.

focused on aspects of emotionality[74] and the psycho-emotive quality of collective action[75], without denying demonstrable elements of planning.[76]

To describe the kind of communal violence that upset Gujarat as 'troubles' or to confine it to a matter of two religious groups' mutual hatred, would not only mean denying the striking asymmetry between the groups – an asymmetry in the number of victims, but chiefly in the power to make use of the support of state authorities – but also the systematic nature of the riots.

Pogroms like the recent ones in Gujarat do not happen because sentiments of hate suddenly 'break out'. If one examines a pogrom, or a riot, more closely, it quickly becomes clear how crucial a part organisation plays in it. In a recent publication of the small news agency Tehelka, numerous members of Hindu-nationalist organisations brag about their role in the riots. While pointing towards sentiments of revenge, they speak of the planned nature of the assaults on members of religious minorities. The attackers, who arrived in lorries, armed with petrol cans and weapons, had computerised lists of the residents clearly labelling their religious affiliations. Gujarat's VHP president admitted to having drawn up such a list on the morning of 28 February. The Shivsena had similar lists in Bombay in 1993. VHP chief Jaideep Patel declared after the confiscation of swords and tridents in Gujarat: 'We've been distributing these weapons since 1985 (…) Nobody has objected, not even the police.'[77] Furthermore it is obvious that the implicit or open support by the government is decisive for the course such riots will take.[78] 'No riot can last longer than 24 hours if the state does not want it to,' police inspector Vibhute N. Rai insists.[79] Rioters tell tales of the support of the police; they report that the police surrendered, indeed handed over Muslims – men, women and children equally – to the attackers.[80] Police officers tell tales of orders coming from above not to interfere against the violence;[81] judges explain how they managed to let off rioters in the few cases that they were charged.[82]

The involvement of state authorities, particularly the police, who did not intervene when asked for help by Muslims, who even surrendered Muslims – including women and children – to their attackers instead of getting them to safety; but of course also the reluctance of the BJP government to end the pogroms by instructing this same police force to deploy the army (which especially by Muslims is perceived as more neutral) as well as this government's explicit expressions of approval of the violence: these concerted actions of violence are, on the one hand, further means to manifest the claim of ownership to India, the majoritarian prerogative and the 'illegitimacy' of the Muslims. On the other hand, they show clearly how far this claim of ownership has spread already, and how self-evident it has become for diverse sections of the Indian population.[83]

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74 V. Das, *Mirrors of Violence*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, p.6.

75 S. Karkar, *The Colours of Violence*, cit.

76 Ibidem, p. 51. V. Das, Mirrors of Violence, cit. pp. 27-28.

77 Patel in an Interview with *Indian Express*, 10.4.2002.

78 A.A. Engineer, Communal Violence and the Role of Enforcement Agencies, in *Religion, Religiosity and Communalism*, in P. Bidwai, et al. (eds.), New Delhi, 1996, pp. 130.

79 Vibhuti N. Rai in an Interview with *Combat Communalism*, 2, No. 6, February 1995.

80 See the transcripts of the interviews on
 http://www.tehelka.com/story_main35.asp?filename=Ne031107Role_of_police_sec.asp

81 See the transcripts of the interviews
 http://www.tehelka.com/story_main35.asp?filename=Ne031107Role_of_police_sec.asp

82 See the transcripts of the interviews on
 http://www.tehelka.com/story_main35.asp?filename=Ne031107Legal_subversion.asp

83 The reports from Gujarat notice a participation of broad sections of the population on a new scale. 'Even' the middle classes, it was said, had taken part in the pogroms, in the arson attacks and the hunt of Muslims. It was never entirely true that communal violence was only the 'lumpenproletariat's' doing, as is often claimed by these same middle classes. Not only was it the middle classes among which the views of Hindu-nationalism first found a sympathetic ear and among

The characterisation of the Muslim not only as 'foreign', but also as aggressive – and in this respect fundamentally different from the Hindu – is pivotal for the construction of Hindu-nationalism and the justification of violence. In it, the conflict continues to be portrayed as an essential one, as a 'clash of civilisations' and as a question of the survival of Hindus and Hinduism.

If a conflict is not only about negotiating a problem with one's opponent, but also – and often much more – about consolidating a group as a group and about becoming its spokesman and representative in essential matters, then postulates of non-negotiability are suitable, because they transfer the resolution of a matter to unreal worlds or times. The impossibility of negotiation ascribed to the conflict has no disadvantageous consequences for those who propagate it. On the contrary, in order for a movement to keep moving, conflict is necessary. If conflicts are resolved, if concerns are complied with, this has often been the end of a movement. Resolving a conflict would be detrimental to its own purposes: as the *perpetuum mobile* of a movement, as a mode of unification of a community, as a hierarchisation of the relevances through which those who propagate the conflict also become spokesmen of the group being demarcated by it. If, now, the concern of the conflict evades settlement by definition, i.e. as a non-negotiable, this has the potential to make the movement a permanent one.

If enmity is an essential characteristic of the relationship between two groups, or if, like in the case of Islam, it is made out to be the characteristic of one 'culture', it becomes possible to continually reformulate the conflict, to adapt it to the local and current opportunities, ultimately to generate continuity over time and to keep on re-concretising the conflict. Ayodhya is only one of the symbols of the allegedly essential and therefore non-negotiable conflict between Hinduism and Islam. Such selected symbols are – potentially – infinite in their number: The Hindu-nationalist organisations have another 3000 mosques on their list, and they will find other symbols for the conflict than mosques.

Julia Eckert
2007/08 Jean Monnet Fellow, RSCAS
eckert@eth.mpg.de

(Contd.)

which the BJP was able to recruit their voters. Particularly the Hindu-nationalist organisations themselves are made up mainly of middle-class members.