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The Perception of Violence:

Conversion in Post-Independence India

by

Ian Douglas Richards

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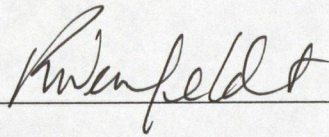

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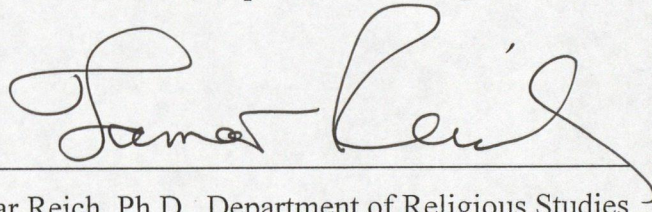UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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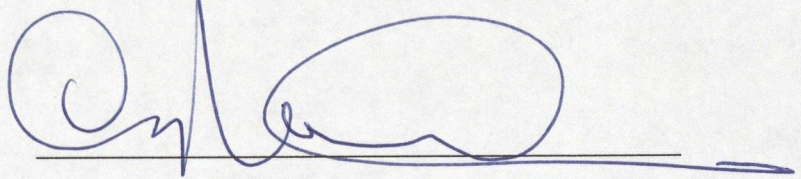
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ABSTRACT

According to both the English Indian Press and the claims of some scholars and analysts, the incidence of violence on the part of Hindus against the Muslim and Christian communities in India has increased substantially since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 1998. Some of this violence has been aimed at Christian missionaries and missionary activity. A common perception is that such violence is perpetrated largely by groups linked to the Sangh Parivar, and that the violence is a reaction to questionable methods of proselytization. The contention of this thesis is two-fold: that objection to conversion is not confined to the Sangh Parivar, and that the objection is not simply to questionable means of proselytization, but to the idea of conversion per se. Further, I will argue that the antipathy to conversion is driven by a vision of India that essentially defines proselytization minimally as an act of destabilization and maximally as an act of violence.

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This work is the product of several years of research and reflection. I wish to express my gratitude to those who have encouraged and challenged me throughout this process, especially those who periodically insisted that I "just get it finished." I would like to thank Dr. Ronald Neufeldt for his supervisory assistance with this thesis. His patience, insight, and scholarship have been indispensable. I would also like to thank the scholars who served on my examining committee: again, Dr. Ronald Neufeldt, Wayne McCready, Tamar Reich, and Douglas Peers.

I am grateful to my parents and immediate family who have avidly supported me throughout my lengthy education. I would especially like to thank my wife, Susan, for her support, encouragement, and love over the past few years. Her example of perseverance in her own life has provided me with the motivation to finish this project. This thesis exists for and because of her and it is to Susan that I lovingly and respectfully dedicate this work.

> *And when old words die out on the tongue,*
> *New melodies break forth from the heart;*
> *And where the old tracks are lost,*
> *New country is revealed with its wonders.*
> *Rabindranath Tagore,*
> *"Poem XXXVII"*
> Gitanjali

Introduction

On 23 January 1998, Australian Christian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons were burned to death in their car in a small village in the Adivasi (Tribal) area of the Indian state of Orissa. This event was a culmination, of sorts, of an escalating series of attacks on Christian missionaries and those they sought to convert by groups associated with the Sangh Parivar. Indeed, in the stretch of time between the start of the anti-Christian attacks in 1997, and the anti-Muslim violence experienced in Gujarat in 2002, Christians seemed to have replaced Muslims as the primary target of violence. As historian Sumit Sarkar has noted, "The Sangh Parivar has always needed one or more enemy Others to consolidate into an aggressive bloc the 'Hindu community' which it claims to represent and seeks to constitute."[1]

Historically, Muslims have been the enemy Other for the Sangh Parivar, a 'family' comprised of several different but interrelated organizations, each of which follows a Hindu ideology known as *Hindutva*. The ideology of *Hindutva*, or 'Hindu-ness' was first conceptualized by V.D Savarkar in his book *Hindutva—Who is a Hindu?* which was first published in 1923. *Hindutva* now refers to both the organizations which comprise the Sangh Parivar, as well as the ideology and rhetoric of these organizations. The Sangh Parivar has been very successful in transforming Savarkar's ideology into a powerful and effective political and nationalistic tool.

Anti-conversion sentiment, however, is not limited to the organizations which comprise the Sangh Parivar or those Indians who are in agreement with the Sangh Parivar's ideological stance. Conversion to Christianity (and Islam) has been a thorny

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[1] Sumit Sarkar. *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Post Modernism, Hindu Fundamentalism, History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 215.

issue with many different Hindu individuals and groups for some time. For example, prior to Indian Independence in 1947, many of the Princely States had anti-conversion legislation.[2] The right to propagate one's religion (and, by extension, to convert someone to one's faith) was a matter of significant debate in the Constituent Assembly debates which preceded the drafting of the Indian constitution.[3] M.K. Gandhi himself questioned both the necessity of conversions and the presence of foreign Christian missionaries in India.[4]

Beginning in 1956, the governments of several Indian states began to closely examine missionary activities within their borders. As time went on, several states both proposed and enacted anti-conversion legislation. At the national level, several bills were put forward in India's parliament, the Lok Sabha, which sought to introduce anti-conversion legislation, though none of these bills were passed into law. The Supreme Court of India also became involved as both individuals and state governments appealed lower court rulings based upon the anti-conversion laws enacted at the state level.

The contention of this thesis is two-fold: that objection to conversion is not confined to the Sangh Parivar, and that the objection is not simply to questionable means of proselytization, but to the idea of conversion per se. Further, this thesis will argue that the antipathy to conversion is driven by a vision of India that essentially defines proselytization minimally as an act of destabilization and maximally as an act of violence.

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[2] Donald Eugene Smith. *India as a Secular State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 176-181.
[3] Ronald W. Neufeldt. "Conversion and Propagation in Independent India" in Reeta Chowdhari Tremblay, et al. ed. *Interfacing Nations: Indo/Pakistani/Canadian Reflections on the 50th Anniversary of India's Independence.* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1998), 277-296.
[4] John C. Webster. "Gandhi and the Christians: Dialogue in the Nationalist Era" in *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspective and Encounters* ed. Harold Coward (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 88.

In Chapter One I will provide a brief history of Christianity in India, drawing out the issues relating to conversion which have arisen from India's missionary history and which continue to inform anti-conversion sentiments. In Chapter Two I will trace the growth of anti-conversion sentiment in the Sangh Parivar by examining the development of anti-conversion and anti-Christian attitudes in three groups which can be considered members of the Sangh Parivar, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). In this chapter I will also examine *Hindutva* ideology as outlined by V.D. Savarkar in his book *Hindutva—Who is a Hindu?* since the anti-conversion sentiments of the Sangh Parivar can trace their roots to Savarkar's ideology of *Hindutva*. In Chapter Three I will examine the anti-conversion sentiment expressed in the Reports on Missionary Activities published by the government of Madhya Bharat and Madhya Pradesh in 1956. In Chapter Four I will examine the freedom of religion acts (regarded by some constitutional scholars as 'anti-conversion acts') enacted by the states of Orissa (1967), Madhya Pradesh (1968) and Arunachal Pradesh (1978), the Lok Sabha anti-conversion bills put forward at the Centre, and two Supreme Court cases conducted in 1977 which challenged rulings based upon the freedom of religion acts in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. My concluding chapter (Chapter Five) will demonstrate that the antipathy towards conversion to Christianity expressed by the Sangh Parivar, as well as groups, individuals and legislators outside of it, can be understood only when conversion is seen as a violent attack upon a particular vision of India, a vision which conflates the ideas of religion, culture, and nation.

Methodology

This thesis will approach the phenomenon of conversion to Christianity and *Hindutva* inspired objections to conversion primarily from within the disciplinary context of the History of Religions. From within the enormous methodological category of the History of Religions, I will be using Robert D. Baird's analysis and application of the historical method as the main directive for my research [5]

The History of Religions, as described by Baird, is reliant upon two definitions: its definition of religion and its definition of history. While acknowledging the inherent difficulty of defining a term as ambiguous as religion, Baird claims that it is possible to define religion inasmuch as one acknowledges that the definition is 'functional" in nature.[6] A functional definition implies that one is ascribing a particular meaning to a particular word or phrase. Though a functional definition may be quite rightly accused of being somewhat arbitrary, this arbitrary nature gives precision to the functional definition by deciding, "which of several meanings of a word can be adopted for the purposes at hand."[7] Baird's functional definition of religion states that religion is comprised of the ultimate concerns of persons and communities. Ultimate, in this context, refers to "concerns, which are more important than anything else in the universe for the person involved."[8]

The second definition upon which Baird's analysis is reliant is the definition of history. Historical study is an act of description. In particular, historical study is a description of the human past. When one combines this definition of history with the

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[5] Robert D. Baird *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971).
[6] Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions,* 6.
[7] Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions,* 7-8.
[8] Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions,,* 18.

aforementioned definition of religion, one is able to isolate the purpose and scope of Baird's methodology, which is to study the "ultimate concerns of persons and communities in their historical given ness, ascertaining how...penultimate matters relate to the most important concern reflected in their thought or in their lives.[9]

My study is, for the most part, limited to the opposition to prosleytization and conversion to Christianity, and to some extent, Islam, which has existed in India in the period between Independence in 1947 and the Meenakshipuram conversion controversy of 1981, as well as the ideology that may lie behind such an opposition. Embedded in this ideology is a vision of India that can be described as religious through its conflation of religion, culture, and nationalism. As I will attempt to demonstrate, India is much more than a geopolitical entity for both the Sangh Parivar and the forces behind the other anti-conversion bills and laws which I will examine throughout the course of this study. India is also a motherland, a culture, and a *sacred* history. The ultimate goal is to preserve and advance this multifaceted conception of India. Indeed, the ultimate concern of those who have followed the *Hindutva* inspired notion of India is itself India. Understanding the ultimacy of this vision of India is fundamental to any analysis of concerns over conversion to Christianity in India.

In addition to the history of religions approach as defined by Baird, one other academic development will inform this thesis. This development is post-colonial theory. While I will attempt to distance my work from a strict "Saidian" Orientalism, I believe it is wise to take the post-colonial project into account when examining pre- and post-Independence Indian historiography. As Gyanendra Pandey points out, colonial (and to a certain degree "Orientalist") historians tended to focus exclusively on religion and

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[9] Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions,* 35.

religious communities in their histories, especially in reference to violence and communal strife.[10] Post-colonial history has veered towards a less significant emphasis on religion and included such things as class, caste and culture. Class, caste and culture must be examined if one is to properly understand *Hindutva* ideology and its response to conversion, especially its response to what section of society is converting to a 'foreign' religion such as Christianity.

In this thesis, I will not attempt to provide a post-colonial critique of either conversion to Christianity or *Hindutva*. Post-colonialism will inform this study inasmuch as recognizing its methods and importance will direct me to look beyond communal strife and religious identity in trying to ascertain why the *Hindutva* forces perceive conversion to Christianity as a violent attack upon the nation.

Further Definitions

The Methodology section above contained one of the three definitions crucial to this study: religion. Religion was functionally defined in terms of "ultimate concern" using history of religions methodology as outlined by Robert Baird. The two other definitions of importance to this thesis are propagation and conversion. What does it mean to 'propagate one's religion' and what does it mean to 'convert' from one religion to another?

In the context of post-Independence India, propagation essentially means to perpetuate the religious tradition. Propagation can be further understood as perpetuating the tradition through passing it on to one's children or family, through the teaching of others outside of one's tradition for 'edification,' or as proselytizing for the sake of

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[10] Gyanendra Pandey. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 24.

converting others to one's own tradition. It is this last understanding of propagation which is particularly problematic for those who oppose conversion for whatever reason.

Conversion, in simple terms, is a movement from one religiously defined community to another. This definition, of course, ignores all of the complications surrounding conversion such as conversion by accretion, dual loyalties, hyphenated types such as 'Hindu-Christians,' etc. The concern surrounding conversion in a vision of India which conflates religion, culture, and nationalism is, of course, the movement of those seen as Hindu to another religious community. This movement is especially troubling when it involves the movement of Hindus to an 'alien' religious community such as Christianity or Islam.

Even though many would argue, as Sumit Sarkar does, that "propagation makes no sense at all without the possibility of convincing others of the validity of one's own religious beliefs and rituals,"[11] the fact that the right to convert is not explicitly stated in Article 25 of the Indian Constitution makes the business of conversion a hotly contested issue in India. Following Sarkar once again, "Freedom of choice, in religion or for that matter in politics or anything else, and therefore the freedom to change one's beliefs, is surely in any case integral to any conception of democracy." [12] The Indian Constitution does, however prohibit conversion by fraud, force, or allurement. As will be seen from my analysis, opponents of conversion in India continually appeal to these constitutional prohibitions against conversion perpetrated through fraudulent means.

Sarkar follows up his abovementioned comments on Freedom of Religion in the Indian Constitution by agreeing with the Indian Constitution's prohibition of fraudulent

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[11] Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames,"* 218.
[12] Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames,* 218.

conversions. Sarkar states that "conversion by force or fraud is contrary to the basic

principle of equal freedom." [13] Here again we enter contested territory: the proponents of

Hindutva ideology, as well as a considerable amount of political discourse in India, have

stated that they are against only conversions from Hinduism to Christianity (or Islam)

performed through fraudulent means. My thesis will argue that this rhetorical obsession

with conversion perpetuated by fraudulent means is merely window-dressing for the

Hindu Right and in the political discourse which will be examined. Conversion itself is

the issue, and conversion is the issue because it is perceived as a violent attack, based on

a particular vision of India.

Contribution to Knowledge

There has been a considerable amount of literature written on conversion in

colonial India, in particular the research conducted by Geoffrey Oddie, Duncan Forrester

and Antony Copley. [14] While there is a substantial amount of polemical literature written

by advocates of the Hindu Right (in particular Ashok Chowgule and Arun Shourie) [15] on

conversion in post-Independence India, there is a significant lack of scholarly study on

conversion during the same time period. This thesis seeks to build upon the limited

scholarly work that has been completed on conversion in post-Independence India.

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[13] Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames*, 218.

[14] Geoffrey Oddie has edited several volumes on conversion in India including *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times* (London: Curzon Press, 1977) and *Religious Conversion Movement in South Asia: Communities and Change, 1800-1900* (London: Curzon Press, 1997). Antony Copley's contribution to the study of conversion in colonial India can be found in his monograph *Religions in Conflict: Ideology, Cultural Contact and Conversion in Late Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997). Duncan Forrester's seminal work *Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India* (London and Dublin: Curzon Press, 1980) is extremely informative on the issues surrounding conversion in Colonial India.

[15] The major works of these writers include: Ashok Chowgule. *Christianity in India: The Hindutva Perspective* (Mumbai: Hindu Vivek Kendra, 1999); Arun Shourie. *A Secular Agenda* (New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1993); Arun Shourie. *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas* (New Delhi; ASA Publications, 1994); Arun Shourie. *Harvesting our Souls: Missionaries, their design, their claims* (New Delhi: ASA Publications, 2000).

This thesis will examine the various Government Reports, proposed and enacted legislation and Supreme Court rulings surrounding conversion in post-Independence India to support my claim that conversion is perceived as a violent attack on a vision of India which conflates the ideas of religion, culture, and nation. Most of the work surrounding these acts and court rulings has been done by Brojendra Nath Bannerjee (*Religious Conversions in India*, 1982) and Ronald Neufeldt ("To Convert or Not to Convert" *in Religion and Law in Independent India*, 1993, as well as several other articles*).* I will seek to build upon the work of these scholars in order to provide a more complete view of the controversy surrounding conversion to Christianity in India since Independence.

A great deal more scholarship has been done on the growth of Hindu nationalism[16], particularly the rise of *Hindutva*. Most scholarship on both the rise and character of the *Hindutva* movement falls into two main categories. The first category is mainly political in nature. That is, there is scholarship that tends to see the Sangh Parivar as a product of decades of political organization and strategy. From a historical standpoint, scholarship in this vein traces the origins of *Hindutva* to the nationalist movement in both pre and post-Independence India, focusing in particular on post-Independence developments and institutions. Scholars following this trajectory include Christophe Jaffrelot (*The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1996), Tapan Basu, et al

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[16] In this study, the term "Hindu nationalism" refers to the movement and ideology of groups and individuals for whom India can only be viewed as a Hindu nation or *rashtra*. This movement follows closely the ideology of *Hindutva* as outlined by V.D. Savarkar in *Hindutva—Who is a Hindu?* The terms "*Hindutva*," the "Hindu Right" and "Hindu nationalism" will be used interchangeably throughout this work. As well, the term "Sangh Parivar" is also seen as part of the Hindu nationalist movement and will be used in that context in this thesis.

(*Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags,* 1993), and, most persuasively, John Zavos *(The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India,* 2000).

The second major category interprets the *Hindutva* movement in a more historical fashion, focusing in particular on religion. The major theme of this strand is that religion has always been the most important aspect of Indian nationalism, both pre and post-1947. Important scholarship in this vein of Hindu nationalist discourse has been provided by Peter Van der Veer (*Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India,* 1994) and Ainslie Embree (*Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India,* 1990).

The most complete understanding of the *Hindutva* movement arises from a synthesis of these two aspects. Thomas Blom Hansen's seminal work *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in India* (1999) attempts this synthesis by arguing that Hindu nationalism has developed "neither in the political system…or in religion…but in what we may call the 'public culture.'" [17] Public culture is defined as "the public space in which communities imagine, represent themselves through political discourse, communal and cultural expressions, and representations of state and civic government." [18] Conspicuously absent from this list is religion, thus exposing the major flaw in Hansen's synthesis. It is my contention that any discussion of "culture (be it "public" or otherwise) in the Indian context must necessarily include religion. Further, one may argue that in India, and in particular in the viewpoint of the Hindu Right, the distinction between culture and religion is not transparent.

Chetan Bhatt's *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths,* published in 2001, is a very important work in the study of Hindu nationalism. Bhatt

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[17] Thomas Blom Hansen. *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in India.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999),4.
[18] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* 4.

moves beyond even Hansen, more clearly identifying the contested space in which *Hindutva* has matured and developed.

A great deal of the antipathy towards conversion to Christianity in India is based on the premise that it is not (only) Hindu religion that is being attacked, but Hindu culture and nation. And Hindu culture, the argument proceeds, goes beyond religious differences and includes all Indians, regardless of their religion. This defense of Hindu culture (as opposed to Hindu religion) allows anti-conversion ideologues to argue, both in apologetics and in the courts of India, that their rhetoric and their actions are not anti-religious and, further, that they support the ideal of secularism as it is enshrined in the Indian constitution.

When the conflation of culture and religion is framed within the context of the debate on conversion, one can begin to understand and appreciate that any distinction made between religion and culture in anti-conversion rhetoric is merely that: rhetoric. The terms religion and culture are almost always conflated. Furthermore, religion and culture, either deliberately or unconsciously, are usually further conflated by the idea of a Hindu nation or *rashtra*. It is this conflation of religion, culture, and nation that provides an ultimate vision of India as a sacred geopolitical entity, and it is this sacralization of India that informs the continuing antipathy of many in India towards conversion, in particular conversion to the 'alien' traditions of Christianity and Islam.

Chapter One: Christianity in India

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly outline the history of Christianity in India

and, more pointedly, responses to conversion to Christianity by members of the Hindu

communities in India. This background chapter will not only provide information on

Christianity and proselytization on the subcontinent; it will also identify many of the

issues arising out of conversion to Christianity, in particular anti-conversion sentiment

found outside of the Sangh Parivar.

Syrian Christians

The history of Christianity in India is, above all else, a missionary history. In

most cases it is a rather simple exercise to identify the missions responsible for the

establishment of the various Christian communities in India. Where one runs into

difficulty, however, is in determining the origin of India's most ancient Christian

community, the Syrian Christians of south India.

Traditionally, the Syrian Christians trace their origin to Thomas, one of Christ's

twelve apostles who was said to have come to India as a missionary in 52 C.E.[19] The

tradition, as it has been passed down, is quite a simple one and is first mentioned in an

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[19] There are several excellent accounts of the "Thomas Legend" and his alleged missionary activities in India. For a strictly historical analysis of the legend and its probability see Samuel Hugh Moffett. *Christianity in India Volume I: Beginnings to 1500.* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 24-44; S.G. Pothan. *The Syrian Christians of Kerala* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 3-37; Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit. *Christians in Asia before 1500.* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), 155-166 and Leslie Brown. *The Indian Christians of St Thomas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 43-65. Less historically rigorous (but still informative) accounts can be found in Placid J. Podipara *The Thomas Christians* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1970),15-35 and; Cardinal Eugene Tisserant. *Eastern Christianity in India: A History of the Syro-Malabar Church from the Earliest Time to the Present Day* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1957), 1-11.

early Christian romance known as the *Acts of Thomas* from about the year 200 C.E. [20] The Apostles gathered in Jerusalem soon after the death of Jesus to decide how they would go about obeying Christ's commandment to preach the gospel to all the world. It was decided that Thomas should go and preach in India. Thomas refused, but ended up going to India all the same because Christ appeared in a vision to an agent of the Indian king Gundaphar, who was looking for a carpenter to work on Gundaphar's palace back in India. Jesus 'sold' Thomas to the agent as a carpenter and Thomas was soon on his way to India. [21]

After arriving in India, Thomas was given a significant amount of money in order to build King Gundaphar his palace. Thomas, however, was unable to spend any of the money on construction after witnessing the horrible poverty of those around him, and so he gave all of the money away to the poor. The King was understandably upset when Thomas told him that he had not built him an earthly palace but one he would see only in heaven and so he promptly put Thomas in jail.[22] The same night as King Gundaphar threw Thomas into jail, Gundaphar's own brother died. In the afterworld, Gundaphar's brother saw a beautiful palace and asked if he might live there. The angels told him no and told him that this was the palace that Thomas was building for his brother the King. The King's brother then appeared to the King in a dream and informed him of the truth of Thomas' teachings. The king released Thomas from jail and soon he and many were converted to Christianity. [23]

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[20] Moffet, *Christianity in India Volume I,* 25.
[21] Gillman and Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500,* 160.
[22] Moffet, *Christianity in India: Volume 1,* 28.
[23] Moffet, *Christianity in India: Volume 1,* 28. See also Gillman and Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500,* 160.

According to the legend, Thomas eventually moved on from the land of King Gundaphar and began preaching in various other parts of India. According to traditional accounts, Thomas was eventually executed on the order of a King Masdaeus, whose lands were traditionally situated near Madras.[24]

An interesting piece of documentary evidence regarding the Christian community in south India is found in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. This text reported that an early Christian scholar, Pantaenus, was sent to India in about 190 C.E. by Demetrius, Bishop of Alexandria to preach to the Brahmins. It is also reported that the writings of St. Jerome contain a similar reference to Pantaneus' mission to India.[25] Jerome goes on to report that Pantaenus had discovered a Christian community already extant in India, and that they had been taught by one of the Christ's apostles, in this case Bartholomew.[26] The reference to Bartholomew, as opposed to Thomas, has been downplayed by many scholars, especially by those who support the traditional account of the St Thomas Christians of south India.[27] In order to maintain the primacy of Thomas as the first apostle to India, Bartholomew is given a supporting role—he is said to have preached in the Kalyan (near present-day Bombay) area *after* Thomas' mission to the south of India and it is also reported that Pantaenus' imperfect grasp of Malayalam led him to hear "Mar Thoma" (Bishop or Lord Thomas in Malayalam) as "Bar Tolomai" (Hebrew for Bartholomew).[28] And while references to Bartholomew cannot be ignored, especially very early references such as those by Eusebius and Jerome, it is interesting to note that

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[24] Moffett, *Christianity in India: Volume I*, 28.
[25] Pothan, *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*, 17-19.
[26] Pothan, *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*, 18.
[27] Pothan, for instance, dismisses Bartholomew from south India and places his mission to India in Kalyan, near what is today Bombay. He readily accepts the argument put forward by those who favour the Thomas mission, that is that Pantaneus confused the name "Mar Thoma" (Lord or Bishop Thomas) with "Bar Tolomai" (Hebrew for Bartholomew). See the *Syrian Christians of Kerala*, 19.
[28] Moffett, *Christianity in India: Volume I*, 38.

Jerome himself in a letter to Marcellus mentions Thomas, not Bartholomew as the apostle to India.

> He [Jesus] was present in all places with Thomas in India, with Peter in Rome, with Paul in Illyria, with Titus in Crete, Andrew in Greece, with each apostle and apostolic man in his own separate region. [29]

It is clear that south Indian tradition both favours and reveres the tradition of Thomas as the first missionary to India. The community's link to Thomas is entrenched in its oral tradition, in songs and poetry that have been passed down through many generations.[30] The most convincing link, however, might be that the community itself exists, that they have ancient relics in the form of the crosses of St Thomas, copper plates and what they consider to be Thomas' tomb.[31] Some of the members of this community trace their Christian lineage back through 80 generations.

Whether the claims and legends of the south Indian Christian community are ignored or accepted, all scholars must admit that the Christian community in India and in particular south India, was initiated by missionaries and has a very ancient origin. Moreover, in many respects the St. Thomas Christian community is a uniquely Indian religious tradition. Although the theology and liturgy of the St. Thomas church were alien to Hinduism, the "social life and custom of the Church [was] completely Indian." [32]

The St. Thomas Christians appeared to co-exist in two very different worlds. On Sundays, the St. Thomas Christians practiced and expressed their unique Christian beliefs. On other days, they observed Hindu holidays and recognized the existence of

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[29] Jerome, *Epistola LXX ad Magnum Oratorem urbis Romae* as quoted in Moffett, *A History of Christianity in India, Volume I,* 39.

[30] Moffett, *Christianity in India Volume I,* 164-165.

[31] Moffett, *Christianity in India Volume I,* 35-35. The copper plates and the stone crosses have been dated to the 7th or 8th century C.E. While this archaeological evidence in no way proves the Thomas legend, when combined with a living South Indian community it can certainly make the case for ancient Christianity (and their traditions and legends) in south India a strong possibility.

[32] Brown, *The Indian Christians of St Thomas,* 3.

Hindu deities, though they stopped short of worshipping them. Perhaps most importantly, the St Thomas Christians actively participated in the most important aspect of Hindu social life: caste.[33] The St. Thomas Christians viewed themselves not only as a Church community but as a caste community. It was this participation in Hindu society that allowed the Christian community, in spite of the foreign origin of their faith, to be viewed by their fellow countrymen as indigenous. It was also this participation and assimilation within Hindu society that has allowed the St. Thomas community to survive for two millennia. [34]

Catholic Missions

The Portuguese arrived in India around the turn of the fifteenth century and initiated trade centres and settlements along the western coast of India, in particular the areas known as Goa, and Daman and Diu. The Portuguese presence in India remained until 1961 at which time they were the last foreign presence to be found on the subcontinent.[35] Though the Portuguese presence was never all that powerful in political terms, the Portuguese did manage to set up extensive trade networks throughout Asia and left an indelible print on the Christian history of India with the establishment of a small Roman Catholic community. [36]

Interestingly, the missionary influence of the Portuguese began with a conversion which demonstrated two features of religious conversion which remain problematic even today in India: 'mass conversion' and 'inducement' or 'allurement.' The first conversion

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[33] Brown, *The Indian Christians of St Thomas,* 4.
[34] Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas,* 3.
[35] Harrison, J.B. "The Portuguese" in *A Cultural History of India* ed. A.L. Basham. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 339-340.
[36] Harrison, "The Portuguese," 346.

was a mass conversion[37] of the *Paravas*, a fisherman caste, in modern-day Tamil Nadu, in 1536 or 1537.[38] During these two years, 20,000 people, practically the entire caste, were converted to Christianity.[39] The reason for this conversion, however, was not an acceptance of Christian teaching but a desire for Portuguese protection from Muslim oppression in the area.[40] Moreover, their Portuguese convertors were less than interested in the converts spiritual well-being. There was no religious instruction or "pastoral care" and, from a religious standpoint, the new converts were left to their own (chiefly Hindu) devices.[41]

Missionary work of the type that was responsible for the conversion of the *Paravas* was poorly organized. The indifference of both the clergy and the settlers to the newly converted should be seen in that light. The Catholic mission became much more organized and effective with the arrival of Francis Xavier in 1542.[42] Francis Xavier baptized several thousand Indians, most of them children, and established an elementary system of religious education in the Tamil language. [43]

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[37] Mass conversion, which will be discussed at length later in this chapter, was an accepted mode of conversion for Roman Catholic missionaries who saw caste as a social or cultural construction and not a religious phenomenon. Protestant missionaries, on the other hand, saw caste as an insult to Christianity and strove (with little success) to remove it from their converts worldview. Protestant missionary attitudes towards caste will also be further analyzed in a later section of this chapter. See D.B. Forester. *Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India* (London and Dublin: Curzon Press, 1980), 14-15 for further information.

[38] Isaac Padinjarekuttu. *The Missionary Movement of the 19th and 29th Centuries and its Encounter with India: A Historico-Thelogical Investigation with three Case Studies* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 1995) 44.

[39] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, 14.

[40] Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement*, 44. Conversion for reasons of physical protection and social improvement is a recurrent theme in Indian missionary history. It is also one of the main causes of antagonism towards missionaries by the Hindu right wing in modern India. See also *Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee, Madhya Pradesh*, (Nagpur: Government Printing Press, 1956).

[41] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, 14.

[42] Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement*, 44.

[43] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, 14.

Catholic missionary work in India moved in a radically different direction when

Robert De Nobili, an Italian Jesuit priest, came to Madurai in Tamil Nadu in 1606. [44]

The majority of converts to Catholicism, at this point, had come from the *Paravas* and

other low-caste groups. De Nobili wanted to see if he could obtain high caste converts, in

particular brahmin converts [45] To accomplish this goal, De Nobili not only mastered

Tamil language and custom, but lived as an Indian *sannyasin*, also studying Sanskrit and

Hindu sacred texts. De Nobili separated himself from the lower castes and lived in the

high-caste way, observing the requisite dietary and caste purity laws. [46] Most

importantly, De Nobili allowed the limited number of high-caste individuals he was able

to convert to maintain all of their social and caste customs, including the sacred thread,

their hair tufts (*kudumi*), and all of the rules surrounding caste and social interaction.[47] In

essence, then, de Nobili followed the missionary practices of 'accommodation,' that is,

the accommodation and acceptance of the 'harmless' social and cultural practices of the

Indians and 'adaptation' by missionaries to their social customs.[48]

The Catholic hierarchy in Rome eventually outlawed the very practices De Nobili

had used to make Christianity acceptable to the high-caste brahmins in Madurai in the

first place: adaptation and accommodation. A series of papal decrees in the eighteenth

century effectively forbade both missionaries and converts from engaging in certain

ostensibly 'Hindu' social and cultural practices.[49] With the rites and practices that had

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[44] Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement,* 45.
[45] Sundaraj, T. "The Relation between Jesuit Missionaries and The Native Powers in Tamil Nadu" in *Jesuit Presence in Indian History* ed. Anand Amaldass. (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988), 121.
[46] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity,* 15.
[47] Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement,* 46.
[48] Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement,* 45-46.
[49] Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement,* 46-47. This was known as the 'Malabar Rites controversy.' Missionaries to India were required to take an oath that they would not practice certain rites deemed inappropriate by Rome—sixteen rites in all. These decrees, obviously, were a matter of serious

given them their social superiority proscribed, the brahmins and other high caste groups which had converted to Catholicism were removed from the cultural and social mainstream of both the Christian and Hindu communities. Christianity undoubtedly lost much of its appeal. For the lower castes, conversion to Christianity still held appeal as a way to increase their social standing and thus remained a viable option.

The main area of Portuguese missionary influence was along the West coast of India, in particular the territory of Goa. While trade was the main concern of the Portuguese, it is also true that the spread of Christianity was also important and was often intertwined with both economic and political concerns.[50] Up until the 1540s, the Portuguese used two methods of attracting converts: orphanages to raise children in the Christian faith and a system of privileges by which one could advance in the Portuguese administration.[51] These methods had limited success and it was in the 1540s that the methods for conversion changed quite significantly, becoming more and more coercive.

This stronger, more coercive attempt to convert the Goans consisted mainly of attacks on Hinduism and the manipulation of socioeconomic factors.[52] It has been argued that this stronger attack may have come about as a result of the Counter-Reformation taking place in Europe at that time and the subsequent deterioration of the more tolerant renaissance humanism in vogue in Portugal just prior to this time. [53] In any case, temples and idols were destroyed and laws were passed that banned the religious practices of

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consternation for both the missionaries and the Indian Christians. Interestingly, it wasn't until 1940 that missionaries were no longer required to take the oath prohibiting them from practicing the outlawed rites.

[50] Rowena Robinson. *Conversion, Continuity, and Change: Lived Christianity in Southern Goa.* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 48.

[51] Robinson, *Conversion, Continuity, and Change,* 48.

[52] Robinson, *Conversion, Continuity, and Change,* 50-51.

[53] Sanjay Subhrahmanyam. *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500-1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 83-84. See also Sanjay Subrahmanyam. *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500-1600.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 111.

priests. Socio-economic manipulation consisted mostly of changing property inheritance laws, with the hopes, perhaps, of acquiring property for the Church.[54]

Following closely on the heels of this stiffening attitude towards Hindu religion in Goa was the Inquisition, which arrived in Goa in the mid sixteenth century.[55] The main thrust of the Inquisition in Goa was to prevent new converts from lapsing back into Hindu religious practices. Interestingly, the Inquisition was also used as a coercive tool against Hindus who had never converted, which Portuguese law allowed if it could be proved that Hindus in some way had prevented other Hindus from converting. [56]

Conversion in sixteenth century Goa opened the way for converts, particularly those from higher castes, to gain access to administrative positions in the Portuguese government and it allowed converts to maintain some of the influence (both social and political) that they had traditionally exercised. As Rowena Robinson succinctly states: "Christianity was the religion of the rulers and conversion was often viewed as the first step towards acquiring some of the superiority of their position."[57]

It is more than evident from the examples given of the prohibitions against accommodation for Indian missionaries and the Inquisition in Goa that the Catholic Church had designs to establish *proper* Roman Catholicism on the subcontinent. These designs included not only the proselytization of Hindus but also the "latinization"(and to a certain degree "Portuguesation") of the indigenous South Indian Christians of St. Thomas.[58] The St Thomas Christians, of course, celebrated their liturgy in the Syriac language and obtained their bishops from Mesopotamia. The Portuguese missionaries

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[54] Robinson, *Conversion, Continuity and Change,* 50-51.
[55] Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia,* 82-83.
[56] Robinson, *Conversion, Continuity and Change,* 51.
[57] Robinson, *Conversion, Continuity and Change,* 55.
[58] Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement,* 47-48.

sought to have the St. Thomas Christians give up their traditional practices and customs, considering them heretical as they did not conform with Latin practices.[59]

The desire of the missionaries to purge the practices of The St. Thomas Christians of their Mesopotamian influence became a matter of law with the Synod of Diamper organized by The Archbishop of Goa, Alexis De Menezes in 1599.[60] The Synod outlawed all Mesopotamian rites and brought all Indian Christians, by law, under the Latin *Padroado*. Not surprisingly, some of the St. Thomas Christians rejected the Synod and Menezes' goal to latinize all of Indian Christianity under the *Padroado* never took place. In 1653, the St. Thomas Christian community revolted and the community ended up divided into the Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholic Churches.[61] The missionaries desire to unify Christianity under the leadership of Rome had effectively created a permanent schism in one of the world's oldest Christian communities. Thus, while the missionaries had helped bring the St. Thomas Christians out of their religious isolation, they had also fractured the community with their notions of the superiority of Western Christianity and the need to do all things in accordance with Rome.[62]

Protestant Missions

Portuguese, and by extension Roman Catholic missionary work, diminished considerably in the eighteenth century.[63] A major reason for this, of course, was the decline of Portuguese power and the rise of British power on the subcontinent in the form of the East India Company. The East India Company was considerably less concerned with the spread of Christianity than its predecessor, the Portuguese, and officially adopted

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[59] Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement,* 48.
[60] Brown, *The Indian Christians of St Thomas,* 32.
[61] Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement,* 49.
[62] Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement,* 49.
[63] Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement,* 50.

a position of religious neutrality, as did the British government when it assumed control of India.[64] Nevertheless, though the East India Company (and the British government) maintained this policy of neutrality, Protestant missionary work came to India in the eighteenth century, reaching its pinnacle in the nineteenth century. The literature on the Protestant missionary enterprise in India at this time is vast and a full presentation of it is beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, I will limit myself to a presentation of four missionary groups: The Lutherans, the Baptists, the Scottish Presbyterians and the Anglicans.

Up until 1813, the East India Company, which was the *de facto* ruler of the Indian subcontinent, maintained a policy of religious neutrality and to some extent discouraged the propagation of Christianity in India. [65] This is quite an interesting position especially if compared with the Portuguese for whom religious and political power was so inextricably linked. Nevertheless, this policy of religious neutrality would not remain in effect throughout the era of British imperial rule and empire and mission became further and further intertwined, eventually becoming one of the most important issues[66] facing both the British and the Indian nationalist movement.

As a result of the neutrality policy of the East India Company, the first Protestant missionaries came not from Britain, but from Germany at the summons of the King of Denmark. Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plutschau, both German Lutheran ministers, arrived at the Danish colony of Tranquebar in modern-day Tamil Nadu in

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[64] Smith, *India as a Secular State,* 66-67.

[65] Smith, *India as Secular State,* 194. Smith also remarks on page 66 of *India as Secular State* that "in 1608 the charter granted by Parliament directed that the company's [East India Company] chaplains should learn the languages of the country in order to instruct Indian servants or agents of the country in the Protestant religion. But these intentions and instructions remained a dead letter." So, while there was some political impetus towards missionary work it remained in the background for the Company until 1813.

[66] Smith, *India as a Secular State,* 67.

1706. [67] Immediately they set about learning the Tamil language and instructing and converting those with whom they came in contact. [68]

Ziegenbalg never established himself as an ardent enemy of the caste system as, we shall see, later Protestant missionaries would. In fact, Ziegenbalg paid little attention to caste at all.[69] The reason for Ziegenbalg's acceptance of the importance of caste can be derived from Ziegenbalg's Lutheran pietist worldview. One of the main tenets of Lutheran pietism was the idea that religious matters should and can be separated from social matters. [70] Caste was seen as something entirely social and though it did often inhibit many conversion attempts it was simply that: a social construct. In effect, however, Ziegenbalg focused on converting those for whom a loss of caste would be no great social imposition, viz. those who had no social standing: the low-caste or casteless in Tranquebar society.[71] In this manner, then, Ziegenbalg held essentially the same position as the Roman Catholic missionaries with regards to caste. In both the Roman Catholic and Lutheran view, caste was a social construct and an entity entirely separate from religious concerns. As such, it could remain a part of the social life of converts so long as it did not undermine Christian doctrine. [72] Ziegenbalg did differ from the Roman Catholics, however, in the castes he sought to convert. The Roman Catholics, in the spirit

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[67] Brijraj Singh. *The First Protestant Missionary in India: Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, 1683-1719.* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16.

[68] Singh, *The First Protestant Missionary in India,* 17-20. Before moving on to a discussion of Ziegenbalg's missionary methods and his attitudes towards caste, it is important to note that the Tranquebar Mission was also financially supported by the Anglican Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), whose most important patron was the British King George I. See Forrester, *Caste and Christianity,* 17. With this information it is possible to see not only the genesis of both popular and political support for the Protestant missions in India but also the somewhat antagonistic views between the East India Company and popular opinion back in Britain surrounding proselytization.

[69] Singh, *The First Protestant Missionary in India,* 56-57.

[70] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity,* 17.

[71] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity,* 18.

[72] Singh, *The First Protestant Missionary in India,* 60-61.

of De Nobili concentrated on the upper castes. Ziegenbalg, in contrast, focused on the lower caste groups.

Ziegenbalg died a young man, at the age of thirty-six. But in the course of his mission at Tranquebar he was able to set himself apart from subsequent Protestant missionaries on the subcontinent. First, through his commitment to learning Tamil and then through translating important Christian works and preaching in that language he was able to set up a system of education wherein converts would have some way to maintain their religion in the absence of missionaries. Second, Ziegenbalg and the Lutheran missions were the only Protestant missionary groups to accept caste as a legitimate social structure and to work and proselytize with this in mind. Some of the subsequent Protestant missionaries would become linguists and educators of some distinction, but caste would never again be accepted as a legitimate structure by Protestant authorities in India.

Although the Anglican Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) gave financial support to the Tranquebar mission, of which almost all of the missionaries were German Lutherans, the Anglicans themselves played a very small role in active missionary work in India until the early to mid nineteenth century. [73] Consequently, it was other Protestant groups from England, in particular the Baptists and Scottish Presbyterians who got the ball rolling in terms of missionary work in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in India.

The first Baptist missionary to India was William Carey. Carey arrived in Calcutta in 1793 and would remain there until his death in 1834 at which time the Baptists were well

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[73] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity,* 33-34.

established throughout the whole of North India. [74] For the first five years of Carey's

tenure in India, very little was done in terms of missionary work. Carey managed a small

Indigo factory and dedicated his spare time to learning Bengali and translating the New

Testament into that language. [75] In 1799, four other Baptist missionaries arrived in India,

setting up in the Danish settlement of Serampore a short distance from Calcutta. Carey

soon joined these four missionaries in Serampore, and from there the missionaries began

their work.

As was the case with Ziegenbalg in the south of India, two of the main features of the

missionary work of the Baptists in Serampore were translation and education. The

primary goal of the missionary was to gain a knowledge of the language of those whom

he was to teach—and then to make the Bible available to the people in that language.

Carey had completed a translation of the New Testament into Bengali by the time he

joined the other Baptists in Serampore.[76] In the years that followed, Carey and his

colleagues learned and translated the Bible into upwards of thirty different Indian

languages, [77] and although none of the Serampore translations are still in use, it was

nonetheless an amazing achievement.

Education was also an important aspect of mission life at Serampore, especially after

the missionaries started experiencing a modest success in terms of conversion. The

mission set up numerous elementary schools and, eventually, a college was established

around 1816 which focused on Eastern languages and European science.[78] Though

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[74] Stephen Neill. *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1758.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 187,194, 204.
[75] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1758,* 189-190.
[76] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1758,* 195.
[77] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1758,* 197.
[78] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1758,* 200.

Christian theology was to be the cornerstone of the curriculum at the college, it was open to all regardless of caste or religious affiliation. Unfortunately for the college Sanskrit was chosen as the medium of instruction rather than English and, as a result, students often moved on to other, more metropolitan colleges, where English was the dominant language. [79] As a result, the college never really reached its full potential.

Another important method of disseminating the gospel at Serampore was the printing press. Not only did the Serampore missionaries print out their numerous translations of religious works, but they also developed a popular press, printing newspapers in both Bengali and English. [80] Both of these newspapers were very popular and, although they may have begun with evangelization in mind, the newspapers became much more concerned with politics and local news as time went on.

Though the Baptists were never hugely successful, they were able to convert a considerable number of people and to establish themselves quite firmly in North India. The Baptists' primary obstacle in their quest for conversion was, of course, caste.[81] Many potential converts were unwilling to sever all of their family ties in order to be baptized. And although Carey and the Baptists were not of the opinion that converts should adopt European culture and manners, they were quite firm in their stance against the caste system and in favour of what they viewed as the egalitarian ethic of Christianity.[82]

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[79] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1758,* 200-201.
[80] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1758,* 202-203.
[81] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity,* 26-27.
[82] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity,* 27-28.

The Scottish missionary enterprise in India began with the arrival of Alexander Duff in Calcutta in 1829.[83] Duff saw education, in particular higher education, as a gateway to the acceptance of the Christian gospel and he established a college in Calcutta in 1830.[84] Within a few years, there were three notable converts to Presbyterianism, including KM Bannerjea, who converted again, this time to Anglicanism, and who eventually became an Anglican priest in 1839.[85]

While unable to attract enormous numbers of converts to Presbyterianism, Duff's educational method of missionary work was successful in different ways and became a model for subsequent missionary efforts on the subcontinent. Duff's college stressed English as the medium of instruction and, as English was becoming more and more important in Calcutta society, it was a very well-attended college by Hindus and non-Hindus alike.[86] Duff sought to convert the non-Christians at his schools through what he believed to be the "reason" inherent in Christianity as opposed to the 'irrationality' of Hinduism.[87] Duff viewed his method as non-coercive, believing that the method appealed to the intellect of the convert and that it sought conversion through, at least at first, an intellectual acceptance of the Christian message. The great Indian reformer, Rammohan Roy, in speaking of the college's decision to teach the New Testament also agreed with Duff and stated that this method of educational proselytization was not coercive. "Read and judge for yourself. Not compulsion, but enlightened persuasion

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[83] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, 28.
[84] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1758*, 309.
[85] Antony Copley. *Religions in Conflict: Ideology, Cultural Contact and Conversion in Late Colonial India.* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 224-225.
[86] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India:1707:1758,* 308-309.
[87] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India:1707-1758,* 311.

which you may resist if you choose. Constitute you yourselves judges of the contents of the book." [88]

Duff and the other Presbyterian missionaries were elitists, some might even say bigots, in many ways, although not in the area of caste. In 1834, Duff distributed the pupils at his school into classes "irrespective of age or caste." [89] Angry parents removed almost all of the pupils, but Duff held firm to his belief that caste played no role in his educational system. Within a short time, almost every pupil returned to the schools. There was an evangelistic reason for Duff's abhorrence of caste—in his view it struck at the heart of Hinduism. Duff was of the opinion that caste was not merely social or cultural but a sacred institution. [90] Since Duff believed most assuredly in the superiority of Christianity to Hinduism, the destruction of caste served a useful iconoclastic purpose. However, his equation of caste with religion was also a novel and perceptive way of looking at Hinduism, a way that affected subsequent missionary efforts and even the questioning of caste that exists in India today. [91]

Up until about the mid nineteenth century, missionary work by Anglicans in India had been limited to financial support of the Lutheran mission in south India and whatever Anglican chaplains of an evangelical bent had attempted in terms of proselytization. The Anglicans became a much more active mission with the advent of the evangelical revival

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[88] Quoted in Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1758*, 309. Both Duff's and Roy's approach to an acceptance of this form of 'educational proselytization' does raise some concerns. Teachers are always in a position of some authority, and, therefore exercise influence of some form or another whether they want to or not. The influence and authority of teachers on students is especially true in the traditional education system in India. Neither Duff nor Roy observe this possibility—given the context of teacher and student in India, could this 'enlightened persuasion' be seen as irresistible compulsion?
[89] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, 32.
[90] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, 32.
[91] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, 32-33.

in the Church of England. [92] For the sake of brevity, I will look at Anglican missionary expansion in one area, the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, under the leadership of Robert Noble. Noble studied Telugu for two years before opening his school in Masulipatam where, in addition to teaching the New Testament he taught the *Bhagavad Gita* as well.[93] It took four years before a student even expressed an interest in converting, and when he did so, his relatives sent him away. In a situation resembling that at Duff's schools, most of the other students were also removed from the school, though they soon returned. No one in Masulipatam was converted until 1852, five years after the initial controversy, when two boys requested baptism.[94] The families of the boys tried to prevent the conversion, even going so far as appealing to the nearest British senior official, who was unable to help them. Ostracized from their families, the converts came to live with Noble.[95]

In many ways, the missionary experiences of Alexander Duff and Robert Noble are very similar. The only way in which they are truly different is in their attitude towards caste. Noble, unlike most Anglicans and certainly unlike the Presbyterians, tended to allow only Brahmins and other high caste boys into his college. In addition he believed in the 'downward percolation' theory of proselytzation, wherein Christianity would filter downwards from the Brahmins to the lower castes.[96] Noble's attitudes towards caste aside, he was a typical example of the Anglican missionary—energetic and devoted to conversion by education. Though there were never many converts from the school,

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[92] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1758*, 255.
[93] Neill, *A History of Christianity in Indi: 1707-1758,* 323.
[94] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1758,* 324.
[95] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India 1707-1758:,* 324-325.
[96] Oddie, G.A. "Christian Conversion among Non-Brahmans in Andhra Pradesh, with Special Reference to the Anglican Missions and the Dornakal Diocese, c. 1900-1936" in G.A. Oddie, ed. *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times* (London: Curzon Press, 1977), 92.

Noble remained in India for twenty-four straight years without ever returning to England.[97]

Protestant missions in India, from the beginning, were based on three important factors. First, missionaries must learn the language of those they are teaching and translate the Bible and other religious texts into that language. Second, the way to attract and maintain converts is education. Third, caste is unacceptable and antithetical to the Christian ethic. The four examples presented above provide ample proof of these uniquely Protestant missionary concerns. The nature of the missions in India changed, however, with the advent of the mass conversions to Christianity in the late nineteenth century.

The Mass Conversions of the Nineteenth Century

Mass conversions were the conversions of large family, caste or village groups to Christianity.[98] The negative attitude of the Hindu nationalists towards mass conversion is not surprising considering that this phenomenon was most prevalent during the late nineteenth century, the same era that saw the origins of both the Indian and the Hindu nationalist movements. The mass movements were especially prevalent amongst the lower castes in South India with the majority joining Protestant religious groups.

Mass conversions can be seen, to a large degree, as a result of the Protestant abhorrence for the caste system.[99] This is rather ironic considering the Protestant's

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[97] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1758*, 325.

[98] Bugge, Henriette. "The French Mission and the Mass Movements" in *Religious Conversion Movements in South Asia: Communities and Change, 1800-1900.* ed. G.A. Oddie. (London: Curzon Press, 1997), 97. Mass conversion movements were not limited to Christianity. Groups were also known to join the Sikhs, the Arya Samaj and the Buddhists—in essence, any group which might be less restrictive and more open in terms of social freedom and advancement.

[99] Forrester, D.B. "The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity, 1860-1960" in G.A. Oddie, ed. *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in Medieval and Modern Times*, 37-38. See also "The French Mission and the Mass Movements," 98.

opposition, in principle, to group conversions and their early reluctance to sanction it. The Protestant missions, in general, saw caste as violating the essential egalitarianism of the Christian religion. As such, and unlike the Roman Catholics, Protestant missionaries emphasized the conversion of the individual rather than the adaptation of Christianity to existing Indian social systems.[100] Why, then, was there this movement towards Protestant Christianity?

As was noted above, the mass conversions to Protestant Christianity were mainly from the lower castes, in particular from untouchable castes. D.B. Forrester argues that the mass movements originated in the lower castes' dissatisfaction with their placement in the traditional caste hierarchy. In addition, the Western influence of British rule and the Protestant missions had eroded certain social ties in the villages and introduced the possibility of moving beyond these social constraints.[101] As the Protestant missions had been the most vehement opponents of the caste system, and also provided more in the way of social and material uplift than the Catholic missions, they became the outlets for the low-caste desire for social improvement.[102] The numerical strength of these mass conversions to Christianity raised the hope amongst the missionaries that higher caste groups would join the migration towards Christianity but this upward movement never took place.[103]

Issues with Respect to Conversion

It was with the mass conversions of the late nineteenth century that Hinduism, or at least those who claimed to speak for Hinduism, became active in combating what they

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[100] Forrester, "The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity,"40.
[101] Forrester, "The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity," 41-42.
[102] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity,* 72-73.
[103] Forrester, "The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity," 48.

interpreted as the evils of proselytization and conversion.[104] Conversion was seen to be

eroding "the base" of Hinduism by converting the lower castes, a prospect made

especially frightening by both the numerical and economic ramifications of whole

families, castes, and villages converting to Christianity. This erosion demanded a

response and this response came in the form of "reform" movements. The reform

movements were institutions created by Hindus who sought to reshape and reform Indian

religious and social structures from within. These movements came into existence during

the nineteenth century and in the latter part of that century, which was also the era of

mass conversions, the movements became politicized.[105] When the reform movements

became politicized, that is, when they became movements associated as closely with the

nation of India as with religion, conversion became an even stronger negative issue. The

reformers, initially content with a reformed Hinduism as a solution to India's social

problems, began to see conversion to Christianity, the religion of the colonial rulers, as an

assault on their vision of Indian culture. Conversion's assault on the reform movements'

views of Indian culture demanded a Hindu response.

The movement most actively involved in opposing conversion to Christianity was the

Arya Samaj.[106] The Arya Samaj, founded in 1875 by Dayananda Saraswati, sought,

amongst other activities, to reconvert Hindus lost to Christianity (and other faiths) by a

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[104] It must be noted that these Hindu responses were not confined to those who converted to Christianity but were aimed at those who converted to Islam and Sikhism as well. See Forrester, "The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity," 49.

[105] Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement*, 60-61.

[106] John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 39. Responses to mass conversion were not limited to the Arya Samaj. Other reformers and nationalists also responded to both mass conversions and conversions in general, most notably Gandhi. As this thesis also contains a chapter on the rise of Hindu nationalism, the reader is referred to Chapter Two for further information on Hindu reform movements.

process of reconversion known as *shuddhi*. [107] The Samaj was frightened by information gleaned from the many colonial censuses published by the British government. The demographic information gleaned from these censuses, in particular the censuses of 1901 and 1911, showed a decreasing Hindu population in India and an increasing Christian population. This declining populational proportion of Hindus, combined with the mass conversions of the preceeding decades created a considerable demographic fear among Hindus, in particular the Arya Samaj.[108] Much of the Samaj's *shuddhi* activity focused on the lower castes, which, of course comprised the majority of the mass conversions to Christianity. However, both the Arya Samaj and reconversion through *shuddhi* only became an effective alternative to movement of the lower castes to Christianity and other faiths when it began to promote a more egalitarian view towards inter-caste relationships.[109] When the Samaj moved in this direction, it increased in number both through s*huddhi* and the lower caste individuals who joined the movement.

The example of the Arya Samaj within the context of mass conversion (or even conversion in general) clearly demonstrates that the mass conversions of the late nineteenth century were directly linked to caste and the desire for the lower castes to improve their social status and increase their own sense of self-respect.[110] Hindu reform movements which sought to stem the flow of converts to Christianity and other faiths, or to provide a viable alternative to conversion were successful only when they provided the same opportunity for social improvement and caste equality as Christianity was able to

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[107] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, 81. See also "Reconversion to Hinduism, the Shuddhi of the Arya Samaj" by J.T.F. Jordens in G.A. Oddie, ed. *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times,* 145-161 for more extensive information on the Arya Samaj and the practice of *shuddhi*.

[108] Chetan Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), 21.

[109] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, 81-82.

[110] Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*, 39.

provide. The Hindu reform groups were unable to stem the flow of converts from the lower castes to Christianity as quickly as they desired and the large number of converts created a sense of fear which, eventually, most reform and even nationalist groups were forced to address. This fear surrounding numbers exists even today amongst Hindu nationalists.[111] The question of conversion had to be addressed and so it was by almost every reform and nationalist group.

One of the most important Hindu analyses of conversion was offered by M.K Gandhi. Considering the influence of Gandhi on both the Indian nationalist movement, and the credence his views are given even in contemporary Hindu nationalist rhetoric, it is instructive to examine Gandhi's response to conversion, missionaries and Christianity. Moreover, the example of Gandhi also demonstrates the antipathy towards conversion in India from otherwise tolerant people, antipathy which continues even today.

Interestingly, Gandhi liked Christianity. Or more, appropriately, Gandhi liked the Christianity espoused in the Gospels and in the life of Christ. This enjoyment of and respect for Christ and biblical Christianity contrasted quite significantly with his dislike for what might be termed "Christian culture" and especially missionaries and their attempts to convert others.[112] The following quotation demonstrates Gandhi's opposition, and also, that which he associates with conversion.

> If instead of confining themselves purely to humanitarian work such as education, medical services to the poor and the like, they would use these activities of theirs for the purpose of proselytising, I would certainly like them to withdraw. *Every nation considers its own faith to be as good as that of any other.* Certainly the

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[111] For example, see Arun Shourie *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas* (New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1994), x, 37-40.
[112] Chatterjee, Margaret. *Gandhi's Religious Thought* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1983), 41.

great faiths held by the people of India are adequate for her people. India stands in no need of conversion from one faith to another. [113]

Several important features of Gandhi's view of Christianity and the missionary enterprise are found in this quotation. First, religion and nation are intertwined. Gandhi states "Every nation considers its own faith to be as good as that of any other." By associating conversion with nation, Gandhi is able to make conversion an issue of imperialism and, consequently, to cast both the rulers (The British) and their religion (Christianity) in a negative light. Further, Gandhi is able to associate the nationalist movement (which is good for Indians) with Indian religion, which despite the presence of Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity on the subcontinent, is indisputably Hindu for Gandhi.

The second important feature of this quotation is the reason for which Gandhi would ask foreign missionaries to withdraw from India, that of using humanitarian activities and the material uplift of the poor for the purpose of proselytization. Gandhi focuses on this particular aspect of missionary work in his critique because a majority of the conversions at the time were coming from the untouchable castes. Gandhi viewed untouchability as a religious issue.[114] Perhaps more appropriately, Gandhi viewed untouchability as a Hindu issue, that is, an issue that could be addressed through a reformation of Hindu social practice. In Gandhi's view, high-caste Hindus were responsible for the elimination of untouchability: it was up to them to repent of the sin of untouchability, change their attitudes towards untouchables and to atone for their sin

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[113] John C. Webster. "Gandhi and the Christians: Dialogue in the Nationalist Era" in *Hindu Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters* ed. Harold Coward (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 88. (Emphasis added).
[114] Gauri Viswanathan. *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1998), 238.

through service to the untouchables.[115] Understandably, the untouchables continued to

convert to other faiths in order to improve their social status.[116]

Conversion to another religion to evade untouchability was unacceptable to

Gandhi and he severely criticized Christian efforts to convert untouchables. Interestingly,

Gandhi felt that the untouchables were "incapable of understanding the Christian

message or of evaluating it in relation to the alternatives." [117] Therefore, the untouchables

could only have been converting to Christianity for either an elevated social status or for

material gain, rather than for any spiritual reasons. And if missionaries were using such

allurements to gain converts, then they should certainly not be allowed in the country.

It is both fair and accurate to argue that Gandhi viewed missionaries as a

destabilizing and denationalizing influence in India. And while, in his rhetoric, Gandhi

stated that a true conversion was acceptable it is also fair to argue that Gandhi was not

going to readily admit that this happened very often, if at all. Gandhi warned potential

converts of what happens when one converts under false pretenses.

> If a person discards his country, his customs and his old connections and manners when he changes his religion, he becomes all the more unfit to gain a knowledge of God. For a change of religion really means a conversion of the heart. When there is real conversion, the man's heart grows...In my view your object in changing your religion should be to bring about the prosperity of your country. [118]

According to Gandhi, when you convert to another faith without the requisite change of

heart, you are discarding not only your religion but your customs, manners, and old

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[115] Webster, "Gandhi and the Christians," 90.
[116] Webster, "Gandhi and the Christians," 92.
[117] Webster, "Gandhi and the Christians," 93. This attitude is maintained in today's Hindu nationalist rhetoric and in government legislation. For example, in states with anti-conversion laws, those convicted of inducing conversion by fraud or allurement face a longer prison term and a larger fine for converting tribals and women than they do for converting a 'normal' man. See The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967.
[118] Quoted in Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought,* 48.

connections as well. In essence, you are discarding your culture, as well as being "denationalized."

Conclusion

Gandhi is an excellent figure for introducing Indian nationalist and then Hindu nationalist responses to conversion to Christianity. It is with Gandhi and the other nationalists that conversion became an incendiary political issue in the early twentieth century.[119] Further, the response of Gandhi and other nationalist figures to conversion, especially conversion to Christianity, continues to inform and direct most of the current discussion on the topic by the Hindu Right,[120] minus, of course, Gandhi's tolerance and his qualified acceptance of the right to propagate one's religion in an Independent India.[121] Gandhi's reservations surrounding conversion play a role in the development of an ideology which sees India as Hindu in cultural, national and religious terms, an ideology which sees conversion as a grave threat to this Hindu vision of India. It is to this discussion and its ramifications that the remaining chapters of this thesis will be directed.

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[119] Forrester, "The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity,"51.
[120] See for example, Arun Shourie. *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas.* (New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1994).
[121] Shourie, *Missionaries in India,* 37-40.

Chapter Two: The Sangh Parivar and *Hindutva*

Introduction

As outlined in the introduction, this thesis requires background information from two interrelated phenomena in Indian history, the history of Christianity and conversion in India and the history of Hindu nationalism, in particular the history of what may be termed *"Hindutva." Hindutva* refers to the communal groups, both political and religious who draw upon the ideology of *Hindutva* or "Hinduness" as outlined by V.D. Savarkar in his book *Hindutva—Who is a Hindu?* which was first published in 1923.[122] *Hindutva* also refers to the ideology and rhetoric of these organizations. Though it was an individual, Savarkar, who first espoused the ideology of *Hindutva*, several distinct yet interrelated organizations, known collectively as the Sangh Parivar, have taken the ideology of *Hindutva* and transformed it into a powerful and effective political tool. These organizations are the Hindu Mahasabha (of which Savarkar was president for a time), the Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). This chapter will begin with an examination of Sarvarkar's organization, the Hindu Mahasabha and then provide a brief history and analysis of the RSS and the VHP. To conclude, this chapter will discuss the ideology of *Hindutva* as espoused by Savarkar, an ideology which continues to inform the rhetoric and political direction of the Sangh Parivar.

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[122] V.D Savarkar. *Hindutva—Who is a Hindu?* Sixth Edition. (Bombay: S.S. Savarkar, 1989).

The Hindu Mahasabha

The Hindu Mahasabha is important, in terms of the development of a politicized

Hindu nationalism for two reasons. Firstly, the Mahasabha was the first modern Hindu

communal organization. That is, it was the first major Hindu organization to base itself

on perceived Hindu political needs and the first organization to try and defend the Hindu

(as opposed to the Indian) from various threats, both domestic and foreign. Secondly, the

Mahasabha attempted to make the ideology of V.D Savarkar a reality. In fact, it has been

argued that Savarkar's *Hindutva* became official policy of the Mahasabha "arguably

before Savarkar assumed the presidency" of the Mahasabha in 1937.[123]

The Mahasabha was formed in the early twentieth century in response to several

historical phenomena. The early twentieth century saw a drastic rise in Hindu-Muslim

violence[124] and also saw the Muslim community granted separate electorates (seats

reserved for Muslims only) in the Constitutional reforms of 1909. [125] Some Hindu leaders

of the time saw the granting of separate electorates as a conspiracy-cum-alliance between

the British colonial government and the Muslims. Other Hindu leaders felt that the Indian

National Congress was also "pandering" to Muslim needs at the expense of the majority

Hindu community.[126] As a result, certain politically inclined Hindus drifted away from

the secular-minded Congress and towards communal organizations which would

represent specifically Hindu interests.

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[123] Ronald Neufeldt, "The Hindu Mahasabha and Gandhi" in *Indian Critiques of Gandhi* ed. Harold Coward. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 132.

[124] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave, 44.*

[125] Kenneth W. Jones. "Politicized Hinduism: The Ideology and Program of the Hindu Mahasabha" in *Religion in Modern* India ed. Robert D. Baird (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981),450. The most complete analysis of the origin and program of the Hindu Mahasabha is provided by Kenneth W. Jones in this article (447-480). The historical overview of the Mahasabha will rely heavily on this article and on Lise McKean's treatment of the rise of the Mahasabha in *Divine Enterprise* pp. 71-96.

[126] Jones, "Politicized Hinduism," 449-450.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were also a time when the missionary religions, Islam and in particular Christianity, were moderately successful in terms of converts, especially converts from the lower strata of Hindu society. It is well known that the departure of untouchables and other low-caste groups to other religions was a matter of great concern to politically conscious Hindus during this period, as was the question of untouchability in general. Within the majority community the query of how to deal with untouchablity had yet to be effectively answered. Untouchability, then, created fear on two fronts for Hindu organizations: the unwillingness to grant untouchables equal status and the (rather paradoxical) fear of losing these people, whom they would not socially elevate, to Islam and Christianity through conversion.[127] Not surprisingly, these conversions drastically heightened the Hindu community's sense of demographic fear, the fear that the Hindu community would lose its majority status.

Taken together, all of these phenomena led to the movement of politically motivated Hindus towards the creation of and membership in Hindu communal organizations. As Thomas Blom Hansen has remarked in reference to the historical antecedents of the Mahasabha and other Hindu communal groups of the early twentieth century "violence, the manufacturing of demonic others, and fear of the illiterate masses were always crucial to the political imaginaries and the political strategies of the middle class in India."[128] As Savarkar himself stated, "nothing makes Self conscious of itself so much as a conflict with non-self."[129] I would argue that this quotation of Hansen's not only correctly identifies reasons, both social and historical, for the creation of the

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[127] Jones, "Politicized Hinduism 448.
[128] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 44.
[129] Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 42.

Mahasabha, but retains its accuracy even in reference to the Hindu communal groups in operation in modern-day India.

The Hindu Mahasabha itself was formed in 1915 at the first All-India Hindu Conference held during the time of the Kumbh Mela in Hardwar[130] and was formed in response to Hindu concerns regarding the historical and social phenomena discussed above. The Mahasabha was organized with the desire of achieving the following six goals:

a) to promote greater union and solidarity amongst all sections of the Hindu community and to unite them as closely as parts of one organic whole;

b) to promote education among members of the Hindu community;

c) to ameliorate and improve the condition of all classes of the Hindu community;

d) to protect and promote Hindu interests whenever and wherever it may be necessary;

e) to promote good feelings between the Hindus and other communities in India and to act in a friendly way with them, and in loyal cooperation with the Government;

f) generally to take steps for promoting religious, moral, educational, social and political interests of the community;

It is impossible to see the seed of the Mahasabha's shift towards its later anti-Congress and militant Hindu orientation[131] in the goals for the Mahasabha set at the Hardwar Conference in 1915. It was the further Hindu-Muslim agitations of the late teens and early twenties that would lead to the more militant outlook and program of the Hindu Mahasabha.

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[130] Jones, "Politicized Hinduism," 451.
[131] Neufeldt, "The Hindu Mahasabha and Gandhi," 133.

The earliest of the primary historical reasons for the shift of the Mahasabha towards a more militant Hindu outlook took place in Malabar between the years 1921-1923. It was during this period that the Moplah uprising took place. Reports reached the Mahasabha heartland in North India that the Muslims of Malabar were forcing Hindus to convert to Islam and that they were subjecting the Hindus to looting, rape, kidnapping and murder, and that the Muslims were also desecrating Hindu temples and razing Hindu homes.[132] Pandit Malaviya, who was then president of the Mahasabha, accused Hindus of "failing to defend themselves" and called for the reclamation of Hindus forcibly converted to Islam through an extensive *shuddhi* campaign. Malaviya also strengthened the Mahasabha's more communal notions by identifying the need for Hindus to ensure their own self-preservation through unity and organization. [133]

The twin ideas of *shuddhi* and unity became important pillars of Mahasabha ideology after the Moplah uprising. Following the Mahasabha conference of 1923 at Benares, religious competition reached something of a fever pitch in India, with conversions, reconversions, *shuddhi* campaigns and periodic outbreaks of violence. Further, demographic fear was invoked and confirmed within the Mahasabha when the orthodox Hindu leader, Jagatguru Shankaracharya told the Mahasabha at its meeting in Nasik in 1924 that if Hindus did not fully engage in the holy work of *shuddhi*, that "within ten decades you shall find no Hindu on the surface of the earth."[134]

Between 1924 and 1937 the Mahasabha was led by a succession of leaders including Lala Rajpat Rai, B.S. Moonje and Bhai Paramanand. During this time two

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[132] Jones, "Politicized Hinduism," 454.
[133] Jones, "Politicized Hinduism," 454-5.
[134] Quoted in Jones, "Politicized Hinduism," 456.

issues were at the forefront of importance for the Mahasabha: demographic fear and the issue of whether or not the Mahasabha should become an active political party and have candidates in political elections. [135] The issue of running in elections was a matter of significant contention between Rai and Paramanand. Eventually, they agreed on running only in areas where what they thought were Hindu interests were endangered.[136] This compromise reflected the turmoil within the Mahasabha with regards to both its direction and its level of militancy. Rai placed his political hope in the Congress, while Paramanand saw Congress policy as futile when dealing with attacks on Hindu interests. The compromise reached in actuality moved the Mahasabha further towards militancy by identifying the key issues supposedly affecting Hindu interests and by polarizing the different voices within the organization.

Paramanand, when he assumed the presidency of the Mahasabha in 1933, sought to further move the organization towards both militancy and political power. Paramanand set out in the exact opposite direction of Lajpat Rai seeking to make the Mahasabha an overt and powerful political machine, and increasing both the scope and importance of the *shuddhi* campaigns. In 1936, the Mahasabha stated that "they [non-Hindus] must be made to understand that Hindusthan is primarily for the Hindus and the Hindus live for the preservation and development of the Aryan culture and the Hindu dharma which are bound to prove beneficial to all humanity."[137] With the reduction of "Hindusthan" to a land of one culture, religion and language, Paramanand had effectively laid the

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[135]Neufeldt, "The Hindu Mahasabha and Gandhi,"133 and Kenneth W. Jones, "Politicized Hinduism," 458-459.
[136] Jones, "Politicized Hinduism," 458.
[137] Quoted in Jones, "Politicized Hinduism," 464.

groundwork for Savarkar's ideology of *Hindutva* to grab hold of the minds of the members of the Mahasabha and to make *Hindutva* the organization's *raison d'etre*.

V.D Savarkar assumed the presidency of the Mahasabha in 1937 when the ban preventing him from engaging in political activities was lifted and he was free to return to public life. As president, Savarkar immediately set about making his ideology of *Hindutva* the official policy of the Mahasabha.

At the base of Savarkar's *Hindutva* ideology is the desire for a unified Hindu *rashtra* or nation and this desire also became the prime directive of the Hindu Mahasabha. Further, the Hindu nation could only be achieved through the "re-militarization" of the Mahasabha, and eventually all of India, in the spirit of the proud martial tradition of the Aryan Golden Age.[138] Therefore, Savarkar set out to militarize the Mahasabha in two ways. First, the Mahasabha openly supported the British war effort and encouraged Mahasabha members to join the British army. [139] By joining the army, Hindus could acquire the military skills and training necessary for a thorough re-militarization of "all Hindudom." Second, the Mahasabha created its own quasi-military youth core, similar to the cadres of the RSS, called the Ram Sena, where Hindu youth would also acquire necessary military skills.[140] Militarization was of serious importance to Savarkar and the Mahasabha, but Savarkar had the foresight to realize that the militarization of the Hindus was something that would only happen over time. Political

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[138] Neufeldt, "The Hindu Mahasabha and Gandhi," 144.. Savarkar found the martial spirit of the Aryan golden age in texts such as the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Bhavishya Purana*.. See *Hindutva*, 36.
[139] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 94.
[140] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 94.

mobilization, on the other hand, was something that could be effective for the Mahasabha right away, so it was in that direction that Savarkar moved his organization.

By supporting Britain in the war effort, the Mahasabha gained serious political capital with the British government, capital denied to political organizations which opposed the war, such as the Congress. [141] The Mahasabha undoubtedly hoped that it would play an important role, not only in securing India's independence but in drafting any constitution, preferably in a decidedly pro-Hindu fashion. Unfortunately for the Mahasabha, it was unable to capitalize on the gains made by supporting the war effort; Britain had little interest in the ideology and direction of the Mahasabha.[142]

With failing health, Savarkar semi-retired from the Mahasabha in the 1941 at which time Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerji became acting president of the Mahasabha, a post which would become officially his in 1944. Under Mookerji, communal interests continued to be of utmost concern. Demographic fear reared its head again in 1940 as Hindus were set to fill out their census papers. Mookerji instructed Mahasabha members on how they were to fill out their forms and reiterated the fears that they were a people in decline. The demographic fear of the Mahasabha revealed not only the organization's inherent paranoia, but also the fears surrounding conversion and the link between the population of various religious groups and real political power. The Mahasabha also used this period during the Second World War to reiterate time and time again that the Congress did not speak for Hindus and that the Congress was committed to the

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[141] Jones, "Politicized Hinduism," 469-470.
[142] Jones, "Politicized Hinduism," 469-470.

appeasement of Muslims and other minorities.[143] In an attempt to give what it perceived to be a Hindu voice to Indian politics, the Mahasabha went into various elections during the war period on a platform of direct opposition to whatever the Congress was standing for. The Mahasabha did very poorly in almost all cases.[144]

Communal tensions reached a head in 1947 with the granting of independence to India and its partition into India and Pakistan. The Mahasabha (and other Hindu nationalist groups) became very suspicious of any Muslims remaining in India, staking the claim that Indian Muslims were "non-national."[145] It was also in 1947 that Dharmveer Bhopatkar became president of the Mahasabha. Bhopatkar is reported to have wanted to "reorient the policy of the Mahasabha so as to make it more effective as an organ of progressive opinion."[146] The Mahasabha was unable to move in any direction, however, as it received a great deal of the blame when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated in early 1948. Further, the Mahasabha suspended all of its political work soon after the assassination as it tried to sustain itself in the period of blame following Gandhi's death. The Mahasabha did, however, return to political work late in 1948, a decision which led its then vice-president (and former President) Dr. Mookerji to resign from the Mahasabha, and eventually to create his own political party, the Jana Sangh.[147]

The Mahasabha took part in three elections between Independence and 1962, consistently losing support over the years. In 1962 the Indian government banned "communal" political parties for a period of time and the Mahasabha faded from the

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[143] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths,* 101-102.
[144] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths,* 109.
[145] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths,* 109.
[146] Quoted in Jones, "Politicized Hinduism," 266.
[147] Jones, "Politicized Hinduism," 267.

Indian political scene. Though it has yet to resurface as a political player in today's changed (and decidedly communal) political climate, the Mahasabha remains as a functioning organization, and continues to express its *Hindutva*-based ideology of Hindu nationalism, though it does so on a much smaller scale than the other two major *Hindutva*-based communal organizations under discussion, the RSS and the VHP.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)[148] is, in my view, the primary organization of the Sangh Parivar. It is from the soil of RSS organization and ideology that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have come into existence and from which they have assumed much, if not all, of their power and influence. In fact, one could certainly make the argument that the RSS, ostensibly a "cultural" organization[149] which claims to be resolutely apolitical, grew these two limbs (the VHP and BJP) so as to move safely into the two areas of even greater import: religion and politics. From its beginnings, the RSS has (at least outwardly) attempted to place itself outside of politics.[150] However, the RSS has, over the years of its existence, come to realize that it is through religion and politics that it can achieve its ideological goals. The RSS has always championed itself as a paragon of organization and discipline—an assertion that few can dispute—and it was through organizing (and now directing) the

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[148] The RSS has been studied in great detail over the years. The finest accounts of the history, development and ideology can be found in Christoffe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement,* Tapan Basu et al, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags,* Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* and John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India.* The landmark study of the RSS is probably *The Brotherhood in Saffron* by Walter Andersen and Shirdhar D. Damle—this work provides excellent detail of the RSS and, especially, its early development. It does not, however, contain the critical rigor and analysis of the aforementioned works.
[149] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags,* 47-48.
[150] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* 92-94.

Sangh Parivar that the RSS is starting to see the realization of its ideological goals as a definite possibility

The RSS, like the Hindu Mahasabha was, at least initially, a Maharashtrian phenomenon. The RSS was established in Nagpur in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar.[151] Hedgewar had come into the Hindu nationalist movement via his association with M.R. Moonje. Moonje had sent the young Hedgewar to Calcutta to study medicine in 1910—and, additionally, to train and work with the terrorist societies of Bengal. [152] Hedgewar returned to Nagpur in 1915, where he committed himself to political activism full-time, working with both the Congress and with the Kranti Dal (Party of the Revolution), an anti-British party. According to Christoffe Jaffrelot, two main issues led Hedgewar to create the RSS. The first issue was that of foreign domination. How could a few British administrators exercise dominion over an entire subcontinent? The second was the threat of Muslims, a fear inspired by the Nagpur riots of 1923. Hedgewar wanted to address these issues but there was, to his mind, no forum, and no organization in which he could do so. The parties which did exist, such as the Congress and the Kranti Dal had neither the discipline nor the methods to effectively counter the threats posed to Hindus from both without (the British) and within (the Muslims).[153] Consequently, the RSS was formed in 1925 to provide both the discipline and the methods to liberate and protect the Hindus.

The Nagpur riots of 1923 also led Hedgewar to another conclusion that was to become of significant importance in his organization, and eventually for all of the Sangh Parivar. Analysis of the Nagpur riots showed "the dependence of literate upper caste

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[151] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 33.
[152] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 33.
[153] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 33-34.

Hindus on the lower castes in times of actual combat."[154] This acknowledgement revealed the need for the upper-caste Hindus to learn combat skills for themselves. The RSS would provide such martial training to its *upper caste* members. Like the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS was a product of the Maharashtrian middle class, in particular the Brahmin and Bania castes. And, like the Mahasabha, the RSS sought to organize Hindu society, and to do so in a top-down manner. The perceived need of the upper castes to defend themselves without the help of the lower castes demonstrates a fear as real, if not as overt, as their fear of Muslims.[155] It was the upper-caste Hindus who must defend Hindu society through organization and it was they who needed to control every aspect, including the martial, of how this was to be done.

Hedgewar envisioned the RSS as an organization of patriotic men who would provide the leadership required for the strong and proper organization of Hindu society.[156] To accomplish this aim of organizing the Hindu community, the RSS restructured the traditional *akhara* institution. The *akhara* was the place where the young men of a given community would meet together and work out, mainly by wrestling and body building. The *akhara*, traditionally, had a spiritual dimension as well, as it was either attached to a temple or included one, the temple normally being dedicated to the monkey-God Hanuman, who was known for his strength in the *Ramayana*. A guru, who trained the boys in physical as well as mental and spiritual matters and who also maintained discipline in the akhara, normally supervised the *akhara*. The members of the *akhara* tended to look at it as their community, and all became strongly attached to it.[157]

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[154] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 16.
[155] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 17.
[156] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 93.
[157] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 35.

The concept of the *akhara* was appropriated and renamed by the RSS to become the *shakha* (local branch) which, to this day, remains the basic unit of the RSS. In addition, these *shakhas* became "ideological *akharas*" [158] wherein teenage boys[159] were brought together once a day for an hour, not only for physical training and exercise, but also for ideological inculcation and instruction in proper values and behavior.[160] Through these *shakhas*, Hedgewar sought to create patriotic young men, loyal to both the RSS and his vision of the Hindu nation.[161] Furthermore, Hedgewar's *shakhas* "kshatriyaized" the RSS movement, teaching young Brahmin boys the martial skills necessary to both protect and effect change in the Hindu rashtra. This "kshatriyaization" served two ends; first it organized and martialized the upper castes, placing all aspects of Hindu mobilization and protection in their hands, and marginalized the need for the lower castes, even in street riots. Second, these boys, trained in both martial skills and Hedgewar's nationalist ideology were anathema to Gandhi's ideals of non-violence and devotional Hinduism.[162]

Recruitment to the RSS, in its beginnings, came about through word of mouth. *Shakha* members would bring their friends, and those who wished to join would often need to bring a group of their peers with them before they were allowed to join the *shakha.* [163] This recruitment style was important to the RSS for two reasons. First, it ensured that those joining the *shakha* were members of a particular social stratum, in particular the higher castes. Boys would recruit from amongst their peers and thus retain

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[158]Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 35.

[159]The RSS focus on teenage boys should not come as a surprise. There is a precedent here in several Indian nationalist and reform movements, including several of the Revolutionary Movements (such as Abhinav Bharat) and, in the religious arena, the Ramakrishna Mission. Teenage boys were obviously chosen for both their physical fitness and their receptivity to ideological and religious idealism. See Tapan Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags,* 17.

[160] Anderson and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron,* 93.

[161] Anderson and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron,* 93.

[162] Anderson and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron,* 93.

[163] Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India,* 185-186.

the social homogeneity of the *shakha*. Second, the fact that the boys were not only caste-mates but also friends could not help but sustain and reinforce the idea of community that Hedgewar was trying to put forth. This "simple model" of recruitment was very effective in the late 1920s and the 1930s as the RSS spread, first throughout Maharashtra and then into North India.[164]

Another aspect of the RSS which needs to be mentioned is its uniform. This uniform was introduced by Hedgewar in 1926 and consisted of khaki shorts and shirt (this would later be changed to a white shirt) and black forage caps.[165] The uniform is important for a number of reasons. First, it reinforces the paramilitary nature of the RSS. The uniform gives the martial training an outward expression of purpose. Moreover, the uniform provides a unity of purpose for all members of the RSS. The uniform unites this paramilitary group in defense of their ideals, in particular the defense of Hindu *rashtra*. On a more observational note, the uniform also brings to mind a vein of fascism running through the RSS,[166] which will be discussed in more detail below.

In 1929, KB Hedgewar instituted the office of *sarsangchalak* or Supreme Leader for the RSS, an office he held until 1940.[167] This institution was probably more important for ideological reasons than it was in terms of organization. As *sarsangchalak*, Hedgewar was being elevated to the status of a guru. As the *shakhas* were being viewed as ideological *akharas*, it was only natural that a guru should be at their head. But, rather than viewing himself as the guru, Hedgewar insisted that the true guru was the saffron

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[164] Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India,* 186.
[165] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 50-51.
[166] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 50.
[167] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths,* 120.

flag of Shivaji, the *Bhagwa Dwaj*[168] Hedgewar had been demanding obeisance to the

saffron flag for several years before instituting the office of *sarsangchalak*, so

establishing a distinction between gurus, as it were, was not exceptionally difficult.

The saffron flag as guru was the first instance (and the most powerful

foreshadowing) of what was to arguably become the Sangh Parivar's greatest strength:

the use of symbols to effect ideological change. This method of ideological inculcation

has been used most effectively in recent years by the VHP.[169] In ideological terms,

obeisance to the saffron flag can be seen as obeisance to the RSS' ideals of Hindu

nationalism and goal of Hindu *rashtra*. The guru of the RSS and its long term goals had

become one and the same, extending not only a religious dimension but a religious fervor

and devotion to RSS activities. It was, in short, a brilliant call to arms in the name of

Hindu *rashtra*.

Symbolism in the RSS goes beyond the saffron flag, also including the

celebration of six specific festivals during the calendar year, many of which (not

surprisingly) coincide with important Hindu holidays.[170] According to T.B. Hansen, these

celebrations, "serve to strengthen the inner bonds of the organization to portray the RSS

and its leaders as the greatest men India ever produced, the leading nationalists in the

country, and so forth."[171] The explication of just one of these celebrations will

demonstrate the power with which the RSS (and the Sangh Parivar) in general can

manipulate and effectively use common Hindu symbols.

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[168] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 39.
[169] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags,* 62.
[170] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 39.
[171] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* 108.

The *Raksha Bandhan* is a north Indian festival wherein sisters tie ribbons around the wrists of their brothers to remind them of their role as protectors. In the RSS version of this ritual, the leader of the local *shakha* ties a ribbon around the flagpole upon which the saffron flag is flying. After this, the members of the *shakha* (known as *swayamsevaks*) put ribbons around each others' wrists to demonstrate their brotherhood.[172] The symbolism of this act is easily apparent. It is the occupation of the entire RSS to protect its guru, the ideal of Hindu *rashtra*. This protection of the Hindu *rashtra*, in turn, will ensure that Hindustan and its people will be protected as well. What are they protecting the guru from? The answer to this question comes in the ideology established by the second RSS *sarsangchalak*, M.S. Golwalkar.

Golwalkar succeeded Hedgewar as *sarsangchalak* in 1940, but in ideological terms his greatest contribution to the RSS was his treatise, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, which was published two years before he came to power, in 1938.[173] Golwalkar's treatise is quite clearly reliant upon Savarkar's *Hindutva* in its ideological position and, using that as its focal point, goes on to outline what was to become the ideological program of the RSS. Golwalkar entitled his ideological program "cultural nationalism," not only to define his agenda but also to differentiate his nationalism from the "geographical nationalism" then in vogue (via the Congress and other organizations) in India. In his dismissal of "geographic nationalism" Golwalkar brought cultural or Hindu nationalism to its totalitarian apex.[174]

The problem with geographic nationalism, according to Golwalkar, was its failure to recognize that it was a "composite nationalism," which was bound to fail. It was only

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[172] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 39.
[173] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags,* 25.
[174] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags,,* 26.

through a cultural nationalism that India could expect to flourish. What is implicit in the dismissal of geographic/composite nationalism is that a unitary culture (read Hindu culture) is necessary for national success. The nation had to be a Hindu *rashtra*, the other entities (Christians, Muslims, etc) could not expect to be part of this process toward nationhood unless they stepped in line with Golwalkar's view of Hindu culture.[175] This view of culture, and the position it awards to minorities, has never really changed in either the ideology or rhetoric of the Hindu Right.

Golwalkar, like Savarkar, drew on European, in particular German sources for the ideology he set forth in *We or Our Nationhood Defined*.[176] Golwalkar was especially impressed with Nazism: "German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by purging her country of the Semitic races—the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here."[177] It can certainly be argued that Golwalkar's appreciation for and reference to Nazism in this context, reflected the xenophobic nature of his nationalist ideology. In addition, Golwalkar made concrete reference to what awaited non-Hindus who failed to accept and conform to his rendition of what Hindu culture entailed. These "foreigners," "fall out of the pale of National Life." "They deserve no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen's rights." [178] The term foreign had come to mean more than the British; it obviously meant the religious minorities in India as well, Muslims and Christians in particular. "They are born in this land no doubt. But are they

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[175] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 26-7. See also Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 52-3.
[176] See Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 53-55 for an extended discussion of Golwalkar's German sources.
[177] Quoted in Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 26.
[178] Quoted in Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 81.

true to its salt? No. Together with the change in their faith, gone are the spirit of love and devotion for the nation."[179] This last quotation is of utmost importance as it demonstrates that religion and culture and nationalism have become conflated for Golwalkar. Conversion (a change of faith) results in denationalization, a religious act which compromises the integrity of Golwalkar's vision of India. There is, arguably, a religious spirit of love and devotion to the nation and Hindu culture of India in Golwalkar's vision of Hindu *rashtra*. Conversion violently attacks this vision of India which includes culture, nationalism and religion as its ultimate foundations.

In the wake of the murder of Gandhi in 1948, Golwalkar had to tone down his xenophobic rhetoric in order to maintain the viability of his organization. The RSS was banned on 4 February 1948 and remained so until 12 July 1949.[180] In the wake of the ban, the RSS laid low, and, on the whole the 1950s were not the most positive time for the organization. Golwalkar, however, rose to the challenge posed by the aftermath of the ban and the new political landscape of an independent and secular India by changing the organization of the RSS through the creation of affiliate members, or, a family.[181] These affiliates would allow the RSS itself to seemingly focus on its *shakha* training and cultural (as opposed to political) objectives and allow the affiliates (at arm's length from the RSS) to move into areas of social concern, religious concern and even electoral politics.[182]

The subsidiary organizations of the RSS are most certainly a family, the ideological sons and daughters of the RSS, and this family relationship, which began in

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[179] Quoted in Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 27-28.
[180] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 31.
[181] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 33.
[182] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 33.

1950s, remains in operation today. Although these subsidiaries have adopted a range of different strategies and used their own devices to garner support amongst the Hindu population, they remain tied to the RSS, which has trained and supported the leaders of the various subsidiaries.[183] The common feature of the RSS family, in organizational terms, is the localized network of full-time RSS organizers, known as *pracharaks*. The local RSS *pracharak* is always consulted before any major decision is made in any of the subsidiary organizations and thus acts as a mediating authority.[184] This relationship between the RSS and its subsidiary organizations assures that the RSS itself will be at the helm of any major decision affecting the family. Consequently, one can say with certainty that not only is the RSS involved in activities beyond its "cultural focus" but that it is also the arbitrating authority, both ideologically, and in terms of action for the entire *Hindutva* family, the Sangh Parivar.

The first subsidiary of the RSS family was its women's organization the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, which is somewhat parallel in structure to the RSS itself.[185] Other subsidiary organizations followed the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, including most notably, the student organization Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarti Parishad.[186] The most important, and powerful, of these organizations, however, was the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) which was founded in 1964 to try to facilitate a closer working relationship between the different Hindu sects and movements.[187] The VHP will be discussed at length in the next section of this chapter.

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[183] Andersen and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 144.
[184] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 97.
[185] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 97.
[186] Andersen and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 117-123.
[187] Andersen and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 133.

Before moving on to a discussion of the VHP, it should be noted that the RSS has had a strong influence on electoral politics in India, especially since the establishment of its affiliated organizations. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh (usually referred to as the Jana Sangh) was created by senior RSS activist K.R. Malkani in 1950, ostensibly to fight the spread of Communism, another arena of profound concern for the RSS.[188] The Jana Sangh was relatively unimportant until after the Indira Gandhi government's State of Emergency in the late 1970s when it emerged as a major political force. The Jana Sangh, whose fundamental ideology was "one nation, one culture, one people" was also the ideological and political progenitor of today's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) probably the most powerful political party in India today.[189]

The Jana Sangh, was led by two long term RSS members, L.K. Advani and Atal Behari Vajpayee. After the Jana Sangh's short lived post-Emergency presence in Central government, the party disbanded only to be reincarnated as the BJP in 1980, once again under the direction of Advani and Vajpayee.[190] The BJP was then and continues to be a Hindu nationalist party, with an overarching *Hindutva* ethos. Political necessity dictates a more liberal stance on the part of the BJP, with a less overt *Hindutva* chauvinism than is seen in the RSS or the VHP. Still, together with its brother organizations the RSS and VHP, the BJP is front and centre in current Hindu nationalism in India, providing not only real political power for the *Hindutva* family but also the prospect of a disintegrating and potentially eradicated secular state.

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[188] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths*, 153.

[189] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths, 153-154*. It should be noted that the BJP was (quite surprisingly) defeated by the Congress in the federal elections of 2004. The BJP does, however, retain significant power as the largest opposition party at the Centre and as the ruling party in several Indian states.

[190] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, 168.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) loosely translates as the "World Hindu Council," and, indeed, it can be said that the VHP is the most worldwide of the three Hindu nationalist organizations mentioned in the introduction, having penetrated deeply into the large (and wealthy) Indian diaspora community. [191] The VHP was established by the second RSS *sarsangchalak,* M.S. Golwalkar in August 1964 at a meeting with delegates representing the many different Hindu communities and traditions.[192] The VHP was to be an organization that represented all Hindus, regardless of *sampraday* (religious community) or caste affiliation. What the VHP has turned out to be, however, is a mediator between the "cultural" organization which is the RSS and the Hindu religious establishment.[193] Moreover, the VHP has "defined" Hinduism (as far as that is even possible) in such a way as to make the religious nationalism of the RSS and other *Hindutva*-inspired forces the accepted form of Hinduism, especially amongst the diaspora community, one of the VHP's main sources of income. Via its simple and powerfully presented definition of modern Hinduism, the VHP has become one of the most powerful religious voices in India, a religious voice with enough power to dictate the direction of not only the every day communal street riot, but state and national politics as well.

The power of the VHP is in its appeal and the VHP derives this appeal by appropriating Hindu symbol and ritual and re-presenting it to the masses in such a way that it corresponds with what the masses want: not only on a religious level but at the socioeconomic level as well.[194] The VHP began this "appeal" to the middle classes soon

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[191] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths,* 183.
[192] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths,* 180.
[193] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* 101.
[194] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags,* 61.

after its formation, and not surprisingly, this appeal also fit in perfectly with the VHP's

desire to provide religious authorities with more of a voice in the political arena. During

the 1960's the RSS (through the VHP) recruited many leading *gurus* and religious leaders

to advocate VHP-style Hinduism. In particular, *gurus* who could be classified as

"modern," whose ideas advocated spirituality (as opposed to ritual) as the way to

religious fulfillment as well as social and material prosperity were recruited to give

credence to the VHP's conception of Hindu religion.[195] These *gurus* were especially

attractive to the middle classes whose religious (and social) leanings coincided with the

religious teachings of these modern religious teachers. In this way, the VHP was able to

establish one half of its primary support-base, the expanding Indian middle-class.

The second half of the VHP's primary support base, I would argue, is the large

and wealthy Indian diaspora community. The VHP's religious doctrine, as simple and

spiritualized as it is, is as attractive to the expatriate community as it is to India's

burgeoning middle class. The diaspora community is removed from the "local religious

and political complexities" of religion in India, making it the ideal audience for VHP

Hinduism, a Hinduism which is not only spiritualized but *nationalized.*[196] A nationalized

Hinduism which the VHP projects all Hindus as sharing becomes not only a religious

outlook that conforms to modern spiritual and temporal needs, but also a powerful bond

to India, in particular India as fatherland.

It is important to specifically discuss what makes the VHP-version of Hinduism

so attractive to the Indian and diaspora middle classes. The VHP both homogenized and

nationalized Hinduism through its definition of what exactly Hinduism is. In terms of

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[195] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* 101-2.
[196] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* 156.

what Hinduism is, the VHP has adopted a "catholic" or "ecumenical" approach to Hinduism. The authors of *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags* note that for the very first time in its history, "an ecumenical order is being imposed on Hinduism." [197] This "ecumenical order" is encapsulated in the VHP's "six point code of conduct" for being a good Hindu.[198] This code includes: regular visits to temples; regular *puja* in the home; basic knowledge of the sacred geography of India; basic knowledge of the mythical epics; loyalty to India; and loyalty to Hindu culture.[199]

Both the nationalization and homogenization of Hinduism can be seen in the "six point code" but, perhaps more important to the homogenization of Hindu religion is the VHP's attitude towards ritual. The VHP has suggested that ritual be "rationalized" by which they mean that most Hindu ritual should be scrapped with the exception of ritual in three key areas: birth, marriage, and death.[200]

I believe that this abridgment of the Hindu tradition can be traced once again to the idea of appeal. In terms of modernity, "Hinduism" of this kind allows the Indian middle-class to distance itself from the more archaic ritual aspects of Hinduism and move closer to a more spiritualized form of Hinduism, a Hinduism which has been more acceptable in recent times. One need only look at the prominence given to Advaita Vedanta in most recent definitions of Hinduism to see the attractiveness of a more spiritualized religion for modern times. For the expatriate Indian community, the de-emphasis on ritual offered by the VHP allows it to feel that it is a part of a living Hindu

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[197] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 64.
[198] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, 185.
[199] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 103.
[200] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 103.

tradition even if it does not have access to the individuals and structures required for the proper performance of extensive religious ritual.

The VHP's homogenization of Hinduism (and its appeal to the religiously isolated non-resident Indian) is resonant with Savarkar's "abridgment" of Hindu religion in *Hindutva—Who is a Hindu?* As John Zavos has demonstrated, Savarkar himself was removed from the everyday practice of Hinduism. At the time *Hindutva—Who is a Hindu?* was written, Savarkar had been in England for five years and in prison for twelve years. For seventeen years, Savarkar had been fully removed from Hindu religious praxis, and, on top of that, he was not the most religious of men to begin with.[201] *Hindutva—Who is a Hindu?* reflects the facts of Savarkar's religious isolation. The VHP has recognized the spiritual isolation of the Indian diaspora and adjusted its interpretation of Hindu religion to reflect a certain amount of religious isolation through its somewhat contrived "spiritualized" and "ecumenical" Hinduism. The Indian middle-class and the diaspora communities may be happy to avoid the ritual complexities of a lived Hinduism, but they are obviously reluctant to relinquish all religious feelings, especially when religion is placed in cauldron with politics and culture. Both Savarkar and the VHP have used a somewhat simple definition of Hindu religion and mixed it with politics to further their own agendas.

The genius of VHP-style Hinduism is that it is also designed to go beyond its core following of middle-class and middle-class expatriate Indians. It is also designed to appeal to the tribal communities and the lower castes and to do so for a particular ideological reason. In 1966, the VHP set up an activist organization known as the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (Tribal Development Centre) which serves two purposes: social

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[201] Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India,* 180.

work and the (re)conversion of tribals who have "left the fold," in particular those who

have converted to Christianity.[202] The VHP's stated reason for these ashrams was to

> Acquaint our brethren residing in the hills and forests, scheduled castes and other
> backward groups with the Hindu way of life and to introduce them to simple ways
> of worship and devotion to Hindu deities and thereby stabilize them within our
> common Hindu fold.[203]

This quotation is very effective in demonstrating the basis of VHP rhetoric and ideology.

The VHP has always been suspicious of Christian missionaries, and, like all Hindu

nationalist organizations plays on "demographic fear," by which I mean the fear that

Hindus will become the minority religious community in India.[204] Bringing tribals and

Scheduled Castes into the Hindu fold is a clever way of both reducing the influence of

Christian missionaries and including as "Hindu" groups who have not always been

defined as Hindus by others, or who may not even define themselves as Hindu. Further,

the VHP's homogenization of Hindu doctrine and ritual is key to keeping these "simple"

people "Hindu" in the VHP-sense of the word. VHP Hinduism, in its simplicity, provides

an effective religious alternative for both the uneducated tribals and the educated middle-

class.

The VHP often refers to its reconversion of tribals as "rehabilitation."[205] However, this

rehabilitation often leads to both reliance on, and deference of the tribals to the upper-

caste VHP leadership, effectively stifling their own voice in terms of self-determination.

As we have seen in our discussion of Gandhi in the previous chapter, the upper castes are

quick to speak for tribals and lower castes in such a way that it seems they are sticking up

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[202] Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*, 103.

[203] As quoted in Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths*, 183. The quote is from a VHP Executive Committee resolution which can be found on the VHP website: http://www.vhp.org/englishsite/a-origin_&growth/evolution.htm.

[204] McKean, *Divine Enterprise*, 106.

[205] McKean, *Divine Enterprise*, 107.

for them, when, in actuality, all they are doing is enforcing upper-caste hegemony in both politics and religion. It is also fair to assert that the VHP's social activism and uplift in tribal areas is an important method of fully integrating the middle class into VHP ideology and religious outlook. The VHP has built much of its social activism on the idea that the educated middle classes wish to be philanthropic and feel that they are making a difference socially. Further, they wish to feel the gratitude of those they are charitable towards. VHP literature on the tribal ashrams tends to focus on this conceit. The appeal of the VHP's tribal work is, according to Thomas Blom Hansen, a "mixture of fear of the underdogs, paternalism, and social vanity, appealing to the narcissistic desires of the urban middle classes to indulge in philanthropy."[206] For the VHP as an organization, involving itself in tribal work not only brings in important middle class monetary donations, but also spreads VHP doctrine amongst a large social group (the tribals) and spreads fear against two of its traditional enemies, Christian missionaries and Communist activists.[207]

The VHP and the RSS played the game of agitational politics well enough for Hindu activists to destroy the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December, 1992. Communal rioting, the worst since Partition, followed the destruction and lasted well into 1993. In the aftermath of the demolition, the VHP was only momentarily dissuaded from its practice of communal agitation and its desire to build a temple at Ayodhya. And while the Muslims are still the objects of most of the VHP's disdain, Christians have

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[206] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* 103.
[207] Chapter 3's discussion of Missionary Enquiry Reports from Madhya Bharat and Madhya Pradesh will demonstrate how fear of foreign influence from both Christians and Communists has been part of Hindu nationalist ideology from at lest the 1950's.

increasingly come under attack by the VHP in recent years, especially in response to their

conversion and missionary activities.[208]

Savarkar and the Ideology of *Hindutva*

V.D. Savarkar, more than any other individual, is responsible for the articulation

of *Hindutva* as a "coherent and powerful pattern of concepts."[209] It was in his book,

Hindutva—Who is a Hindu? published in 1923 that Savarkar outlined the ideology of

Hindutva, or "Hindu-ness" and established an ideological framework on which all

subsequent Hindu nationalist rhetoric would rest. T. N. Madan convincingly argues that·

"in recent years [Savarkar's *Hindutva*] has acquired the undisputed status of the

manifesto of Hindu fundamentalism"[210] Therefore, one cannot understand the vision of

modern Hindu nationalism held by the members of the Sangh Parivar, without examining

and understanding Savarkar's ideology of *Hindutva*.

Savarkar's ideology was successful because it replaced the usual emphasis on

religion, in particular scripture, with an emphasis on culture. Early Hindu reformers such

as Dayananda Saraswati had placed the Vedas upon a pedestal and looked towards these

sacred writings as the key to Hindu "success" or progression into the modern world.[211]

Savarkar also wished to change the outlook of Hindus but to do so, he subsumed

Hinduism, the religion, under something which he considered to be greater: Hindu

civilization or culture:

> Hindutva is not a word but a history. Not only the spiritual or religious
> history of our people as at times it is mistaken to be by being confounded

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[208] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, 198-202.

[209] Basu, et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flag*, 6.

[210] Madan. *Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 220.

[211] Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*, 220.

with the other cognate term Hinduism, but a history in full. Hinduism is only a derivative, a fraction, a part of Hindutva.[212]

The key to the overarching success of Savarkar's ideology was his supposed de-emphasis on religion. I choose the term "de-emphasis" because Savarkar really did not lessen the role of religion in his definition of Hindu culture; he merely conflated religion and culture with the idea of Hindu *rashtra*. In Savarkar's *Hindutva* ideology, religion became ever more associated with nationalism. In fact, religion and nationalism became so intertwined that the lines of demarcation between religion, nationalism and culture became almost impossible to distinguish. When one looks at the organizations behind the powerful manifestations of Hindu nationalism in India today, one sees the same sort of confluence between religion and nationalism. Moreover, Savarkar's rendition of Hindu culture (and the place of Hinduism, the religion, within it) has made religion an especially potent political tool.

Savarkar wrote *Hindutva* while in prison for various terrorist acts committed both in England and India, and though his revolutionary and nationalist activities are still celebrated (especially in his bio/hagiographies by authors such as Jyoti Trehan)[213] his most influential activity was the composition and publication of *Hindutva* and several other Hindu nationalist tracts. It was in these writings, as well as during his presidency of the Hindu Mahasabha, that Savarkar co-opted religion for nationalistic purposes and where he laid the groundwork for modern Hindu nationalism.

Savarkar's ideology has been effective for two important reasons, his interpretation of India's past and his goals for India's future. Moreover, Savarkar's vision

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[212] V.D. Savarkar. *Hindutva—Who is a Hindu?* [VI Edition] (Bombay: S.S. Savarkar, 1999), 3
[213] Jyoti Trehan. *Veer Savarkar: Thought and Action of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1991).

of both the future and the past were utopian in nature. As Ainslee Embree argues, "when leaders of religious or nationalist movements look to the past in search of a golden age, they are usually in search of the future; the past becomes usable as it undergirds the future."[214] Savarkar did this very thing; he successfully created an idealized Indian past in order to justify his *Hindutva* vision of the future.[215]

Hindutva means "Hindu-ness" and so from the very title of his work we can determine that Savarkar was concerned with what it means to be Hindu, or, better put, what constitutes Hindu identity. "Hindutva embraces all departments and thought and activity of the whole Being of our Hindu race."[216] This quotation is instructive in demonstrating what Savarkar was attempting to accomplish with his monograph: he was trying to define and create a Hindu civilization with a basis in history. Savarkar was creating a recognizable (and powerful) Hindu culture and history, and while the creation of this culture was paramount, we cannot forget the basis on which Savarkar's culture rested, a base which was most certainly religion.

What then is a Hindu? For Savarkar, *Hindutva*, or Hindu identity is based upon three important foundations: first, geographical unity, second, common racial features, and third, a common culture. [217] In these three foundational principles we can see the genesis of modern Hindu nationalism. Religion, though it has been demoted in favor of culture, still plays a significant role in the geographical foundation of Savarkar's *Hindutva* in that Savarkar stated that those inhabitants of India who considered India to

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[214] Ainslee Embree. *Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 13.
[215] Sarkar. *Beyond Nationalist Frames*, 246. Sarkar reinforces this point of Embree's, arguing that "Constructions of histories or lineages as morale-booster, for legitimacy, to link up present aspirations with more-or-less imagined pasts in efforts to move towards specific kinds of futures—have all been a standard feature of modern political movements."
[216] Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 4.
[217] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 26-27.

be both their holy land and the land of their ancestors were true Hindus.[218] Muslims or

Christians would be unable to consider India to be their holy land even if it was the land

of their ancestors. Savarkar states that "...the root meaning of the word Hindu...may

mean only Indian, yet as it is we would be straining the use of the words too much—we

fear to the point of breaking—if we call a Mohammedan a Hindu because of his being a

resident of India." [219]

Within the context of this thesis, this is perhaps the most important aspect of

Savarkar's *Hindutva*—the idea that other religious groups can be only in the country not

of the country. The allegiances of Muslims and Christians are elsewhere, and so they

must be suspected of destroying the bonds which hold the Hindu nation (*rashtra*)

together. Muslims and Christians are especially suspect if they attempt to convert Hindus

to their foreign faiths as this would destroy the essential link between all Hindus in

Savarkar's *Hindutva,* the view of India as holyland. This fear of a change in allegiance

upon conversion is not limited to hard core Hindu nationalists such as Savarkar. The idea

of "denationalization" (as it is usually referred to) upon conversion has a long history in

India, a history evident in Gandhi's writings on conversion and also the Enquiry Reports

into conversion of various Indian states in the 1950's and 1960's, reports which will be

discussed in Chapter Three.

Savarkar defines the holyland of all true Hindus as "Hindustan" and describes

Hindustan in geographical terms as a unified nation stretching from the Himalayas to the

seas and from the Indus to the seas, basically the same borders that defined India under

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[218]McKean, *Divine Enterprise,*79. Savarkar stated: "Yes, this Bharatbhumi, this Sindusthan, this land of ours that stretches from Sindu to Sindhu is our Punyabhumi (holy land), for it was the land that the Founders of our faith and the Seers to whom 'Veda' the Knowledge was revealed." Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 111. For further information see also Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 82-84, 110-116.
[219] Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 83.

British colonial rule. Savarkar obtains this information from his rather unique (and certainly nationalistic) translation of the *Bhavishya Purana*.[220] Further, Savarkar goes on at length in defending his use of the *Puranas* as history and certainly more accurate than the use of "Western" historical texts in an extended footnote.[221]

Savarkar was arguing that the Hindus had, since Vedic (or at least Puranic) times, comprised a territory the same size as British India, and, more importantly, that the Hindus had conceived of this territory (and themselves) as a *rashtra* for this same length of time. Savarkar's project in presenting the geographical history of India in this manner was two-fold. First, he was appropriating, for Hindus, what the British had "accomplished" in their de facto unification of the subcontinent under one ruler. At the same time, Savarkar was diminishing what the British had done under the guise of nationalism. Everyone in the nationalist movement, be they violent or non-violent, wanted all of India to be free of British colonial rule. In addition, the nationalists (with the exception of those calling for Pakistan) wanted India to be an independent geographical entity of the same size and scope as British India, which really was a new way of viewing India. By appropriating history and making the culturally and, to a large extent politically "unified" subcontinent something that had existed from time immemorial, Savarkar gave a new definition of what it meant to be Indian.

It is also important to note the interrelationship between religion, identity and geography in this facet of Savarkar's *Hindutva*. Savarkar bases the historical viability of his Hindustan on what is arguably a religious document, the *Bhavishya Purana*. Savarkar (and other Hindu nationalists) use religious texts, festivals, and rituals as not only the

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[220] Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 29-30; Chetan Bhatt *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths,* 90-91.
[221] Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 34-36.

basis for what they refer to as "cultural" but also as a means of conflating religion and culture.[222]

The equation of religion and culture serves a useful purpose for Savarkar in the geographical context of his *Hindutva,* as it allows him to demonstrate the religious nature of Hindu identity. A Hindu is a person who was born in Hindustan and who also considers it holyland. By tying India, as a geographical entity, to the *Bhavishya Purana,* Savarkar is allowing Hindus to make a stronger political claim on an independent India than other resident groups because the very existence of India in its present form is religiously substantiated. Even if one wanted to refer to the *Bhavishya Purana* as an exclusively "cultural" document, Hindus have greater claim on India through the *Bhavishya Purana* due to its indisputable nature as a Hindu text. Religious substantiation of what India is via a Hindu text is not something in which other religious groups in India could participate. Moreover, this simultaneously historical and religious substantiation of geopolitical India, justified what Savarkar had always wanted India to be, a Hindu *rashtra.*[223]

As mentioned above, the second foundation of Savarkar's *Hindutva* was the idea of common racial characteristics amongst Hindus. For Savarkar, both nation and nationalism could only be understood in terms of race.[224] Savarkar defined race in terms

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[222]Two quotations from Savarkar strikingly reveal the interface between culture and religion in his rhetoric. "The Hindu civilization, as represented in common history, common heroes and common literature, common art, a common law and a common jurisprudence, common fairs and festivals, *rites, rituals, ceremonies, and sacraments*" Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 100 (emphasis added); "And culture? The English and Americans feel they are kith and kin because they possess a Shakespeare in common. But not only Kalidas or a Bhasa but, Oh Hindus! Ye possess a Ramayan and Mahabharat in common—and the Vedas!" Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 134.

[223] Ronald Neufeldt. "Interpreting the Past, Designing the Future: Hindutva and the Rhetoric of Violence" in *Globalization, Technology and War: Confronting the Gods of the Twenty-First Century* ed. David J. Hawkin. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 159.

[224]Neufeldt. "The Hindu Mahasabha and Gandhi," 143.

of blood: "The second most important essential of Hindutva is that a Hindu is a descendant of Hindu parents, claims to have the blood of the ancient Sindhu and the race that sprang from them in his veins."[225] Interestingly, Savarkar refers to those who share a common blood as a race, and does so using the term "race-jati."[226] Jati is usually used in reference to sub-castes, but in Savarkar's case, inter-caste marriage had mixed the blood within the castes making all Hindus the members of one jati, or race.[227]

The importance of blood in Savarkar's *Hindutva* ideology went beyond physiology; it also contained a very interesting philosophical component. For instance, one could become a Hindu and have Hindu blood running through his veins by way of incorporation into the race through belief. Savarkar states,

> We are not only a nation but a Jati, a born brotherhood. Nothing else counts, it is after all a question of the heart. We feel that the same ancient blood that coursed through the veins of Ram and Krishna, Buddha and Mahavir, Nanak and Chaitanya, Basava and Madhava, of Rohidas and Tiruvulluvar courses throughout Hindudom from vein to vein, pulsates from heart to heart. We *feel* we are a jati, a race bound together by the dearest ties of blood and therefore it must be so.[228]

A "racial" Hindu, then, is someone who has, in all respects, adopted the Hindu way of life.[229]

The "choice" (based on sentiment or affection for all that is Hindu) involved in being a member of the Hindu race plays a crucial role for Savarkar. First, sentiment became a measuring stick in terms of whether or not someone was a Hindu.[230] *Hindutva* is an ideology of identity; thus, an individual's Hindu-ness can be measured in terms of

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[225] Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 110.
[226] Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 84.
[227] Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths,* 94-95.
[228] Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 89-90.
[229] Neufeldt, "The Hindu Mahasabha and Gandhi," 143.
[230] *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths,* 95-96.

how committed one is to the ideals of the Hindu *rashtra*. When this commitment is taken away, or, as is suggested in the case of Muslims and Christians, directed some place else, one is not a Hindu, even if one has a thousand years of actual Indian blood running through their veins. Commitment to the Hindu *rashtra* and membership in the Hindu race-jati required commitment and participation in Savarkar's third essential element of *Hindutva*, the common culture.

In reference to the Muslims and Christians of India, Savarkar stated that

they cannot be called Hindus in the sense in which the term is actually understood because, we Hindus are bound together not only by the tie of the love we bear to a common fatherland by the common blood that courses through our veins...but also by the ties of the common homage we pay to our great civilization—our Hindu culture.[231]

Blood and race had brought the Hindus together and culture was going to provide the shared history and goals that would enable Hindu *rashtra* to be established.

Savarkar stated that the culture shared by all Hindus included "a common history, common heroes, a common literature, a common art, a common law and a common jurisprudence, common fairs and festivals, rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacraments"[232] A common language, in particular Sanskrit, can also be added to this list of cultural characteristics. It is within this list, as basic as it may seem, however, that we begin to see the xenophobia inherent in Savarkar's definition of Hindu culture.

After describing what constitutes Hindu culture in *Hindutva—Who is a Hindu?* Savarkar's narrative immediately turns to how Muslims and Christians cannot share in this culture, no matter how long their tenure in the subcontinent. It would have seemed that if Muslims or Christians had become Hindu culturally by taking upon themselves

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[231] Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 91-92.
[232] Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 100.

Hindu 'blood', they would indeed be Hindus, but for Savarkar this is simply insufficient. "They belong, or feel that they belong, to a cultural unit altogether different from the Hindu one. Their heroes and their hero-worship, their fairs and their festivals, their ideals and outlook on life have now ceased to be common with ours."[233]

The only way Indian Christians or Muslims could become Hindu was by giving up their religion. "(Y)e, have only to render whole-hearted love to our common Mother and recognize her not only as Fatherland (*Pitribhu*) but even as Holy (*Punyabhu*) and ye would be most welcome to the Hindu fold."[234] Such a statement would not be surprising if Savarkar was making his basis for Hindu identity religion alone; but Savarkar states again and again that his basis for identity is cultural. The requirement to see India as holyland aptly demonstrates that a significant aspect of Savarkar's Hindu culture was religious in nature. Robert Baird defines religion as that which is of ultimate concern to an individual or group of people. Given that the geographic entity of India is both Fatherland and Holyland, the ultimate would appear to be India as sacred entity. The requirement to see India as Holyland was an impossibility for Indian Christians and Muslims. As a result, these two communities, to this day have the perpetually unfinished burden of demonstrating their love and loyalty to the Hindu nation in a manner that could only reach completion, if at all with the abandonment of their faiths and the adoption of an Hindutva ideology that considered them enemies.[235]

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[233] Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 101.
[234] Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 115.
[235] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths,* 98.

Conclusion

Savarkar's *Hindutva* is certainly the most important text in the Hindu nationalist movement, even today, and is the fuel that motivates and drives the ideological and rhetorical machine of the Hindu Right. Moreover, the ideology of *Hindutva* has been given concrete expression by the Hindu Mahasabha and, especially, the organizations which comprise the Sangh Parivar today. *Hindutva* ideology has also given rise to a vision of India which has conflated the ideas of religion, culture and nation, and which has sacralized the geopolitical entity of India. This particular vision of India has come to see the conversion of Hindus to other faiths, in particular the movement of Hindus to religious communities with origins outside of the subcontinent, as not only an act of treason, but a violent attack on this sacred conception of India.

This vision of India which has conflated religion, culture, and nationalism is not confined to the Sangh Parivar. The following two chapters of this thesis will examine the opposition to conversion from Hinduism to other religious groups by individuals and organizations not necessarily connected to the Sangh Parivar. In particular, these chapters will focus on anti-conversion sentiments found at the State and Federal levels of government in India. These two chapters will also demonstrate that though this opposition to conversion may come from outside of the Sangh Parivar, it is derived from the same vision of India—a vision which sees India as a Hindu nation.

Chapter Three: Missionary Activity Enquiry Reports

Introduction

As the historical background has shown, opposition to conversion from Hinduism to Christianity and other 'alien' religions is not a new phenomenon in Indian history and is most certainly not confined to contemporary *Hindutva* rhetoric and the organizations of the Sangh Parivar. Opposition to conversion is a relatively widespread phenomenon in India, and can be found in numerous Enquiry Commission reports, proposed and enacted legislation, as well as rulings by the Supreme Court of India.

The first five years after Independence saw a massive influx of foreign missionaries into India, a fact which raised concerns both for lay Hindus and politicians. As a result, in 1952, "an unprecedented number of applications for visas for new missionaries of recognized societies was refused." [236] Both Hindu communal groups (such as the Hindu Mahasabha) and the government itself (as the examination of the Enquiry Commissions' shall demonstrate) charged that missionaries were engaged in political activities and encouraging the tribal peoples whom they worked amongst to agitate for their own nation. [237] In 1955, the government of India established a new policy regarding the entry of foreign missionaries. New missionaries were required to possess "outstanding qualifications or specialized experience in their lines." [238] The purpose of the "outstanding qualifications" clause was to ensure that qualified Indians were the first choice for employment. In addition, missionaries were not to be allowed to work in tribal

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[236] Smith, *India as a Secular State,* 200.
[237] Smith, *India as a Secular State,* 201-202.
[238] Smith, *India as a Secular State,* 205.

or border areas and required governmental permission to open new "centers or institutions."[239]

Official central government policy and the general concern regarding foreign missionaries led two Indian states, Madhya Bharat (part of today's Madhya Pradesh) and Madhya Pradesh, to make further enquiries into the activities of Christian missionaries. Both of these state governments published reports on their enquiries in 1956 which provide significant insight into anti-conversion sentiment in the early years after Independence. This chapter will examine these two reports, *The Christian Missions Enquiry Committee's Report, 1956 (Madhya Bharat)*[240] and *The Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee, Madhya Pradesh.*[241]

It is important to note that these two reports were not the first instance of government intervention with regards to conversion on the subcontinent. Several of the the subcontinent's Princely States enacted laws which attempted to prevent conversions prior to Independence. According to Donald E. Smith, "approximately seventeen Indian states had such legislation in effect" at the time of India's Independence and, even after these states joined the Indian union, the "laws were enforced in some cases until 1950."[242]

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[239] Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 206.

[240] *The Christian Missions Enquiry Committee's Report, 1956.* (Indore, Madhya Bharat: Government Press, 1956). Hereafter this report will be footnoted as *MB 1956* with the appropriate page references.

[241] *The Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee, Madhya Pradesh.* (Nagpur: Government Printing, Madhya Pradesh, 1956). This report is usually refered to as the Niyogi Report after the Chairman of the Committee, retired Chief Justice of the Nagpur High Court, M.B. Niyogi. Hereafter, this report will be footnoted as *Niyogi Report* with the appropriate page references.

[242] Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 177. See pages 176-181 of *India as a Secular State* for an excellent analysis of several of the anti-conversion laws enacted by the Princely States.

Madhya Bharat, 1956

The Introduction of Madhya Bharat's *The Christian Missions Enquiry Committee's Report, 1956* states that Christian missions "were brought into the limelight particularly by reason of the demand for a separate state for the Nagas of Assam. There was a popular cry that their [the Missions] activities were not above board and that they tended to create a rift in the national life of India." [243] As a result of this popular complaint, the Madhya Bharat legislature commissioned an enquiry into missionary activity within the state. The main allegations against the missions were, first, that the missionaries were indulging in political activities and, second that they were either forcibly or fraudulently and by temptation of monetary and other gains, converting illiterate aboriginals and other backward people and thereby offending the feelings of Non-Christians.[244] The enquiry was to be conducted by interviews with various "witnesses" and by a questionnaire which was distributed to the missionaries and to "other known political, religious and social Institutions as well as to prominent individuals interested in the problem as also to Government Officials." [245] The Enquiry Committee was commissioned in 1954 and published its report in 1956.

Within the context of the first stated reason for the report, the accusation that Christian missionaries were indulging in political activities, the first issue addressed in the Report is that of "extra-territoriality." Extra-territoriality was the assumed influence of the missionaries among the tribal peoples in their agitation for a separate state. There were two political movements in operation at the time of the Report which were of

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[243] *MB, 1956,* 1.
[244] *MB 1956,* 3.
[245] *MB 1956,* 2.

concern to the fledgling Indian government. First, was the movement for an independent state among the Naga tribals in Assam and, of more immediate concern, the political movement involving the tribal peoples in Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, the so-called Jharkand movement. [246] This fear of a political separation by the tribal communities is certainly apparent in *MB 1956,* though much less so than in subsequent reports such as the Madhya Pradesh Enquiry of 1956. The reason for this fear, of course, was the fact that almost all of the missionary work in Madhya Bharat was conducted by foreign missionaries amongst the lower castes and especially the tribals.[247]

While the Committee did report that they had "no tangible evidence of any active anti-national propaganda by the missions themselves," [248] they did attempt to make links between the religious work of the missionaries and politics. For example, the Committee reports that Rev Fr. Mocha, of the Roman Catholic mission in Jhabua, "admitted that people were given information on politics to make them good citizens." [249] Immediately after this statement, however, the authors of *MB 1956* wrote that "All the activities of this mission are among the Adiwasis [tribals]. One would wish that politics is dissociated from religion." [250] This statement points out two very real fears held by many Hindu politicians in early post-Independence India. First, the fear that the nation would be further divided as it was with the partition of India in 1947, and, moreover, that it would be divided on religious lines, just as it was in partition. The second fear revealed by accusations of "extra-territoriality" was the fear that foreign forces, which had dominated India for so many years, would continue to have political influence. The missionaries

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[246]Smith, *India as a Secular State,* 201-2.
[247] *MB 1956,* 21.
[248] *MB 1956,* 20.
[249] *MB 1956,* 25.
[250] MB 1956, 25.

working amongst the tribals, who were agitating for their own state, were foreign. The idea that these foreign forces could in some way be further dividing the nation through their influence on the tribals appears to have been a real fear for the Madhya Bharat government.

While *MB 1956* was only able to make allusions to missionary support for political independence movements in the state, it did repeatedly refer to another area of perceived political influence: the phenomenon known as "denationalization." Denationalization, put simply, is the loss of nationality, in this case through conversion to a religion not indigenous to India. Missionaries seeking converts in India had been accused of denationalization since the mid-nineteenth century when the Protestant missionary movement's encounter with India was reaching its zenith. Indians who converted to Christianity were seen to be losing their national identity.

MB 1956 describes the convert from Hinduism to Christianity in the following terms:

> To the convert there is a feeling of elevation and of being superior to his erstwhile community whom he begins to despise and a serious rift is created in the National life…Such a person, it is observed, puts himself before his community and country. He is a Christian first and then an Indian. [251]

It is not surprising that, in 1956, the majority of Indians would be familiar with or even have experienced the superior, arrogant and often prejudiced attitudes of their former rulers, the British. Neither is it surprising that those who converted to the "alien" religion of the rulers might also start to act as though they were somehow superior. What is surprising is the language used in *MB 1956* to describe the convert: "Such a person…is a Christian first and then an Indian."

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[251] *MB 1956*, 20.

Language which states that converts from Hinduism to Christianity are "denationalized" or a "Christian first and then and Indian" implicitly reveals that the authors of the report see India as a Hindu nation. Conversion to Christianity, an alien faith, becomes a question of allegiance for the convert. A "Christian first and then and Indian" could quite as easily be read as "a foreign subject first and then an Indian." Denationalization through conversion is a real fear for the authors of *MB 1956*, a fear that would appear to be much more pronounced than their denunciation of conversion by suspect means such as inducement and allurement.

In a literal sense, *MB 1956* identified some of the positive activities of the Christian Missions and also rightly pointed out some of the questionable methods of proselytization used by the missionaries to secure converts, methods such as inducement and allurement. Moreover, the report pointed out the need for an expanded government role in alleviating the suffering of the tribals and Scheduled Castes—and this not only to prevent them from converting to Christianity, though prevention of conversion was a welcome side effect. This report's recommendation for registration with the government of conversions from one religion to another[252] and its allusions to the alleged extra-territorial and denationalizing tendencies of the missionaries were harbingers of much more strident language and prejudice towards missionaries and conversions to Christianity from Hinduism. Movement in this more radical direction can be clearly seen in the next report to be examined, the *Niyogi Report*.

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[252] *MB 1956*, 43.

Madhya Pradesh, 1956

The *Niyogi Report* was published in 1956 after two years of enquiry by a committee comissioned by the Madhya Pradesh government in 1954. The enquiry was comissioned because

> from time to time...the conversion of illiterate aboriginals and other backward people was affected by the Christian missionaries either forcibly or through fraud or temptations of monetary gain" and that "the feelings of non Christians were being offended by conversions of this type." [253]

The Committee visited "Seventy-seven centres...and an approximate number of 11,360 people were contacted."[254] The committee contacted not only mission employees but also both Hindus and non-Hindus who lived in the areas surrounding the missions for information. The committee also sent out 385 questionnaires, 330 to Hindus, and 55 to Christians, in order to acquire more information.[255] The Protestant Missionaries cooperated fully with the committee as did the Roman Catholic Missions, at least initially. The Catholics withdrew their cooperation in 1955 and filed not only a statement of protest but also petitioned the High Court for a petition to end the enquiry. This petition was denied in early 1956. [256]

A close examination of the report will show that, while the method of conversion was definitely an issue, it was not the main issue. The main issue, as in the case of *MB 1956,* was conversion to Christianity itself and the perceived repercussions such conversions would have on the Indian nation and, more subtly, Hindu culture. The issues that initially confronted the Committee were allegations of fraudulent conversions among the aboriginals and lower castes within the state of Madhya Pradesh, both a narrow and a

[253] *Niygoi Report,* 1.
[254] *Niyogi Report,* 2.
[255] *Niyogi Report,* 4-5.
[256] *Niyogi Report,* 5.

local issue. However, the report goes beyond this issue to examine conversions in general and, quite strangely, the pros and cons of Christianity in general. As the introduction states

> The material gathered in the initial stages of the enquiry revealed to the Committee that its significance far transcended the bounds of any one country or region in the world and that it was calculated to have world wide repercussions. That compelled the Committee to view the subject as an integral part of a larger picture on the broad canvas of world history. The Committee had to consult a number of published books, pamphlets and periodicals for determining the nature and form of their recommendations."[257]

The issues at hand for the Committee were much greater than the conversion of a few tribals—the issue of conversion was seen to have "world-wide repercussions." As such, the Report moved away from its stated goal of "clear[ing] up doubts and disputes that may exist" and promoting "good will, friendliness and peace among the various sections of the people."[258]

It is informative to take a brief look at the composition of the Enquiry Committee which authored the *Niyogi Report*. The charman of the Committee was M.B. Niyogi (thus the name by which the report is known) a former Chief Justice of the Nagpur High Court, 5 Committee members and a secretary. All of the members were Hindu with the exception of S.K. George, a member of the Syrian Orthodox Church. While the government of Madhya Pradesh claimed that the Committee was comprised of "men of unbiased and impartial outlook" [259] certain Christian groups, in particular the Catholics took issue with both the composition and impartiality of the committee. While it would certainly be unfair to say the Committee was biased simply because it was comprised primarily of Hindus, it is a valid assumption that the Catholic Bishopric saw the enquiry

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[257] *Niyogi Report*, 2.
[258] *Niyogi Report*, 2.
[259] *Niyogi Report*, 177.

as compromised and biased, as the Bishopric's petition to the High Court to end the enquiry demonstrates. [260]

The *Niyogi Report* follows, at least initially, a pattern similar to *MB 1956* before moving above and beyond that document both in the scope and the level of analysis of anti-conversion and anti-Christian sentiment. The *Niyogi Report* identifies four major areas in which mission activity and conversion were said to be threatening the fledgling Indian nation. These areas are extra-territoriality; anti-national propaganda; denationalization of converts; and the removal of untouchables and tribals from the Hindu fold.

Extra-territoriality, within the context of the *Niyogi Report* can be seen as the Committee's view that the Christian community desired its own separate nation, a nation along the lines of Pakistan. [261] A great deal of foreign money was injected into the Christian missions active in the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh,[262] money which was seen by the Committee as preparing the area for separation. The Committee's concern is understandable given the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. [263] It is conceivable that the initial fear of conversion expressed by the Committee is a direct result of Partition's communal nature. The Committee undoubtedly feared that if all the tribals in the Jharkhand movement converted to Christianity, India could again be divided on religious grounds.

The second area in which missionary activity was seen as damaging the Indian nations was that of anti-national propaganda. This is a very interesting assertion, as the

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[260] *Niyogi Report*, 5

[261] *Niyogi Report.*, 3.

[262] *Niyogi Report*, 3.

[263] *Niyogi Report*, 1, 60.

evidence given for this anti-national propaganda is comprised of both anti-State and anti-Hindu statements allegedly made by Christian missionaries. In the Report's accusation that the missionaries were spreading anti-national propaganda we can see what can be described as a conflation of religion and nation in the ideology of the authors of the *Niyogi Report.*

The first mention of anti-national propaganda provided by the missionaries in Madhya Pradesh is found on page 7 of the report which reads "On the integration of the states, Missionaries became afraid of losing their influence. So they started an agitation, playing on the religious feelings of the primitive Christian converts, representing the Madhya Pradesh Government as consisting of infidels and so on."[264] While the missionaries (especially the more strident among them) may well have described the Madhya Pradesh government as infidels, it is difficult to imagine how such commentary represented a threat to public order or the State itself, unless the ideology of the authors of the report clearly contains a vision of India as Hindu in nature.

Evidence of the *Niyogi Report*'s conflation of religion with nation can be found on page 32 of the report which states "Missionary organizations are so wide-spread in this country that they seem to constitute a state within a state." [265] Why is it that these Christian enclaves are deemed to be a "state?" It is only possible via the conflation of religion with nation. There are three possible reasons, in the case of the *Niyogi Report,* for seeing Christian enclaves as a state within a state. The first reason is the partition of India. India had indeed been divided into two states based on religion. In this case, a fear of further divisions is certainly understandable. The authors make reference themselves to

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[264] *Niyogi Report,* 7.
[265] *Niyogi Report,* 32.

the partition of India on religious grounds.[266] The second reason is India's immaturity as an independent, secular state at the time the report was written. India had only been an independent state for nine years and a fear of anything foreign was visible everywhere. The third reason was the understanding (an understanding which was certainly supported in theory by Partition) held by those who took offense to conversion, including the authors of the report and possibly the government of Madhya Pradesh, that India was a Hindu nation. If the nation is Hindu, then it follows that the state must be Hindu also. Consequently, other religious groups, including Christians, comprise a separate "state" simply because they are not Hindu. Christians and Muslims are unable to share in this sacred concept of the nation because their holyland, it is asserted, is not India but Palestine, or in the case of the Muslims, Arabia.

The third area of missionary activity damaging the nation of India was the "denationalization" of converts, an area closely linked to the accusations of anti-national propaganda discussed above. The *Niyogi Report* introduced its attack on the denationalization caused by Christian missionaries with two examples. In the first example, the committee reports that missionaries in Hoshangabad district had replaced the expression 'Jai Hind' (Hail India) with 'Jai Yeshu' (Hail Jesus). In the second example, it is reported that "those who come under the influence of the missionaries begin to greet each other with the words "Jai Yeshu" instead of "Jai Rama".[267] The replacement of "Jai Rama" with "Jai Yeshua" can been seen as matter of considerable concern given Rama's dual identity as deity and national hero, especially in more modern representations of Rama. In these modern representations, Rama is often cast as the

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[266] *Niyogi Report*, 1, 60.
[267] *Niyogi Report*, 131

founder of the Hindu nation. In this way, politics and religion are conjoined in a powerful symbol, which is in keeping with the *Niyogi Report's* strong reaction to the alleged "preemption" of Rama. [268] Denationalization, in this context, can only be interpreted as the declaration of the supremacy of the Christian god over the supremacy of the state/nation and, more intriguingly, the supremacy of the Christian god over the supremacy Hindu gods.

It would be rather simple to dismiss these examples as mere anecdotes if they had not been used by the Committee as evidence of the denationalization of converts. Furthermore, one cannot help but notice the significance inherent in using such symbols to introduce the section on denationalization: the nation itself is identified as Hindu, Hindu gods are supreme and the placement of a different (read: Foreign) god above the Hindu gods is not a matter of individual religious concern but a matter of national concern.

The application of the adjective 'Hindu' to the idea of nation made by the *Niyogi Report* in its discussion of denationalization raises the question of whether or not Christians can be seen to possess "dual allegiances." Dual allegiance refers to the idea that the Indian Christian would owe allegiance to both the state of India and to Christ. This is not problematic, argue the authors of the report unless "there was a conflict of loyalties between Christ and State" in which case "the true Christian had necessarily to choose obedience to Christ."[269] The report acknowledges that there is normally "no

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[268] For more information on the place of Rama in Hindu nationalist ideology see Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* 174 and Basu, et al, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags,* 9.
[269] *Niyogi Report,* 59-60.

conflict" between spiritual and national allegiance, however, "conflict between loyalty to the State and loyalty to the Church cannot be ruled out."[270]

By claiming that conversion to Christianity created dual allegiances among converts, the *Niyogi Report* established a very important ideological point. Hindus do not share the dual allegiance issue with Christians. The Hindu cannot possess these divided loyalties between religion and the state because the state is Hindu both culturally and religiously. The Committee reinforces this point by providing two politico-religious conspiracy theories which demonstrate the risk to the state when Hindus convert to Christianity.

The first conspiracy theory related by the *Niyogi Report* is that of an unholy union between American missionaries and the American government to prevent Communism from spreading into India, though by 1956 it had already arrived. The Roman Catholic Church was also said to be part of this conspiracy. The Niyogi Committee reported that "the Catholic Church and the American Democracy are united in their frantic drive for gathering proselytes to Christianity to combat Communism: the former to extend its religious empire and the latter to obtain world leadership."[271] While one can argue quite rightly that "American Democracy" was attempting to gain influence in various geopolitical spheres at the time the Report was written to fight its rival ideology of Communism, the report provides no real evidence of how America was using "its" converts in India to combat the Communist threat. The argument is based entirely on the premise that because certain missionary groups come from America they were willing pawns of the American government and that the American government is Christian and willing to advance a Christian agenda of some kind. The authors of the report are

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[270] *Niyogi Report*, 60.
[271] *Niyogi Report.*, 62.

conflating Christianity and the American government in much the same way as they conflate Hinduism and the Indian state. As for the Roman Catholic Church, it too may have been against Communism, but the main point of its presence in this conspiracy theory is the notion of the authors of the *Niyogi Report* that "Catholic countries" were actually controlled by Rome. The authors refer to present-day states "based on religion"[272] and assume that the influence that religious institutions such as the Catholic Church can exert on state governments is tantamount to full control.

The second conspiracy theory promoted by the *Niyogi Report* is the idea that missionaries, in particular American missionaries, planned to establish a foothold in India through converting outcastes and tribals and to cause these outcastes to agitate for their own independent state.[273] This conspiracy theory is also a fine entry point for discussion on the fourth major area of contention cited by the Report, the removal of untouchables and tribals from the Hindu fold. The *Niyogi Report* contends that "people converted to Christianity would be mostly from the outcastes or the aboriginals who can be primed with hatred against their countrymen, if for no other reason than the fact that the latter are 'idolators' and that the former belong to the Kingdom of God."[274] It would be difficult to contradict the claim that a group of people could be stirred to agitation via religious pressure. However, in the case of the tribals and outcastes, it would be much more effective, I think, to create an agitation based on social concerns, in particular their ill-treatment at the hands of their upper-caste co-religionists. *The Niyogi Report*, unlike *MB*

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[272] *Niyogi Report.*, 60.
[273] *Niyogi Report*, 61.
[274] *Niyogi Report*, 61.

1956, only acknowledges the possibility of the government's own responsibility for the socially bereft, illiterate, and "ignorant" nature of the tribals and outcastes in passing.[275]

There is an assumption which runs throughout the *Niyogi Report* (as well as Gandhi's rhetoric and the State Freedom of Religion laws) that untouchables and tribals are in fact Hindu, whether or not they define themselves as such. This assumption is revealed in such language as that quoted above, when outcastes and tribals are referred to as persons "who can be primed with hatred against their countrymen." The outcastes and tribals are primed with hatred for their countrymen when they indulge in the religious act of moving from the Hindu community (where they have been assigned by upper caste Hindus) to the alien faith of Christianity. Such hatred for their fellow Indians does not exist when the outcastes and tribals remain "Hindu." The discussion of tribals and outcastes reveals the most important ideological aspect of the *Niyogi Report*, the idea that India is a Hindu nation. In the language of the report, the tribals remain pro-Indian, or at least neutral, as long as they do not convert to Christianity. The authors repeatedly demonstrate a vision of India as Hindu, in which religion and nation are conflated.

At a more practical level, it should not be surprising that the authors of the *Niyogi Report* would be fearful of losing numerous tribals to conversion in light of the fact that, at the time of the report, 57.4% of Madhya Pradesh was populated by members of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes."[276] From a strictly political standpoint, that is a very large voting bloc and, were the lower castes and tribals ever to agitate for separation, it would have been a rather large agitation indeed.

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[275] *Niygoi Report*, 137.
[276] *Niyogi Report*, 23

Tribals were important to the government of Madhya Pradesh, it would seem, not for their inherent worth or their deep Hindu roots, but for their importance in ensuring a Hindu majority. Conceivably, conversion attacks the Hindu majority and such an attack on the majority was intolerable given a vision of India which sees the nation as indisputably Hindu. "Can any right thinking man assert that such vile attacks on the religion of the majority community in India is part of the Christian religion or is conducive to public order and morality?...the voluminous oral and documentary evidence before us shows that attacks on Hindu religion, its gods and deities, are an important and integral plank of Christian propaganda, and are being indulged in...in all parts of the state."[277]

Article 46 of the Indian Constitution[278] requires the state to protect the weaker sections of society, viz, the tribals and Scheduled Castes. One way of accomplishing this 'protection' while simultaneously ensuring a Hindu majority was to attempt to absorb these weaker sections into the greater Hindu community. This absorption of the Scheduled Castes and tribes by the state can be viewed as protecting them from religious exploitation at the hands of Christian missionaries.[279] A better way to express this, however, is that absorption attempts to protect the Hindu nation from exploitation at the hands of a foreign element.

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[277] *Niyogi Report*, 127-128. This is no doubt a reference to the Article 25 of the Indian Constitution in which public order and morality are addressed since propagation of religion, in the Indian Constitution is "subject to public order and morality." See Article 25 of the Indian Constitution in H.M. Seervai, *Constitutional Law of India, Volume II, {Fourth Edition}* (Bombay: N.M. Tripathi Private Ltd., 1993), 1274.

[278] Seervai, *Constitutional Law of India, Volume II,* 2015-2016.

[279] *Niygoi Report*, 30.

Conclusion I: India as a Hindu Nation

The language of both *MB 1956* and the *Niyogi Report* points to many concerns and ideas similar to those expressed in the *Hindutva* ideology of Savarkar and the Sangh Parivar. The assertion that a convert "is a Christian first and then an Indian" is unquestionably the main ideological argument of *MB 1956*. The authors of this Report see the connection between religion and nation much as Savarkar would have seen the connection.[280] Hinduism was born and bred in India—it is an Indian creation. As such, Hinduism—both in its cultural and religious manifestations must be indisputably part of the national life of all Indians. Christianity, and Islam for that manner, was born outside the subcontinent and the convert is identifying herself, at the most fundamental level, with an entity which is indisputably outside of and alien to the nation. An adherent of this worldview, where religion and nation are so closely intertwined, cannot help but see the conversion of Hindus to Christianity at the hands of foreign missionaries as tantamount to treason, and a violent attack on both Hinduism and the nation of India.

The fear of denationalization in the *Niyogi Report* operates on the same level as the "demographic fear" in *Hindutva* ideology, discussed in the introductory chapters of this thesis. In addition, the denationalization of Hindus who convert to Christianity serves to provide Hindus with a threatening "Other" against which to juxtapose a new vision of Hindu identity.[281] The creation of this threatening "Other" also allows a powerful conflation of culture, religion and nationalism. This interplay is accomplished by using

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[280] Sarvarkar, *Hindutva*, 113. "For though Hindusthan to them [Muslims and Christians] is Fatherland as to any other Hindu yet it is not to them a Holyland too. Their holyland is far off in Arabia or Palestine. Their mythology and Godmen, ideas and heroes are not Children of this soil. Consequently their names and their outlook smack of a foreign origin. *Their love is divided.* (emphasis added).

[281] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 6.

political ends as a defense against what would seem to be of primarily religious concern in a secular state, in this case conversion. Through its antipathy towards the principle of conversion and not merely suspect means of obtaining converts, the *Niyogi Report* proposed a vision in which the nation of India was Hindu in nature, and then attempted to demonstrate how the attack on religion represented by conversion threatened the nation itself. The conspiracy theories discussed in the previous section of this chapter reflect the idea proposed by both the Report and *Hindutva* rhetoric, that conversion is an attack on the nation.

MB 1956 also demonstrates the intertwining of religion and culture, in particular with its consideration of the caste system. The Report accurately points out that most of the converts to Christianity came from the lower strata of Indian society and it also notes that many of these converts joined the alien faith of Christianity because of their humble place in society and the lack of status (both economic and social) granted them by both the upper castes and the government. *MB 1956* states that "there must be a thorough heart searching in the Non-Christian Communities and particularly the Hindus for finding out the reasons for the tendency of the ignorant masses to quit their fold."[282] Note that it is the Hindus, and in this case it must be the upper caste Hindus as they are not part of the "ignorant masses" being converted, who must conduct a "thorough heart searching" and tackle their own apathy towards the lot of the lower castes.

This type of language echoes Gandhi's prescription for the removal of untouchability, his idea that caste Hindus must have a change of heart and "repent" in order to banish untouchability.[283] Any attempt for the untouchables and other low castes to improve their

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[282] *MB 1956*, 40.
[283] Webster, "Gandhi and the Christians," 90.

own lot and to empower themselves or speak for themselves was not acceptable, especially if their decision was to leave the fold of Hinduism. [284]

The social and religious position in which the authors of the *Niyogi Report* place the Scheduled Castes and tribes is reflective of the place in which they find themselves in both *MB 1956* and the worldview of the Hindu Right. The Report claims that throughout their tenure in Madhya Pradesh, Christian missionaries had claimed that the tribals were not Hindus, but "animists." [285] The Committee disagrees and in a manner just like that of the authors of *MB 1956* they invoke the words of Gandhi in reference to the tribals. The authors point out that when asked if tribals in the Kond Hills area were Hindus (as opposed to animists) Gandhi replied "yes...because *I know* that in spite of being described as animists these tribes have from times immemorial been absorbed into Hinduism...their roots lie deep there." [286] The reference to Gandhi is instructive on at least two accounts. First, it is Gandhi (and the other high-caste guardians of Hinduism) who determine what religion a tribal is, not the tribals themselves. [287] In essence, Gandhi is stating that the tribals must be Hindus, whether they identify with that classification or not. Second, Gandhi's quotation identifies a perception of Hinduism, whether as culture or religion, which is central to *Hindutva* rhetoric, that is, the perception that Hinduism, absorbs whereas other "missionary" religions like Christianity and Islam divide and conquer. Perhaps most importantly, Gandhi's statement is reflective of the idea that India is Hindu religiously. It is Christianity and Islam which divides the nation. Hinduism, the

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[284] Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold,* 220 -223.
[285] *Niyogi Report,* 26.
[286] *Niyogi Report,* 26. Italics added.
[287] See Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold,* 220-223, for a parallel discussion of Gandhi's relationship to untouchables and his "refusal" to let them speak for themselves about what or who they were.

religion of the majority, a religion born and bred on the subcontinent, is what unfies the people of India.

The acceptability of absorbing the tribals into the Hindu fold, for the Niyogi Committee, is based upon two ideas. First, is the idea that the tribals have always been Hindu and were never considered "animists" or anything else until the British period in India.[288] Second, and more important, is the idea that "coercion and religious persecution have been unknown in Hindu society,"[289] which aptly describes the "myth" of Hindu tolerance.[290] Describing Hinduism as absorbing and hyper-tolerant softens the simultaneous and rather harsh claim implied by the reports that India is, despite allusions to secularism, a Hindu nation. The only way for the Hindu state to circumvent this charge of anti-secularism is to define Hinduism as simply a culture, in particular a culture which can and does absorb all religions .The language of caste relations in *MB 1956* demonstrates the conflation between religion, nation, and culture within the context of conversion to Christianity.

Conclusion II: Conversion itself the Issue

At the outset of the discussion of *MB 1956* I stated that the Report had been written in response to two accusations leveled by the general public against the Christian missionaries. The first accusation was that the missionaries were indulging in political activities. The second accusation was that the missionaries were "either forcibly or fraudulently and by temptation of monetary and other gains, converting illiterate aboriginals and other backward people and thereby offending the feelings of Non-

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[288] *Niyogi Report* 26.
[289] Niyogi Report 63.
[290] Embree, *Utopias in Conflict,* 19-39.

Christians."[291] The second accusation is worthy of further discussion, especially as this accusation further demonstrates the conflation of religion and culture in *MB 1956*.

Conversion, it has been argued, was never, at least until the nineteenth century and the advent of the Hindu reform movements, a part of the Hindu religion. The reason for the absence of conversion is the fact that Hinduism can be viewed as an ethnic religion.[292] Hinduism was confined to a particular geographic area (India) populated by people with similar religions. Conversion, therefore, was a non-issue. It was India's encounter with the Semitic religious traditions of Islam and Christianity which familiarized Hindu culture with proselytization and conversion. The negativity of the Hindu encounter with conversion was exacerbated by the fact that these two proselytizing religious traditions were asssociated with political entities which conquered the subcontinent.[293]

Hindu acceptance of conversion has never fully been realized and this realization has failed to occur for the reason that conversion itself, and not just the methods used to affect it, is dismissed. Conversion is not a part of Hindu culture and even *shuddhi* is a contested practice for many Hindus. This is because conversion goes against one of the most closely held beliefs of many Hindus, the idea that Hinduism is inherently tolerant of all religions and that it views these different religions as equal. Gandhi was a proponent of this and his words regarding the subject are quoted at the end of MB 1956.

> The different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree. Therefore, they are equally true, though being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect. It is impossible for me to reconcile myself to the idea of conversion after the style which goes on in India and elsewhere today. It is an error which is perhaps the greatest impediment to the world's progress towards peace. [294]

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[291] *MB 1956*, 3.
[292] Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 163.
[293] Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 163.
[294] From *Harijan* dated 30-1-1937. Quoted in *MB 1956*, 40.

Hinduism is phenomenally tolerant, not only of the diverse theologies which come under the umbrella of the term "Hinduism," but of all religions at the metaphysical level.[295] However, one cannot say that Hindu culture is tolerant. The reason that one cannot make the argument for Hindu tolerance at the level of culture is the pervasive nature of the caste system. It is the social structure provided by the caste system which structures and orders Indian civilization. Most Indians, especially upper-caste Hindus, have been unwilling to break with the caste system, thus the failure of most missionaries to convert vast numbers of Hindus despite the metaphysical freedom associated with Hinduism.

The social aspect of caste within Indian society has endured and will continue to endure. Furthermore, the supposedly "casteless" religions of Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism will undoubtedly continue to participate in the caste system as long as they are present on the subcontinent. What this social uniformity demonstrates is an Indian culture which is not tolerant but which has the startling ability to "encapsulate almost any religious or cultural entity without admitting any genuine dialogue or possibility of interaction at the most profound levels of human discourse."[296] Encapsulation, in the context of Hindu culture, refers to the culture's ability to "make it possible for many levels of civilization to live side by side" without allowing any real dialogue. [297]

Hindu religion is not threatened by Christian doctrine or theology. But at the "most profound level of human discourse" in the type of Hindu culture evoked in *MB 1956*, social interaction governed by the laws of caste, Christian doctrines of social equality, if

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[295] Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 30.
[296] Embree, *Utopias in Conflict*, 25-6.
[297] Embree, *Utopias in Conflict*, 25.

put into concrete action, do pose a cultural threat. Hindu culture in its totality is further threatened when these cultural threats are combined with some form of political threat. The political threat in MB 1956 is the supposed agitation for a separate state (the Jharkhand movement) by the tribal population in Madhya Bharat. The *Niyogi Report* identifies this same fear. It is for these reasons that, of the five major conclusions drawn by the authors of *MB 1956*, the first two conclusions are directed at the conversion of tribals and the conversion of members of the Scheduled Castes. These two groups, when they perform the religious act of conversion, are disrupting the social system on which Hindu culture depends. This cultural threat, when combined with a political threat, is violative of a worldview in which Hindu culture, nationalism, and religion are so closely intertwined.

If Hindu culture encapsulates rather than tolerates other religions and cultures, the logical conclusion must be that Hindu culture, when viewed from the inside, is a complete system, both religiously and socially. Consequently, Hindu culture has no need of external religious or cultural influence; neither has it any need for dialogue with these alien religious and cultural systems.[298]

Indian civilization is marked by both the perseverance and preservation of its patterns, especially in social terms.[299] What both the *Hindutva* forces and the groups and individuals antithetical to 'alien' religions and conversion have done is to give a contemporary voice to ingrained cultural and religious assumptions about the Other. This contemporary rendition of Hindu culture has allowed the Hindu Right to make claims of religious and cultural tolerance, even when their actions suggest otherwise.

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[298] Embree, *Utopias in Conflict,* 30.
[299] Embree, *Utopias in Conflict,* 24.

If an integral part of Hindu culture and religion is 'tolerance' one can see how conversion itself is the major issue for both *Hindutva* adherents and the authors of *MB 1956* and the *Niyogi Report.* Christianity is not showing tolerance for Hindu religion by encouraging Hindus to switch their allegiance to another faith community with origins outside of India. Furthermore, Christianity, with its anti-caste notions of social equality, further erodes an important social basis of Hindu culture and religion. In *MB 1956* and especially the *Niyogi Report,* disappointment with the means of conversion quickly escalates into antipathy towards conversion in general. This antipathy is firmly based in the worldview expressed in the reports which sees India as Hindu and which sees conversion as not simply a movement from one religious community to another, but a movement which strips the convert of his national and cultural identity, of her Indianness. And in a worldview that so tightly conflates religion, culture and nationalism, conversion undermines if not attacks the totality of all that is India.

MB 1956 and the *Niyogi Report* were enquiries into missionary activities within their respective borders. Although the reports made recommendations for dealing with missionaries and conversions, the recommendations were not binding and the reports dealt, for the most part, with the ideological antipathy towards conversion. In the wake of these reports, however, several Indian states put forward and enacted anti-conversion legislation and several members of India's national parliament put forth similar anti-conversion bills in the Lok Sabha. Chapter Four will examine these anti-conversion acts and bills, as well as two cases brought before the Supreme Court of India which challenged the validity of the state anti-conversion acts.

Chapter Four: Proposed and Enacted Anti-Conversion Legislation

Introduction

Concerns over conversion to 'alien' religions continued to be of concern in Indian politics, particularly at the state level. Three Indian states, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and Arunachal Pradesh enacted "Freedom of Religion Acts" to fight conversion and to protect the so-called weaker sections of society. During this same time frame, several bills were put forth at the Centre which reflected many of the same sentiments contained within the State Freedom of Religion Acts. The purpose of this chapter is to examine these proposed and enacted pieces of legislation, particularly with respect to their attitudes towards conversion and the vision of India that may inform these attitudes. This chapter will conclude with an analysis of two Supreme Court rulings on appeals which challenged the validity of the state Freedom of Religion Acts.

The 'Freedom of Religion' Acts

The earliest Freedom of Religion Act was enacted in the state of Orissa in 1967 and was entitled The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act.[300] The Orissa Act echoes the language of the *Niyogi Report*, describing its purpose as "An act to provide for prohibition of conversion from one religion to another by use of force or inducement or by fraudulent means and for matters incidental thereto."[301] On the surface, then, it appears that the intent of the Orissa Act was to prevent forcible conversions or conversions perpetrated by fraudulent means.

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[300] It should be noted that Orissa was the first state to enact an anti-conversion law *after* Independence. Prior to 1947, 17 princely states had anti-conversion laws in effect. See Neufeldt, "Hindutva and the Rhetoric of Violence: Interpreting the Past, Designing the Future," 172fn, and Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 177-179. It should also be noted that legislation similar to the state acts under discussion was proposed during the debates leading to the drafting of the Indian constitution, although such legislation was never enacted. See Neufeldt, "Interpreting the Past, Designing the Future," 162-166.

[301] Lalit Mohan Suri, ed. *The Current Indian Statutes*, (Chandigarh: Law Register Press, 1968), 4.

However, when one examines further the language of the Orissa Act the impression derived is not that conversion by fraudulent means is under attack but that conversion in general, in any form, to an alien religion is the major issue. The stated object of the Act is as follows

> Conversion in its very process involves an act of *undermining* another's faith. The process becomes all the more objectionable when this is brought about by recourse to methods like force, fraud, material inducement and exploitation of one's poverty, simplicity and ignorance. Conversion or attempts to conversion in the above manner, besides creating maladjustments in social life, also give rise to problems of law and order. It is, therefore, of importance to provide for measures to check such activities which also *indirectly impinge on the freedom of religion.*[302]

The most important point revealed by the stated objective of the Orissa Act was that conversion was seen, first and foremost, as a process which *undermines* another's faith *and* which creates maladjustments in social life. Religion and social life are inextricably linked in the language of this quotation. Furthermore, a change of religion negatively impacts the social life of the entire society. Commentary such as this leaves little doubt that this legislation was enacted not only in opposition to suspect means of conversion; it demonstrates that the issue at hand, from the outset, was conversion itself.

The prescribed punishment for converting someone via the objectionable means outlined in the Orissa Act of 1967 was a one year prison sentence, a fine of 5000 rupees or both. Interestingly, the fine for converting a minor, woman, or a member of the Scheduled Castes or tribes was two years imprisonment, a fine of 10 000 rupees or both.[303] Ostensibly, the Act was legislated to "protect the weaker sections of society" which were here defined as "women, minors and members of the Scheduled castes and tribes." The increased fine for converting a minor or woman or member of the Scheduled

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[302] Suri, ed. *The Current Indian Statutes*, 5 (emphases added).
[303] Suri, ed. *The Current Indian Statutes*, 5.

tribes or castes was based on the idea that those who convert individuals from these groups are exploiting their "poverty, simplicity, and ignorance."[304]

The language of "poverty, simplicity, and ignorance" in reference to the Scheduled Castes and tribes strikes one as paternalistic, as well as echoing the concerns of *MB 1956* and the *Niyogi Report* concerning these "weaker sections of society." The lawmakers who drafted Orissa Act of 1967 made it clear that the Scheduled Castes and tribes are too ignorant to decide for themselves whether they wish to move from one religious group to another. The paternalism of the Orissa Act of 1967 is one of its basic ideological underpinnings. As the tribes and scheduled castes are too simple to grasp the meaning of conversion, conversion can obviously only come about through suspect means such as fraud or allurement perpetrated by missionaries working amongst the weaker sections of society. Conversion, therefore, must be out of the question, with the assumption that legislating against it will protect all of society from the social maladjustments conversion may cause.

The anti-conversion scene returns to Madhya Pradesh which, in 1968, enacted its own anti-conversion act, entitled the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam. The Adhiniyam is similar in nature to the Orissa Act of 1967 and is ostensibly based on the desire to prohibit forceful or fraudulent conversion from one religion to another. The language of the Orissa and Madhya Pradesh Acts is almost identical as are the punishments for taking part in a conversion. Where the Adhiniyam went beyond the Orissa act, was in its stipulation that conversions must be registered with the District

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[304] Suri, ed. *The Current Indian Statutes*, 5.

Magistrate, who was then required to submit the register of conversions to the state government every month.[305]

The third of the three State Freedom of Religion acts was that of Arunachal Pradesh, 1978. The official title of the act is the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act. It should be noted however, that the original title of the Act was the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Indigenous Faith Bill. Under this title, the bill was refused presidential assent. After its title was changed to the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, the President of India gave his assent to the bill and it became law in the union territory of Arunachal Pradesh.[306] It should be noted that though the title of the act was required to be changed, there was no change to the prose of the proposed act.

Indigenous religions in the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act were defined in the following manner:

> 'Indigenous' means such religious beliefs and practices including rites, rituals, festivals, observances, performances, abstinence, customs as have been found, sanctioned, approved, performed by the indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh from the time these communities have been known and includes Buddhism as prevalent among the Monpas, Menbas Sherdukpens, Khambas, Khamtis and Singhpoos, Vaishnavism as preached by Noctes, Akas and Nature worships including worships of Dogi-Polo, as prevalent among the indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh. [307]

No mention is made of whether (induced) conversions from non-indigenous faiths back to the indigenous faiths listed were subject to the punishments outlined in the Act. The punishments for forcible conversion to a non-indigenous religion were similar to the punishments in the other two State anti-conversion Acts: up to two years in prison with a fine of up to ten thousand rupees. There was no stipulation for increased punishment in

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[305] *Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhininyam*, 687.
[306] Brojendra Nath Banerjee. *Religious Conversions in India* (New Delhi: Harnam Publications, 1982), 260.
[307] Banerjee, *Religious Conversions in India,* 262.

the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act for converting a minor, woman, or member of the Scheduled Castes or tribes. Additionally, all conversions were to be registered with the Deputy Commissioner of the district in which the conversion took place. [308]

Anti-Conversion Bills Introduced in the Lok Sabha

The implementation of anti-conversion legislation was much more effective at the state level than at the Centre. It is instructive, however, to examine a number of bills introduced in the Lok Sabha which closely follow the anti-conversion legislation enacted at the state level.

Several bills, which were similar in scope and recommendations to the State Acts discussed above, were introduced in the Lok Sabha in 1954 (Indian Converts Regulation and Registration Bill), 1967 (The Backward Communities Religious Protection Bill), 1978 (Freedom of Religion Bill) and 1981 (The Compulsory Registration of Religious Conversions Bill). This section of Chapter Four will briefly examine each bill.

The Indian Converts Regulation and Registration Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in 1954 by Congress member Jethalal Joshi. This bill, had it been adopted, would have had three major ramifications for both missionaries and potential converts: Individuals or institutions (i.e. Missions and missionaries) would have had to obtain a license from the District Magistrate in the area in which they were working; the district magistrate would maintain a register of conversions and the individual wishing to convert would be required to declare his intention to change his or her faith one month prior to

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[308]Banerjee. *Religious Conversions in India,* 262-263.

the religious ceremonies of conversion actually taking place.[309] Furthermore, both the license holder and the convert would be required to furnish the district magistrate with the particulars of the conversion within three months of the ceremonies taking place.

Debate surrounding this bill lasted a full year in the Lok Sabha, from December of 1954 to December of 1955 when it was finally rejected. Although the bill was general in nature and could certainly be seen as including conversion to any religion, the debate surrounding it made it clear that the bill was aimed at Christian missionaries and their "political motivations" for proselytizing. [310]

The object of 1967's Backward Communities Religious Protection Bill was the most explicit of any of the anti-conversion bills introduced in the Lok Sabha. It stated that the bill's object was to "protect the members of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward classes from proselytizing activities of foreign Christian missionaries." [311] In addition to explicitly designating foreign Christian missionaries as the major issue with regards to conversion in India, this act had direct links with both the *Niyogi Report* and the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act. The definition of indigenous faith in Arunachal Pradesh Act would appear to follow the definition of "a religion of Indian origin" in the 1967 Backward Communities Religious Protection Bill. A religion of Indian origin included "Hindu religion in any of its forms or developments," "Buddhist, Jaina or Sikh religion" and any "religion the founder of which was born in the territories of India."[312] Converting to a non-indigenous faith required the potential convert to file a

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[309] Ronald W. Neufeldt, "To Convert or Not to Convert: Legal and Political Dimensions of Conversion in Independent India," in *Religion and Law in Independent India* ed. Robert D. Baird. (New Delhi: Manohar, 1993), 324.

[310]Smith, *India as a Secular State,* 184-185.

[311] Bill No. 134 of 1967, Introduced in the Lok Sabha on 1 December, 1967, 4.

[312] Bill No. 134 of 1967, Introduced in the Lok Sabha on 1 December, 1967, 2.

written statement of intent to the District Magistrate, an investigation by the District magistrate into the "contemplated change of religion" and registration on a conversion registry. [313] No such application or registration was required for any person "whereby he takes to his ancestral religion or any religion of Indian origin." [314]

In 1978 Janata Party member O. P. Tyagi introduced the Freedom of Religion Bill, which was designed to prohibit conversions by force, inducement or fraud and to protect especially members of the Scheduled tribes and castes, minors and women. This bill contained all of the aspects included in the State Acts, including the stipulation that unlawful conversion of a minor, woman, or member of a Scheduled caste or tribe would result in double the prison time and double the fine of a 'normal' unlawful conversion. [315] The Freedom of Religion bill disappeared with the Janata government in 1980, and was never enacted into law.

Vasant Kumar Pandit's bill of 1981 called for the compulsory registration of all religious conversions. Pandit stated that "in recent times conversions have taken place on "mass scale" under circumstances which leave doubts about those conversions being not voluntary nor out of free will nor a genuine change of faith." [316] The compulsory registration of conversions, Pandit argued, would prevent such "non-voluntary" conversions from taking place.

In stating that conversions had, in recent times, taken place on a "mass scale" Pandit was undoubtedly referring to the Meenakshipuram conversions of untouchables to Islam which had taken place earlier in 1981. In February of 1981, 1100 untouchables

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[313] Bill No. 134 of 1967, Introduced in the Lok Sabha on 1 December, 1967, 2.
[314] Bill No. 134 of 1967, Introduced in the Lok Sabha on 1 December, 1967, 3.
[315] Neufeldt, "To Convert or Not to Convert: Legal and Political Dimensions of Conversion in Independent India," 324-325.
[316] Bill No. 151 of 1981, Introduced in the Lok Sabha on 11 December, 1981, p 6.

living in Meenakshipuram Village, Tirunaveli District, Tamil Nadu, converted to Islam

sparking a nation-wide debate on conversion. [317] The debate surrounding conversion

sparked by the events in Meenakshipuram was not limited to the usual suspects (The

Sangh Parivar and right-wing Hindu journalists) but came to include the Congress-led

government at the Centre and a surprisingly high percentage of the Indian population in

general.[318] The magnitude of the national debate surrounding conversions at this time

demonstrates the contested nature of conversion in Indian society as a whole, especially

amongst the majority community.

It is instructive, therefore, to examine the Meenakshipuram controversy in slightly

more detail, especially the Central government's response to the conversions. The Central

government led by Indira Gandhi accepted the argument put forth by the Hindu Right that

the Meenakshipuram conversions had been facilitated through financial inducements

provided by oil-rich Arabs.[319] Consequently, the Central government enacted the Foreign

Contributions (Regulation) Act in 1981, which prevented several organizations, in

particular Christian missionary groups, from receiving foreign financial contributions

without Central government permission.[320] The government-authored *Meenakshipuram*

Report which was published in November of 1982, contradicted both the position of the

Hindu Right and the government response to the conversion controversy surrounding the

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[317] Abdul Malik Mujahid. *Conversion to Islam: Untouchables Strategy for Protest in India* (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: Anima Books, 1989), 46. There were also conversions to Islam made by Untouchables in several other villages surrounding Meenakshipuram. See pages 47-48.

[318] Mujahid, *Conversion to Islam*, 96, 133fn.. A poll conducted by the magazine *India Today* in October of 1981 revealed that 57% of Indians polled wanted government intervention to stop conversions. In northern Indian cities, the support was 78%. The support level of 57% is very high when one considers that 38% of India's population consists of untouchables and non-Hindus.

[319]Mujahid. *Conversion to Islam*, 87-8. The issue of foreign money, and especially the government's swift response in terms of enacted legislation requiring Central government approval for certain groups (in particular missionary groups) to accept financial contributions from abroad raises the issue once again of dual allegiances. See the discussion of dual allegiances presented in Chapter 3 above.

[320] Mujahid. *Conversion to Islam*, 98.

events at Meenakshipuram in 1981. The *Meenakshipuram Report* stated that the caste-Hindus who made accusations of inducement could not provide "any detail as to "who paid whom, etc" and that, in the final analysis, it was "not possible to say in this regard anything categorically about the involvement of foreign money."[321]

Pandit's bill, with its desire to register conversions and with its language of "mass conversions," reflected the demographic fear, which has always been part of the rhetoric and ideology of the Hindu Right. Furthermore, Pandit's bill can be seen as demonstrative of the extent to which demographic fear had come to be not merely an issue for the Hindu Right, but a matter of *national* concern. The extent to which the national government and perhaps more importantly the press responded to the conversion of untouchables to Islam is telling. Approximately 1100 people converted to Islam in the village of Meenakshipuram village and the media estimated that the entire number of converts in the year of the controversy, 1981, was no more than 2900 in all of the villages in the area.[322] These numbers do not reflect a threat to the Hindu numerical majority; neither do they support forecasts of the Hindu majority becoming a minority in the future. The nationwide response to these "mass conversions" and the threat they entailed went above and beyond their numerical significance.

The responses to the Meenakshipuram conversions do provide, however, an idea of how strong a response conversion can generate in India and at all levels of Indian national life. The responses also reveal that members of Hindu society outside of the Hindu Right see conversion as something that can only arise out of manipulation or financial inducement, especially where the lower castes are involved. These responses

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[321]Mujahid. *Conversion to Islam*, 88.
[322] Mujahid. *Conversion to Islam*, 46.

fail to consider the numerous possibilities of why the conversions of Meenakshipuram took place, including the possibility that the conversions were themselves a protest against Hindu society from within. What is ignored is that the converts themselves may have recognized this factor as well, that the converts knew that by converting they would be deeply wounding those whom they saw as their oppressors and that they were conducting a psychological war against the social and political inequities of Hindu culture.[323]

Pandit, I would argue, was expressing the demographic fear which also informed the various other State Acts and Lok Sabha bills. Pandit's commentary in the debate surrounding the introduction of the bill is indicative of this fear.

> In recent years, particularly from the new census figures, we do see that large numbers of people are changing their faith. By this Bill I merely want to give the person a full chance to think over the whole thing because mass conversions are now taking place. If it is a question of one or two individuals I do not mind. But when mass conversions are taking place it definitely leaves a doubt whether it is really the result of a true change of faith. [324]

A great deal of *Hindutva* rhetoric is based on the importance of the Hindu majority and the demographic fear is implicitly based upon the fear of "what might happen if" the Hindus lose their majority status. Could India then be referred to or, more importantly, *believed in* as a Hindu *rashtra*? In this context, conversion becomes a violent attack on the *Hindutva* perception of what compromises the Indian totality. Conversion is violent because it destroys belief: belief in Hindu religion but also belief in Hindu *rashtra* and the supremacy of Hindu culture. From the response to the Meenakshipuram conversions, it is quite apparent that many Indians share this vision of India as Hindu *rashtra* with the Sangh Parivar. Consequently, conversion becomes much

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[323] Mujahid. *Conversion to Islam*, 82-85; 105-106.
[324] *Lok Sabha Debates,* Vol. XXII, December 11, 1981, 405.

more than a movement from one faith community to another; it becomes a change which undermines this vision of Indian society.

Supreme Court Rulings

Two similar cases challenging state 'Freedom of Religion' Acts (in particular the Madhya Pradesh and Orissa acts) came before the Supreme Court of India in 1977. These cases were so similar, in fact, that they were addressed by the Court at the same time. The cases involved two individuals versus their respective states, Reverend Stanislaus v. the State of Madhya Pradesh, in which the High Court had upheld the State's Freedom of Religion Act (the Adhiniyam) and the State of Orissa v Mrs. Yulitha Hyde, wherein the High Court of Orissa had ruled that the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act was *ultra vires* Article 25 section 1 of the Indian Constitution. Article 25 states that one is free to propagate religion subject to public order, health and morality.[325]

Reverend Stanislaus challenged the Madhya Pradesh Adhiniyam on two accounts. First, Stanislaus argued that the State did not have "the necessary legislative competence" to enact a law such as the Adhiniyam—he argued that such legislation must come under the purview of Parliament. Stanislaus' second, and more important objection, was that the Adhiniyam was in violation of Article 25 of the constitution.[326] The High Court of Madhya Pradesh ruled to uphold the Adhiniyam on the basis that "every person has a right to profess his own religion and act according to it. Any interference with that right of the other person by resorting to conversion by force, fraud or allurement cannot, in our opinion be said to contravene Article 25 (1) of the Constitution of India as the article

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[325] See Durga Das Basu *Constitutional Law of India.* (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India, 1978), 82, and H. M. Seervai, *Constitutional Law of India,* 1274.
[326] *Rev Stanislaus v MP, 1977* AIR S.C., 909-910.

guarantees religious freedom subject to public health." [327] What is, penalized by provisions of the Adhiniyam, argued the Madhya Pradesh High Court, was conversion by force, fraud or by allurement—methods of conversion considered to be injurious to "public health."

In the case of Yulitha Hyde, who challenged the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, the High Court of Orissa ruled against the state. In a manner completely opposite to the Madhya Pradesh High Court ruling, the Orissa High Court ruled that the Act was indeed *ultra vires* Article 25 (1) of the Constitution of India and, as well, that the State Legislature did not have the Constitutional sanction to enact such a law. [328]

The basis for the Orissa High Court Ruling was the argument that Article 25(1) of the Constitution allows for the propagation of religion and as conversion is part of the Christian religion, the right to convert is protected by Article 25. The Court also ruled, "prohibition of conversion by 'force' or 'fraud' would be covered by the limitation subject to which the right is guaranteed under Article 25 (1)"[329] Furthermore, the Court ruled that "the definition of the term 'inducement' is vague and many proselytizing activities may be covered by the definition and the restriction in Article 25 (1) cannot be said to cover the wide definition."[330]

When these two cases came before the Supreme Court in 1977, the Orissa High Court ruling was rejected and the Madhya Pradesh ruling was upheld. The reason for this ruling was as follows

> What the article grants is not the right to convert another person to one's own religion
> but to transmit or spread one's religion by an exposition of its tenets. It has to be

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[327] *Rev Stanislaus v MP, 1977* AIR S.C., 910.
[328] *Rev Stanislaus v MP, 1977* AIR S.C., 910-911.
[329] *Rev Stanislaus v MP, 1977* AIR S.C.., 910.
[330] *Rev Stanislaus v MP, 1977* AIR S.C., 910.

remembered that Article 25 (1) guarantees "freedom of conscience" to every citizen, and not merely to the followers of one particular religion, and that, in turn, postulates that there is no fundamental right to convert another person to one's own religion because if a person purposely undertakes the conversion of another person to his religion, as distinguished from his effort to transmit or spread the tenets of his religion, that would impinge on the freedom of conscience guaranteed to all citizens of the country alike. [331]

The ruling of the Supreme Court seems to suggest that there is a right to propagate, by virtue of expounding the tenets of one's religion, but no right to convert. This is an interesting argument as it appears to remove the legality of conversion through any type of mediator (such as a missionary or the zealous follower of a particular religion), and not just within the context of converting through the use of fraudulent means, which was ostensibly the purpose of enacting the State Legislation in the first place. In this Supreme Court judgment, the intent to convert impinges on the freedom of conscience of others—as such, it is not protected by Article 25 of the Constitution.

The conclusion put forth by the Supreme Court on these two cases appears to imply that conversion *only* comes about through fraudulent means, a belief implicit in both the State Acts and the Reports on Missionary activities where not just the means of conversion but all conversions were viewed with suspicion because they were seen to prey upon the ignorance of the weaker sections of society.

Conclusions

The argument that conversion itself *is* the issue to legislators is first apparent in the Orissa Act. In the Orissa Act, conversion is described as an act which undermines faith, a description which reveals a particular vision of the totality which is India. If India is seen as a Hindu *rashtra*, conversion can only be unidirectional, that is conversion to Hinduism only. Conversion to an alien faith such as Christianity or Islam undermines not

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[331] *Rev Stanislaus v MP, 1977* AIR S.C., 911.

only one's faith but one's *national life*. As the object section of the Orissa Act states, conversion "creat[es] maladjustments in social life."[332]

Both the Orissa Act and the Madhya Pradesh Adhiniyam are reflective of the "demographic fear" aspect of *Hindutva* rhetoric which has already been discussed. The punishment and fine for converting a "tribal, woman, or minor" was double the punishment and fine for converting someone not designated as a member of the "weaker sections of society." This added 'protection' for the "weaker sections of society," in particular the Scheduled Castes and Tribes was especially important in states such as Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, both of which had (and continue to have) very large tribal populations. Given the supposed extra-territorial and anti-national allegiances of Christians, conversion of a large number of Tribals to Christianity would represent a potential catastrophe in terms of Hindu *rashtra*, especially if these tribal Christians became militant. Defining the tribals and Scheduled Castes as Hindus (whether or not the Tribes and Castes chose to define themselves as such), served two purposes for the State governments. First, inclusion of the Tribes and Scheduled Castes provided, at least on paper, a demographic advantage for Hindus versus non-Hindus. This was a practical political advantage. Second, defining the tribes and Scheduled Castes as Hindus made their conversion (or even potential conversion) to Christianity that much more repugnant in ideological terms. While we cannot ignore the possibility that the Madhya Pradesh and Orissa governments actually held the belief that the Scheduled Castes and Tribes were Hindu culturally and religiously, it is impossible to ignore the possibility that the

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[332] Suri, ed. *The Current Indian Statutes*, 5

definition of these weaker sections of society as Hindu was merely a practical political maneuver based on a desire for Tribal and Scheduled Caste votes.[333]

In *Hindutva* ideology and rhetoric, as with all who have a vision of a Hindu India, one could argue that Hinduism, as a religion, is holy not so much for religious reasons but for the fact that it is of indigenous origin and either a product of or progenitor of Hindu culture. The definition of 'indigenous religion' in the Arunachal Pradesh Act, along with its original title, the Freedom of Indigenous Faith Bill, shows a strong affinity to the language of *Hindutva* as outlined by Savarkar.[334] Adherents to religions outside of those whose origins were in India could not be looked at as "Hindu" culturally even if the adherents of these religions were born in India and did indeed look upon India as their fatherland. The problem for adherents to these non-indigenous faiths was that they could never look upon India as their holyland, no matter how long such faiths had been extant in India. By focusing the anti-conversion issue explicitly on the protection of 'indigenous' faiths and the prevention of conversion to non-indigenous faiths, the Arunachal Pradesh Act is by far the most explicitly *Hindutva*-oriented of the state Freedom of Religion Acts. By protecting indigenous religion, the state can be seen, again through *Hindutva* lenses, to be protecting the nation from such 'external' and 'anti-national' threats as conversion to Christianity or Islam. Not surprisingly, while conversions from the indigenous faiths to non-indigenous faiths were seen in a negative light, conversions to Hinduism or any other indigenous faith were not—in fact

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[333] Lancy Lobo. *Globalisation, Hindu Nationalism and Christianity in India* (Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2002), 77.
[334] Neufeldt, "Interpreting the Past, Designing the Future," 169.

conversions of this nature did not even merit recognition in this anti-conversion legislation.[335]

The anti-conversion bills proposed at the Centre were very similar to the state Freedom of Religion Acts, not only in their legal language and proposed punishments for participation in unlawful conversions but also in the ideology implicit in their language. The 1967 Backward Communities Religious Protection Bill clearly demonstrates how the State Acts, the Bills and the State Reports feed off of one another.

The 1967 anti-conversion bill put forward at the centre is linked to the *Niyogi Report* (and *MB 1956*) by the author of the bill himself. In the "Statement of Objects and Reasons" section of the bill, the author, P.V. Shastri writes, "the findings of these Committees [Madhya Pradesh and Madhya Bharat] have been agitating the public mind and have been a cause of public tension also." [336] From the "public tension" inspired by the *Niyogi* and *MB* reports of 1956 came the Lok Sabha bill of 1967 in which "safeguards" for the protection of religions of Indian origin were sought. Eleven years later, the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill of 1978 echoes the 1967 bill's sentiments on the protection of these indigenous Indian religions.

The different proposed anti-conversion bills at the national level go beyond similarities in legal language and proscribing certain missionary activities. The link in its most potent form, is ideological in nature. In the ideology of *Hindutva*, non-Indian religions (such as Christianity and Islam) are alien and, as such, are contrary to national/Hindu interests. In *Hindutva* rhetoric, adherence to an Indian religion (and in particular Hinduism) is an expression of nationalism, of devotion to the nation. To

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[335]Neufeldt, "Interpreting the Past, Designing the Future," 169.
[336] Bill No. 134 of 1967, Introduced in the Lok Sabha on 1 December, 1967, 4.

convert to a non-indigenous religion is, in this regard, an act of treason.[337] Moreover,

when the Hindu right defines its ideology in "cultural" terms, as opposed to religious

terms, it is not removing religion from the equation. Implicit in *Hindutva* definitions of

Hindu culture is the importance of the indigenous religion of India: Hinduism. To

participate in the culture means also to revere and participate in the indigenous

religion.[338] Rejection of the indigenous religion is akin to a rejection of the indigenous

culture, and as a result, the nation as well. Conversion, in such a context can really only

be seen as a treasonous act.

The main argument of this Chapter is two-fold. The first argument is that it is not

merely the proponents of *Hindutva* who envision India in such a way that religion,

culture, and nation are conflated and that changing religious communities is antithetical

to this vision. Such a vision is shared by a much larger section of Hindu society, as the

proposed and enacted anti-conversion legislation, as well as the strong, negative, and

nation-wide response to the Meenakshipuram conversions of 1981, demonstrates. The

second argument is that conversion itself and not merely conversion by suspect means is

the major issue in the State Freedom of Religion legislation, Lok Sabha bills, and

Supreme Court rulings which have been examined. This argument raises further

questions about the right to convert given the legislative and judicial interpretations of the

right to propagate enshrined in the Indian constitution and India's status as a secular

nation. The issue of the right to convert is a complex one and that complexity does not

appear to be recognized by either the courts or the various representative bodies. On one

hand is the issue of the right to "convert" someone and on the other hand is the right of

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[337] Neufeldt, "Interpreting the Past, Designing the Future," 169.
[338] Neufeldt, "Interpreting the Past, Designing the Future," 169-170.

someone to convert to another religion. Implicit in both the court rulings and the language of the State Acts and Lok Sabha bills is the idea that no one (or at least very rarely does someone) actually *chooses* for whatever personal reason to convert to another religion under normal circumstances. The emphasis in all of these documents is on "force, fraud, and allurement." So even though it is stated that individuals could convert of their own free will and choice if they chose to, it is also implied that it is rarely a free choice to convert. Conversion goes against the exercise of freedom of conscience and one would only go against conscience if forced or induced to do so.

Anti-conversion and anti-Christian sentiment is not a new phenomenon in India, neither is a worldview which sees India as Hindu religiously, politically, and culturally. The implications of this vision of India for Indian power structures are quite clear. There is no place for the "alien" in this conception of India. India is to be seen as a Hindu *rashtra* wherein the majority community determines the direction of not only the culture, but also the political entity known as the nation. When one attempts to convert an adherent of one of the "indigenous religions" of India to an alien religion such as Christianity or Islam, one is violently attacking the roots of the Indian nation, or perhaps more appropriately, the roots of Hindu *rashtra*. Such violent attacks, of course, can only be retarded with a response in kind—a response of violence. This thesis will conclude with an analysis of conversion as violence.

Chapter Five: Conversion as an Act of Violence

Introduction

The main contention of this thesis has been that conversion itself and not merely conversion by suspect means of a Hindu to an "alien" religious community is the major issue for the Sangh Parivar as well as for the authors of the state government enquiry reports into missionary activities, State Freedom of Religion legislation, the anti-conversion Lok Sabha bills, and the two Supreme Court rulings which have been examined. I would also argue that the historical examination of Christianity and Christian missions in Chapter One supports the argument of opposition to conversion *per se*, in addition to providing a historical documentation of the opposition to proselytization and conversion seen in the pre-Independence period of Indian religious history. In each of these cases, the opposition to conversion itself is based on a particular vision of India,

The purpose of this concluding chapter is two-fold. The first purpose is to further explicate this vision of India, a vision which conflates the concepts of religion, culture, and nation and which has informed the rhetoric and language surrounding conversion. Though this vision is found in the government and legal documents examined, it is a vision most clearly articulated in the *Hindutva* rhetoric of the Sangh Parivar. The second purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that, in the context of this vision of India, conversion is seen as an act of violence, and to delineate the way in which this violence is understood.

Language and Rhetoric

The introduction of *MB 1956* stated that the Report had been written in response to two accusations leveled by the general public against the Christian missionaries. The first

accusation was that the missionaries were indulging in political activities. The second accusation was that the missionaries were "either forcibly or fraudulently and by temptation of monetary and other gains, converting illiterate aboriginals and other backward people and thereby offending the feelings of Non-Christians."[339] The accusation that missionary activities were "offending the feelings of Non-Christians" is worthy of further discussion, especially as this accusation further demonstrates the conflation of religion and culture in *MB 1956*.

It has been repeatedly argued that conversion was never, at least until the arrival of Islam in India, and especially in the nineteenth century with the advent of the Hindu reform movements, a part of the Hindu religion. The reason for the alleged absence of conversion up to these historical points is the fact that Hinduism has been defined as an ethnic religion.[340] Hinduism was confined to a particular geographic area (India) populated by people with similar religions. Conversion, therefore, was a non-issue. It was India's encounter with the Semitic religious traditions of Islam and Christianity which familiarized Hindu culture with proselytization and conversion. The negativity of the Hindu encounter with conversion was exacerbated by the fact that these two proselytizing religious traditions were associated with political entities which conquered the subcontinent.[341]

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[339] *MB 1956*, 3.

[340]Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 163. There are scholars who have taken issue with Hinduism's definition as "ethnic," at least within the context of conversion. The ethnic religion of Hinduism, as Smith defined it, means that conversion was a non-issue until confrontation with the missionary religions of Islam and Christianity. Neufeldt, for example, has argued that conversion or at least conscious competition between rival schools of thoughts for followers has always existed in India and that "people, including rulers, did shift allegiance from one tradition to another." See Neufeldt, "Conversion and Propagation in India,," 277-278.

[341] Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 163.

Acceptance of conversion has never fully been realized in India and this realization

has failed to occur for the reason that conversion itself, and not just the methods used to

effect it, is questioned, if not dismissed outright. Conversion, it is argued, is not a part of

Hindu culture. Moreover, conversion goes against one of the most closely held beliefs of

many Hindus, especially the Hindu Right, the idea that Hinduism is inherently tolerant of

all religions and that it views these different religions as equal. Gandhi was a proponent

of this aspect of Indian culture and his words regarding the subject are quoted at the end

of MB 1956.

> The different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are
> branches of the same majestic tree. Therefore, they are equally true, though being
> received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect. It is
> impossible for me to reconcile myself to the idea of conversion after the style
> which goes on in India and elsewhere today. It is an error which is perhaps the
> greatest impediment to the world's progress towards peace. [342]

How then are the *shuddhi* or reconversion campaigns of groups such as the Arya

Samaj and, more recently, the VHP to be explained within the context of Hindu

tolerance? For the VHP, which has renamed the process of *shuddhi* "*paravartan*" (which

can be translated as "homecoming"), the assumption is made that these converts to Islam

and Christianity, no matter how recently they or their ancestors were converted, are

Hindu culturally and they are simply being welcomed back to "their ancestral Hindu

dharma."[343] The language of *paravartan* expressed by the VHP above is instructive:

Hindu dharma is as much cultural as it is religious—in fact, one could argue that there is

little if any difference. Adding significance to this conflation of religion and culture is the

fact that the VHP attributed the impetus behind the *paravartan* movement to various

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[342] From *Harijan* dated 30-1-1937. Quoted in *MB 1956*, 40.
[343] McKean, *Divine Enterprise*, 106-107.

Hindu religious teachers (*acharyas*) and the fear of a decreasing Hindu population, the demographic fear which has been discussed at length above.[344] The homecoming of *paravartan* has a political, religious and cultural element. Still, if Hinduism is so tolerant—and conversion so distasteful—why should *shuddhi* or *paravartan* be necessary at all? [345]

The political threat in MB 1956 was the supposed agitation for a separate state (the Jharkhand movement) by the tribal population in Madhya Bharat. The Niyogi Report identifies this same fear within the borders of Madhya Pradesh. It is for these reasons, that of the five major conclusions drawn by the authors of MB 1956, the first two conclusions are directed at the conversion of tribals and the conversion of members of the Scheduled Castes. These two groups, when they perform the religious act of conversion, are disrupting the social system on which Hindu culture is predicated. This cultural threat, when combined with a political threat, is violative of a worldview in which Hindu culture, nationalism, and religion are so closely intertwined.

Ainslee Embree has argued that the type of Hindu culture advocated by Indians with a *Hindutva* type of worldview has the ability to "encapsulate almost any religious or cultural entity without admitting any genuine dialogue or possibility of interaction at the most profound levels of human discourse."[346] What this means is that Hindu culture has the ability to "make it possible for many levels of civilization to live side by side without allowing any real dialogue." [347] If Hindu culture encapsulates rather than tolerates other

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[344] McKean, *Divine Enterprise,* 106.

[345] It is important to note that (re)conversion, whether it be in the form of *shuddhi* or *paravartan* is a contested practice among Hindus, that is it is not accepted by all Hindu groups. (Re)conversion is, however, an accepted practice among the groups which advocate a *Hindutva* worldview, in particular the VHP.

[346] Embree, *Utopias in Conflict,* 25-6.

[347] Embree, *Utopias in Conflict,* 25.

religions and cultures, the logical conclusion must be that Hindu culture, when viewed from the inside, is a complete system, both religiously and socially. Consequently, Hindu culture has no need of external religious or cultural influences, neither has it any need for dialogue with these alien religious and cultural systems.[348] In fact, one could make the argument that dialogue itself can be seen as a threat to the system. Indian civilization is marked by both the perseverance and preservation of its patterns, especially in social terms.[349] What the *Hindutva* forces have done is to give a contemporary voice to ingrained cultural assumptions about the Other. This contemporary rendition of an "ageless" and complete cultural system has made *Hindutva* ideology both recognizable and intriguing for the Hindu masses. Furthermore, this contemporary rendition of Hindu culture has allowed the Hindu Right to makes claims of religious and cultural tolerance, even when its actions suggest otherwise.

Anti-conversion sentiment among the Hindu Right, even under the ostensibly 'tolerant' umbrella of Hinduism, has been heightened through the use of nationalism. The Hindu majoritarianism of Savarkar's *Hindutva* ideology successfully appropriated nationalism, making "the indigenous origin of religious (or by extension, other) beliefs, practices, or institutions the supreme criterion of value."[350] Charges of "denationalization" against both missionaries and those who converted to Christianity were easily made. Savarkar repeatedly expressed the idea that Muslims and Christians could not be considered Hindu because India was not their holyland.[351] A religious change of allegiance, therefore, also became a political change of allegiance for those

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[348] Embree, *Utopias in Conflict,* 30.
[349] Embree, *Utopias in Conflict,* 24.
[350] Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames,* 235.
[351] Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 83.

who converted to 'alien' faiths. Missionaries, in this worldview are attacking the *Hindutva* conception of India and, to a significant extent the converts themselves are traitors who can only be saved through *shuddhi, paravartan* or in certain cases, violence. .

Case Study: Rhetoric and Violence, Gujarat, 1999-2000

I began this thesis with a report of an Australian missionary, Graham Staines, and his two young sons being burned to death in their vehicle by elements associated with the Sangh Parivar, an event which can be seen as a culmination of sorts for an escalating series of anti-Christian attacks in the Indian states of Orissa and Gujarat in late 1998 and early 1999.

As heinous as this act undoubtedly was, it is the language and rhetoric of the Sangh Parivar after the Staines killings and the other anti-Christian attacks that reveals the place of conversion in the worldview of the Hindu Right and for those who have a similar vision of India. This case study will examine several examples of this type of rhetoric, which were put forth in the wake of the anti-Christian violence and its condemnation, both in the Indian English language media and internationally.

Rhetoric, as it normally does, preceeded the 'actions' against the Christian community by the Sangh Parivar, particularly the VHP. Two examples stick out as most indicative of a worldview that sees India as Hindu in all respects, as well as a worldview which sees conversion as an act of denationalization. Ashok Singhal, the working president of the VHP made the following accusations as the outbreak of the violence in the Dangs district of Gujarat commenced. Singhal's first accusation was that Mother Teresa's main perogative was conversion and not humanitarian service and that she only helped individuals who promised to convert to Christianity. Singhal also accused mother

Teresa's fellow Nobel laureate, economist Amartya Sen, of being concerned about literacy simply because it would aid in the spread of Christianity. . Singhal further charged that the media was complicit in creating an environment in which these two individuals could flourish and eventually be recognized.[352] Language such as this demonstrates two deeply held fears of the Sangh Parivar: that Christians in India (such as Sen and Mother Teresa) are not nationalistic and are concerned only with the spread of Christianity, and that the West (be it Western media or governments) aids Christians in converting Hindus and destabilizing the country.

With accusations against Christians, such as those made by Singhal out in the public domain, and with conversion becoming more and more of an issue in Gujarat, the VHP proceeded with its anti-Christian and anti-conversion campaign. According to Pralay Kanungo, "between 25 December and 3 January (1998), 24 churches, 3 schools, and 6 houses or shops were burnt, destroyed or damaged, and 9 Christian tribals suffered serious injuries."[353] Sporadic anti-Christian violence in both Gujarat and other parts of India, particularly Orissa, continued up to the time of Staines' murder on 23 January 1999, and even beyond.[354]

The anti-Christian activities were roundly condemned in the English language Indian press and by other nations, in particular the United States.[355] BJP Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee was forced to distance himself from the VHP and other members of the Sangh Parivar and assure both the Indian and world political communities that the

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[352] *The Times of India,* 30 December 1998, *India Today,* January 11, 1999, 23.

[353] Pralay Kanungo. *RSS's Tryst with Politics* (Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 252. This was not the extent of anti-Christian activities and attacks in India during this period. See also Lobo, *Globalisation, Hindu Nationalism and Christians in India,* pp. 181-209.

[354] See Lobo, *Globalisation, Hindu Nationalism and Christians in India,* pp. 181-209, for more detail.

[355] *ReDiff.com* 7 January 1999. *ReDiff.com* is an Indian on-line news outlet. For the text of this article see http://www.rediff.com/news/1999/jan/07christ.htm

minority communities in India were being protected.[356] Not all of Vajpayee's cabinet colleagues were as diplomatic, however. Union Minister of State for Human Resource Development, Uma Bharati, alleged that the events in the Dangs were minor incidents which were "blown out of proportion" and were "part of a conspiracy to defame the BJP government at the Centre and to weaken India."[357] Pressure from inside the BJP's ruling coalition as well as outside pressure from the Sangh Parivar led Vajpayee to call for a national debate on the issue of conversions.[358]

The Sangh Parivar, especially the VHP, was neither silent, nor diplomatic in responding to the controversy and various accusations made in wake of the anti-Christian violence in Gujarat, and the language in its responses demonstrates a worldview which undoubtedly sees conversion as a violent attack upon India. In an interview with *India Today*, the VHP's international president, V.H. Dalmia, after accusing the Christian missionaries in the Dangs of initally attacking "us," went on to blame Christians for stirring up discontent because they felt they will have "the best of times, and get away with anything" under the Congress leadership of Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born and (at least nominally) Roman Catholic wife of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Most tellingly, Dalmia, when asked if Christians vs. Hindus was now a political issue, stated: "Yes. We do not want to make it so, but we won't mind if it becomes one."[359]

The rhetoric of the Sangh Parivar, indeed even the language of the central government at the time of anti-Christian violence in the Dangs clearly demonstrates that conversion, especially from Hinduism to Christianity, is a political issue for those in

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[356] *ReDiff.com* 7 January 1999. http://www.rediff.com/news/1999/jan/07christ.htm
[357] *ReDiff.com,* 9 January 1999. http://www.rediff.com/news/1999/jan/09uma.htm
[358] *ReDiff.com,* 11 January 1999. http://www.rediff.com/news/1999/jan/11chris.htm
[359] *India Today,* 11 January 1999, 27.

India who see India as a Hindu *rashtra*, a state which is Hindu culturally, politically, and religiously. A religious act, conversion, is seen as a political act which destabilizes the nation, and those who convert are seen to side with foreign elements who have infiltrated and "attacked" India through forces as disparate as missionary groups and the English language media. When the deeply held belief is that India is in all respects Hindu, propagation of alien religions such as Christianity and Islam, "poses a threat to the very existence of Hindus and Hindustan",[360] even when the demographics of the situation suggest otherwise.[361] And, if your nation, your *rashtra*, your mattter of ultimate concern is seen to be under violent attack, or at the very least destabilized by the actions of missionaries and converts, how would one respond? In the Dangs, the Sangh Parivar chose a response equal to the accusation: a response of violence.

Case Study: A Hindu *rashtra*: The VHP and the Ekatmata Yajña

As a final case study, I would like to examine the VHP's response to the Meenakshipuram conversions of 1981. I have already discussed the response to these conversions made by MP's and Indira Gandhi's Congress government. The VHP's response, I believe, provides the clearest demonstration of how the Hindu Right perceives conversion as a violent attack upon India.

The *ekatmata yajña* was born out of the political upheavals surrounding Indira Gandhi's government and the State of Emergency in the 1970s. In the early 1980s, both the RSS and the VHP decided to focus on Hindu *sangathan,* or the organization of Hindu society, as a way to attract the disenchanted masses and further expand the Hindu

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[360] *Rediff.com,* 12 January 1999. http://www.rediff.com/news/1999/jan/12dang1.htm
[361] *India Today,* 11 January 1999, 27.

nationalist project.[362] The *ekatmata* of 1983 also broke new ground for the Hindu Right

by including both the lower-castes and South Indians in what was formerly a primarily

North Indian, Hindi-speaking, and upper-caste domain: the performance of public Hindu

ritual. The reason, of course, for this inclusion of the lower-castes and south Indian

communities was the 'mass' conversion of lower-caste Hindus to Islam in

Meenaskhipuram, Tamil Nadu, in 1981. The *ekatmata* truly was the beginning of Hindu

nationalist, in particular VHP dominance of public religious space in India, a dominance

which culminated in the *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement and the destruction of the Babri

Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 and then continued in the anti-Christian attacks discussed

above, and the anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002.

Ekatmata yajña can be translated as "Sacrifice for Unity"[363] and it was the VHP's

most powerful effort up to that point to publicly unify the numerous and disparate Hindu

communities under a single ideological objective, that objective being the absolute need

for Hindu *rashtra*. The *ekatmata* consisted of three huge processions criss-crossing the

subcontinent: Katmandu, Nepal to Rameshwarm in Tamil Nadu, from Gangasar in

Bengal to Somnath in Gujarat, and from Hardwar in Uttar Pradesh to Kanyakumari in

Tamil Nadu.[364] Of great symbolic significance, these processions met up in Nagpur

which is not only close to the geographic centre of India, but is also the birthplace (and

headquarters) of the RSS, and the birthplace of V.D. Savarkar, before moving off on their

own once again towards their various destinations.

The *ektamata* used three powerful symbols to disseminate its ideological

message. The first, of course, was the sacred geography of Bharat. The processions

[362] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 154
[363] McKean, *Divine Enterprise*, 115.
[364] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 360.

started and ended in major pilgrimage sites and stopped at major pilgrimage, temple and

sacred river sites along the way. [365] Thus, the procession represented a symbolic

unification of Hindu holy sites, regardless of *sampraday* association. Of more importance

was the placement of Nagpur at the centre of these processions. The sacred geography of

India now had a symbolic centre based upon the ideology of the Hindu Right. *Hindutva*

forces were giving concrete and tangible expression to their ideological desire to unify

and organize Hinduism and to achieve the goal of Hindu *rashtra*. As Peter Van Der Veer

notes, the *ekatmata yajña* was "a ritual of national integration."[366]

The second and third symbols used by the VHP in the *yajña* campaign were

"images representing the Ganges and Mother India (*Bharat Mata*) as deities." [367] The

Ganges was a wise choice as a unifying symbol because it is holy to all Hindus regardless

of community affiliation. The Ganges as deity was made all the more tangible by the sale

of Ganges water to individuals wherever the procession halted. *Bharat Mata* was also a

powerful unifying symbol. Mother symbolism and Goddess symbolism have, in India,

been linked to nationalism in the past. [368] By bringing the Goddess and Mother India

together during the procession, the VHP brought Mother India back into public

consciousness, and, most importantly, gave both the Goddess and Mother India a

particularly nationalist, or perhaps better put Hindu nationalist slant.[369]

The VHP has maintained that the *yajña* was not political in any way and that it

was strictly an exercise in national integration.[370] However, the influence of the RSS on

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[365] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 360.

[366] Peter Van Der Veer. *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 124.

[367] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 360-1.

[368] Van Der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, 125.

[369] Van Der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, 125.

[370] McKean, *Divine Enterprise*, 117.

the proceedings, to say nothing of the participation of various high-level government officials in the rituals of the *yajña,* lent it a pronounced political flavor.[371] Above all, the *ekamata* demonstrated the power of mobilization possessed by the Hindu Right. The majority community could be brought together, it could pressure the government and if it could mobilize *en masse* it could certainly vote in the same way. The *ekatmata* was, according to Christophe Jaffrelot, "the effort to construct a Hindu vote which could...defend the interests of the majority community."[372] The *ekatmata*, then, was a demonstration of a political mobilization which would only become more intense.

Through the *ekatmata yajña,* the VHP and RSS established, for the first time, an extensive network of volunteers and supporters in South India.[373] The construction of this network was important for both symbolic and more practical reasons. On the symbolic level, the South, which had to that point not been of much importance to the VHP and RSS, became the "last frontier" to be settled in terms of unifying all Hindu groups and giving them a common goal in Hindu *rashtra.* The establishment of *Hindutva* forces in the South, on the practical level, "was a significant step toward an actual 'nationalization' of the movement."[374] As time went on, local units of the VHP became more and more important in driving the ideological machinery of the organization and influencing politics at all levels.[375] By entrenching itself in the South, the VHP was guaranteeing that theirs was a voice to be heard and respected in Indian politics, regardless of the geographical region.

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[371] McKean, *Divine Enterprise,* 117. See also Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 362.
[372] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 362.
[373] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* 155.
[374] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* 155.
[375] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* 155.

Movement by the VHP into South India went beyond symbolic and temporal "union" with the rest of the Hindu *rashtra*. The VHP, through the *ekatmata*, was also able to disseminate *Hindutva* ideology in a region made receptive by recent political and religious events.

In 1981, many untouchables in the Meenakshipuram area of Tamil Nadu converted *en masse* to Islam (ostensibly in protest) to the ill treatment they received at the hands of their reputed Hindu brethren. This mass conversion sent waves throughout India, fuelling the old fear that Hinduism was somehow "under siege."[376] The VHP was especially offended by the conversions and became more and more anti-minority in their sentiments and rhetoric. The VHP combined its anti-Muslim sentiments with the demographic fear of an India "under siege" in the form of the *ekamata yajña* and other *ratras* or processions that moved through Tamil Nadu (after the conversions) in a spirit of social activism and inclusion.

In order to appear to and perhaps include their lower caste brethren in the VHP mission, the VHP sponsored two processions which traveled across the state of Tamil Nadu. Each of these processions carried an idol of the South Indian god Murugan, and at each stop on the procession route, low-caste and untouchable people were allowed to worship and perform *abhisheik* (bathing of the idols).[377] This honor had always been denied to the lower caste and untouchable communities. The VHP was protesting the conversion of the lower-castes to Islam through the processions—it was following its established procedure of inclusion, just as it had through the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams. The procession was also, however, doing much more in terms of *Hindutva* ideology, it

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[376] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths*, 170.
[377] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths*, 188.

was a political manipulation of an extremely important regional deity of caste Hinduism "traveling" across the physical landscape of Tamil Nadu in order to simultaneously counter conversions to Islam among lower and "untouchable" castes, oppose Dravidian, anti-north Indian and anti-brahmin ideology, attempt to integrate "untouchables" with an hierarchical caste-devotional Hinduism, and elide in their entirety the social and economic grievances of "untouchables" that arise from caste Hinduism.[378]

Through these *yatras* (and the *ekatmata yajña*, where the lower castes were responsible for the protection and dispersal of Ganges water from the *yatras*) the lower castes and untouchables were simultaneously appropriated by the caste-Hindu dominated VHP as Hindus, while their "brand" of Hinduism was deemed unacceptable. As Chetan Bhatt, not so subtly remarks, "the VHP has never undertaken a *yatra* that has brought the worldviews, animist beliefs, deities and secular or religious practices of tribal and 'untouchable' people to 'upper' caste neighborhoods and insisted that brahmins adopt these in place of their own religions."[379]

In *Hindutva* rhetoric Muslims and Christians are deemed anti-national because of the foreign origin of their respective faiths. As such, conversion to one of these faiths is seen as a gross injustice to Hindu "culture" and a threat to the eventual establishment of Hindu *rashtra*. Perhaps more than any other reason, this fear of conversion and its repercussions (both real and imagined) contributed to the organization and execution of the *ekamata yajña*.

Though inclusive and syncretistic in its design—the *ekatmata* was represented as a spontaneous surge of Hindus irrespective of caste, class, gender, and sect—the entire

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[378] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths,* 188.
[379] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism:* Origins, Ideologies, Modern Myths, 188.

campaign had a clear anti-Muslim undercurrent, and derived vital energy from apprehensions vis-à-vis Muslims and other non-Hindu minorities who were depicted as "encroaching" upon Hindu culture through conversion. [380]

The "undercurrent" of anti-Muslim sentiment of the *ekatmata* became the *raison d'etre* of the VHP as it organized and executed its most impressive mobilization of all: the *Ramjanmabhoomi* campaign. As tensions died down after the *Ramjanmabhoomi* campaign, Christians, both missionaries and new converts, especially those in Tribal areas, became the focus of the VHP's anti-minority activity, [381] at least until anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002.

The *ekatmata yajña* of 1983, as a response to lower-caste Hindus converting to an 'alien' faith (in this case, Islam) contains all of the attributes which I see as demonstrating that conversion is viewed as a violent attack upon a vision of India which conflates the ideas of religion, culture, and nation. First, the *ekatmata* emphasized the sacred geography of India and, thus, it also emphasized the goal of Hindu *rashtra*. Second, the *ekatmata* attempted to consolidate disparate Hindu religious communities by using common symbols/deities such as the Ganges and *Bharat Mata*. This consolidation, at least in principle, aimed to bring Hinduism, the 'common' religion of India into stark contrast with the 'alien' religion of Islam. Finally, the lower-castes and tribals were subsumed into greater Hinduism by being allowed to participate in the *abhishek* rituals, participation which had previously been denied to them. This act also provided a common front against alien religions—and kept the lower castes Hindu, whether they viewed themselves as Hindu or not.

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[380] Hansen, The *Saffron Wave,* 154.
[381] Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames,* 215.

.The religious symbolism attached to the geography of India by the *ekatmata* clearly demonstrates that, at least in part, any conception of nation or *rashtra* held by the Hindu Right includes a religious aspect. Therefore, any conversion to an alien religion is an example of denationalization, an attack on the sacred geography of the nation as well as an act that calls the convert's national identity into question. The attacks do not stop there, however. Converting the lower castes and tribals is also an attack on Hindu religion and culture. Conversion to Christianity, or Islam, I believe, sparks the fear that the lower castes and tribals will be given a voice they have hitherto not been given. Arun Shourie, a well-known journalist, politician and *Hindutva* advocate wrote in his 1994 book *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas* that "the Church is spurring movements among so-called "Dalits," etc. But many of the leaders you have patronized by helping "Dalits" speak with poison in their tongue. They advocate hatred...encouraging, projecting, assisting 'Dalit leaders'...would certainly disrupt Hindu society."[382]

What language like that of Shourie's demonstrates is that culture, religion, and the idea of the nation, are not only conflated in the ideology and rhetoric of *Hindutva*, but that a *Hindutva* vision of India cannot possibly exist without Hindu hegemony in each of these areas. A disruption of Hindu society (i.e. the new found voice of now 'caste-less' converts) is a violent attack on the societal component of Hindu culture. Demographic fear demonstrates that the Hindu Right fears a loss of political, as well as cultural hegemony. Conversion, a religious act, strikes at the base of what *Hindutva* is built upon: a culture, a nationalism, based almost entirely upon a sacred vision of India.

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[382] Arun Shourie. *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas.*(New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1994.

.Conclusion

The contention of this thesis has been two-fold: that objection to conversion is not confined to the Sangh Parivar, and that the objection is not simply to questionable means of proselytization, but to the idea of conversion per se. I have also argued that the antipathy to conversion per se is driven by a vision of India in which the concepts of religion, culture, and nation are conflated. This vision of India, essentially, defines proselytization (and conversion) minimally as an act of destabilization and maximally as an act of violence.

Conversion to Christianity (or other 'alien' religions such as Islam) has been of such consequence to the Hindu Right because it sees conversion as a violent attack upon its conception of India, a conception derived from its ideology and rhetoric. One cannot examine *Hindutva* language without seeing a religious basis for its definition of culture and the place of the caste system within that definition. Despite its claims to the contrary, *Hindutva* rhetoric also provides a significant intersection between nationalism and religion, as demonstrated by the Sangh Parivar's disdain for conversions to 'alien faiths' such as Christianity and Islam. India, for the Hindu Right is a Hindu *rashtra* and it always must. Its argument that they are speaking only of Hindu culture with regards to the idea of Hindu *rashtra* are unconvincing.

The second contention of this thesis has been that anti-conversion language has not been limited to the Sangh Parivar, and, moreover, that this antipathy towards conversion is and has been part of political discourse in India, and not just in the past decade when the Sangh Parivar has had such tangible political power. This is the point of my examination of the government Reports, Acts, Lok Sabha bills and Supreme Court

judgments. Anti-conversion political discourse finds its origin in the same place as does the Sangh Parivar's antipathy towards conversion—in a vision of India which is entirely Hindu. I would also argue that via its presence in mainstream political discourse, *Hindutva*-like ideology has become more and more acceptable in India, especially with respect to conversion. Though 'propagation' of religion is protected in the Indian Constitution, conversion, at least explicitly, is not protected. As long as this ambiguity exists, conversion will continue to be a hot button issue for all Indians and not just the Hindu Right.

For the Hindu Right and the authors of the government and legal documents which have been examined in this study, the matter of ultimate concern to them is their conception of India: an intricate weaving together of religion, culture, and nation. As long as that which is 'Hindu" can only be of indigenous origin, conversion will continue to be seen by the Hindu Right and those who share a similar vision, as a violent attack upon their most ultimate concern: a sacred India. And their response to this perception will match the importance of the concern. The response will be violent.

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