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## 1. Abbreviations

|      |   |                                  |
|------|---|----------------------------------|
| RSS  | - | Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh      |
| SJM  | - | Swadeshi Jagaran Manch           |
| VHP  | - | Vishwa Hindu Parishad            |
| BJP  | - | Bharatiya Janata Party           |
| BJP+ | - | BJP and associated organisations |
| WB   | - | World Bank                       |
| IMF  | - | International Monetary Funds     |
| OBC  | - | Other Backward Castes            |
| SC   | - | Scheduled Castes                 |
| ST   | - | Scheduled Tribes                 |

## 2. Glossary

|                             |   |   |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Golwalkar, M.S.             | - | successor of Hedgewar as head of the RSS; author of Hindu-nationalist writings such as <i>Bunch of Thoughts</i> (1966)  |
| Hedgewar, Keshav Baliram    | - | 1889-1940, founder of the RSS; Maharashrian brahmin   |
| Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh | - | most important organisation within the Hindu-nationalist movement which is not interested in party politics; founded in Nagpur in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar; ideological backbone of the movement |

- Sangh Parivar - term describing the total of all Hindu-national organisations and parties
- sarsanghchalaak - leader of the RSS
- Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar - early Hindu-nationalist, one of the founding fathers of the movement, author of *Hindutva*
- shakas - meetings of the RSS; each of the 27 000 shakas consists of ca. 50 people
- Vishwa Hindu Parishad - global Hindu-nationalist council founded with the purpose of protecting Hindu culture and religion; defines dharma as a set of duties and rules as cornerstones of Hindu society

### 3. Introduction

In an issue of the *Orientwissenschaftliche Hefte* entitled *Großmacht Indien* Rahul Peter Das made the contribution "Zentrum Asien, Peripherie Europa: Die Wahrnehmung der Rolle Indiens im neuen, internationalen Machtgefüge". In this article he postulated the thesis that European ignorance towards the status and development of India is omnipresent and that the euro-centric perception of current affairs derives from the European image of India, depending on foreign aid.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore he assumes that the change of influences of different nations and regions will lead to a transformation of understandings of justice and an makeover of political terms and their implications.<sup>2</sup> Although Das introduces his contribution by uttering his understanding of different nations/states as diverse conglomerates of individuals and their patterns of thought,<sup>3</sup> he concludes that the prime necessity for Europe can be seen in adjusting its understanding of its own and other country's power towards a more realistic approach.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, this conclusion appears to be slightly inappropriate, since a plain change in estimating India seems to be insufficient.

As a consequence, the scrutiny of formative patterns of thought<sup>5</sup> and their origins gives the impression of a more holistic and flexible change of the European understanding of India as a world power in a multi-polar world. Following this approach, this paper will be dedicated to the idea of analysing Hinduism and Hindu-Nationalism as one aspect of Indian patterns of thought, perception and self-understanding.

One mode that will be applied in order to achieve this is the analysis of different facets of Hindu-nationalism in India, leading to particular ideas about the 'West'. This must be seen as an attempt to identify sources of misunderstanding and misconceptions on both sides. Furthermore a circumscription and analysis of the Hindu-nationalist political spectrum will be carried out in order to identify patterns of

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<sup>1</sup> Das, Peter Rahul. „Zentrum Asien, Peripherie Europa: Die Wahrnehmung der Rolle Indiens im Neuen Internationalen Machtgefüge.“ *Orientwissenschaftliche Hefte: Großmacht Indien*. Rahul Peter Das & Hanne Schönig. Eds. OWZ: Halle, 2004. p. 8ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.1.

thought and the soil on which the enormous growth of the Hindu-nationalist movement could be achieved. The underlying reasons of this topical limitation on a limited number of aspects of the large field of Hindu-nationalism cannot be more obvious: The 'pantheon' of organisations and people involved in the process of formation of Hindu-nationalism is only matched by that of the various Hindu-sects, gods and goddesses and consequently, an unbelievable multitude of ideologies, opinions and political conviction.

Therefore, the structural analysis of the rise of the *Sangh Parivar* will be followed by a scrutiny of the ideological basis and the subsequently emerging world-view of Hindu-Nationalism as promoted by the various organisations. The scholarly basis of such a project can only be described as extraordinary. The amount of scholars who dealt or deal with topics such as Indian patterns of perception, western ideas of India, Hinduism as such, and Hindu-nationalist organisation is enormous. Still, the quality of these scholarly works differs widely. Even scholars with an amazing reputation such as Heinrich Stietencron fall back into the pattern of serving odd clichés such as the overestimation of India's bottomless religiosity compared with secular western societies.<sup>6</sup> In order to avoid falling into the trap of applying such stereotypes a large number of scholarly writings will be used. Ainslie Embree's contribution to Sumit Ganguly's and Neil Devotta's book *Understanding Contemporary India* offers a good introduction and matrix for the integration of publications on specific problems.<sup>7</sup> Another source of information is Henrik Berglund's *Hindu Nationalism and Democracy* that offers a magnificent up-to-date overview of the complex field of Hindu-nationalism and manages to depict relations and ties between present and past organisations of the Hindu-nationalist movement.<sup>8</sup> Further essential scholarly writings that will be used within this paper are Chetan Bhatt's *Hindu Nationalism*, Clemens

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Stietencron, Heinrich von. *Der Hinduismus*. München: C.H. Beck, 2001. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Embree, Ainslie. "Religion" *Understanding Contemporary India*. Sumit Ganguly & Neil DeVotta. Eds. Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Berglund, Henrik. *Hindu Nationalism and Democracy*. Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2004.

Six' *Hindu-Nationalismus und Globalisierung*<sup>9</sup>, and *The Saffron Wave*<sup>10</sup> by Thomas Blom Hansen.

In the following paragraphs, the analysis of perception of selfness and otherness in India and in western world in the context of Hindu-nationalism will be discussed. However, a general awareness of the fact that such an analysis is always bound to the danger of promoting certain stereotypes seems to be useful. Therefore, it has to be made clear that the images described can only be seen as one facet of a large picture of opinions and that they have to be seen as individual opinions of particular groups such as scholars or Hindu-nationalists.

## **4. Hindu-Nationalism as an Indian Phenomenon**

### **4.1. Selfness & Otherness Within the Hindu-Nationalist Context**

In a discussion on the perception of India in the Occident one has to distinguish between public opinion and scholarly discourse. Therefore the following introductory paragraphs will be dedicated to the discussion of popular opinions on India which will be followed by a scholarly discussion on Hindu-nationalism. As noted above, putting emphasis on religious and spiritual aspects of the society has been a central component of the western view on India.<sup>11</sup> Part of this non-scholarly, western perception of Indian ideas of transcendentalism is the interpretation of religious plurality as polytheism.<sup>12</sup> Beyond polytheism, the multiplicity of religions and deities has been criticised as 'disorderly superstition'.<sup>13</sup> Ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century Hinduism forms the – western – explanation of nearly all aspects of the Indian society that seem to be unfamiliar or unfavourable in terms of occidental ideals.<sup>14</sup> These prominent aspects that are explained by Hinduism are poverty, illiteracy and poor treatment of women,<sup>15</sup> but the most important feature of Indian society -as seen by the western public-

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<sup>9</sup> Six, Clemens. *Hindu-Nationalismus und Globalisierung: Die Zwei Gesichter Indiens: Symbole der Identität und des Anderen*. Frankfurt a. M. & Wien: Brandes und Aspel, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Hansen, Thomas Blom. *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Stietencron. *Der Hinduismus*. 93.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 103.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Embree. "Religion." 191.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 192.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 192.

unquestionably forms the rigid caste-system, which has become a symbol of perceived unjust treatment of individuals and unreasonable limitation of opportunities. This system of four *varnas* and thousands of *jatis*<sup>16</sup> and even people being totally excluded from that form of organisation (ST, *dalits*) is seen as a symbol of the 'retarded' Indian society. The western image of the caste-system's nature and the multitude of religious groups within India appears to be rather blurred, since religious groups and detailed knowledge about them such as their number of followers seem to be less important than a mere repetition of general opinions on India. Furthermore, it has to be said that western public discourse hardly recognises Indian discourse on this topic, or even discussions within the Hindu-nationalist political spectrum.

However, it is necessary to be aware of the difference between the India-image of a general public and the viewpoint of historians, sociologists and anthropologists. Amongst scholars the discussion on the phenomenon of Hindu-nationalism and its sky-rocketing rise to political power seems to be the most thoroughly discussed aspect of India's past and present society. Especially the xenophobic/chauvinistic elements of the Hindu-nationalist ideology seem to be interesting. The testing of India's nuclear ballistic missile was one of the first actions of the Hindu-nationalist government under Atal Behari Vajpayee and it has been interpreted as a deed of Hindu-chauvinism and as a symbol of BJP's anti-minority ideology, since the missile, named Agni<sup>17</sup> has to be seen not only as a message and demonstration of power of the Hindu-India to Pakistan, but also to the Indian Muslim population.<sup>18</sup> Still, one has to acknowledge the fact that this is only one – relatively new – outcome of an ideology that can be found much deeper, namely in the roots of Hindu-nationalism.

#### **4.2. Historical Origins of the Hindu-Nationalist Ideology**

Even within the core of the Hindu-nationalist movement, the RSS, elements of German and Japanese nationalism can be found.<sup>19</sup> The reas-

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<sup>16</sup> Stietencron. *Der Hinduismus*. 96.

<sup>17</sup> Agni is the Hindu god of fire.

<sup>18</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Berglund. *Hindu Nationalism and Democracy*. 62.

ons of this can be found within the ideological framework of the movement as constructed by its most important figure Savarkar, who, as leader of the Hindu Maha Sabha, laid emphasis on the Aryans and the North as the roots of Hindu religion and culture.<sup>20</sup> The problematic feature of this framework is that Savarkar focuses on religion and culture being based on ethnicity, blood, race, and affect.<sup>21</sup> Within this ideology it is impossible to separate culture and race from religion. Therefore he strongly sympathises with Zionist's demand for a Jewish state on the one hand.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand his conception of an organic *Volkskörper* lead him to assumption that the Indian Hindus have to be seen as being in the same situation as Sudeten Germans, whereas Indian Muslims can be compared to German Jews, who are alien to the German *Volkskörper*.<sup>23</sup> These ideas can be tracked back to one and the same core: An individual will always remain more devoted to his/her holy land than to their fatherland.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, German Jews and Indian Muslim fit the same category, since they are both more dedicated to their holy land than to the very soil they live on.

Beyond these mere ideological and strategical components of Savarkar's understanding of *Hindutva*<sup>25</sup> he demonstrated uncritical admiration for Nazism and Fascism as the coming fruition of the Aryan culture.<sup>26</sup> These features were carried on by Savarkar himself who continued to express those opinions well into the 1960s<sup>27</sup>, and by the ideological backbone of the movement, the RSS, which remains the most radical organisation of the movement until now. Using the RSS as its basis, ideas such as those described beforehand were spread through various organisations, such as the *Jana Sangh*. Within this party young RSS-men gained more and more control between 1951 and 1967. Those forces changed the goal of the party more and more towards the establishment of a new, Hindi-speaking social elite.<sup>28</sup> In order to categorize the

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<sup>20</sup> Berglund. *Hindu Nationalism and Democracy*. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. 94.

<sup>22</sup> This is especially interesting since Savarkar saw a strong Jewish state in the Middle East as a fortification of the Muslim Arabic world. Berglund. *Hindu-Nationalism and Democracy*. 69.

<sup>23</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. S.106.

<sup>24</sup> Berglund. *Hindu Nationalism and Democracy* 70.

<sup>25</sup> The term *Hindutva* can be read as Hinduness.

<sup>26</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. 108.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 108.

<sup>28</sup> Graham. "The Leadership and Organisation of the Jana-Sangh." 157.

RSS one has to recognize that they have been willing and able to participate in numerous protests against global, foreign influences. To achieve the desired outcome, the RSS can rely on a large body of 27 000 *shakas*, that give the organisation a presence in each and every corner of the state. These *shakas* are the most effective device to organise any form of anti-western and anti-Muslim protests<sup>29</sup> Organisations such as the RSS function not only as an outlet of xenophobic sentiments, but also as promoter. In this sense the Hindu-nationalist movement resembles some features of the European Nationalism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. That the utterances of Savarkar and the xenophobic rhetoric of the RSS do not stand alone can be concluded from various other prominent figures of the movement such as Chandra Bose who visited Germany and Japan during the Second World War in order to form an alliance against the colonial oppressor.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, this particular event perfectly fits Hindu-nationalist patterns of thought, since it resembles one basic principle of the ideology of Savarkar and his followers: "The enemy of my enemy is my best friend."<sup>31</sup> Apologists of Hindu-nationalism might argue that Savarkar cannot be seen as being a National Socialist, since he was much in favour of a Jewish state on Palestine territory. Nonetheless, racism cannot be defined by the race of the supposed arch-enemy. The 19<sup>th</sup> century concept of nationalism of Jews as alien to European society has simply been adjusted to Hindu-nationalist purposes. The general pattern of life as a continuing aggressive battle between people of different creed remains central.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, India as a 'Hinduised' society has to be aggressive as long as the others (Muslims and foreign invaders) remain aggressive and hostile towards India and the Hindu people. Therefore, even in 1961 Savarkar stressed his view that the democratic politicians are useless cowards. Thus, he would rather prefer the 'great leader' Adolf Hitler.<sup>33</sup> Many scholars recognised the fact that the prejudices of the movement might have changed, but that the schemes beyond remained unchanged.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, the following paragraphs will be dedicated to

<sup>29</sup> Six. *Hindu-Nationalismus und Globalisierung*. 111.

<sup>30</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. S. 108.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 103.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 103.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 104.

<sup>34</sup> Six. *Hindu-Nationalismus*. 112.

the of common features of old-guard Hindu-nationalism and new developments.

### 4.3. Continuity & Change of Hindu-Nationalism

Within the framework of Hindu-nationalism different concepts can be recognised as stable cornerstone of the movement. One of those cornerstones is the reaction to 'otherness'.

The concept of the 'other' which has to be hated can be represented by foreign investors as well as Indian Muslims. Scholars see a continuity of the leading figures, fostering these shifts of targets of xenophobic propaganda while keeping basic ideology:

“Die Proteste gegen das globale Fremde der letzten Jahre waren in entscheidender Weise von jenen Gruppierungen und politischen Organisationen der Hindu-nationalistischen Rechten Indiens getragen, die im Wesentlichen auch die innenpolitischen Umgestaltungen, Kommunalisierungen und Radikalisierungen im Sinne eines exklusivistischen 'religiösen Nationalismus' vollzogen und deren Stellungnahme gegenüber dem Globalen in Indien daher nur als eine ungebrochene Fortsetzung der von diesen Gruppierungen konstruierten und gepflogenen, wesentlich älteren innerindischen Konfliktlinien zu verstehen ist.“

This rather narrow focus on racial and cultural facets – disguised as religious aspects – of the religious right wing has not only been criticised by secular and western scholars, but also by numerous other social and political forces, including Hindu-sect officials who saw a lack of religiousness within the Hindutva-movement that might be caused by a too global definition of religion among Hindu-nationalists.<sup>35</sup> This criticism can be backed by findings that under Keshvan Baliram Hedgewar the RSS's focused mainly on militancy and physical fitness, although these dimensions of the Indian society have always been ascribed to the *kshatrian* identity. This is especially interesting, since Hindu-nationalism has mostly been identified with the *brahmanical* caste.<sup>36</sup> Other important organisations, such as Savarkar's *Hindu Maha Sabha* also focus on the cultural, rather than religious aspects of Indian society, such as a cultural resistance as the crucial dimension for understanding Indian, as well as Hindu-nationalism.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. 94.

<sup>36</sup> Berglund. *Hindu Nationalism and Democracy*. 71.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 74.

These findings are significant and interesting, since on a global level India stands for spirituality, whereas the western hemisphere represents materialism.<sup>38</sup> This dichotomy again must be seen as an outcome of fundamentally different perceptions of cultural and religions conceptions by Indian and western observers and participants. Furthermore, *brahmanical* ideas, being referred to as 'Hindu values'<sup>39</sup> can be -but do not have to be- interpreted as religious or cultural aspects of social life which leads to fundamentally different outlooks on India's social life. This claim can be illustrated by some of Savarkar's ideas concerning Hindu religion as being defined by common thought, action, achievements, history, literature, arts, shared laws, rites, customs, festivals and feasts, and the common mother tongue, Sanskrit.<sup>40</sup> It is eye-striking that not all of these features of a common Hindu religion have to be understood exclusively as being of religious origin or character. Even secular politicians might agree, that common achievements, literature and shared laws are integral features of a functioning secular society and can be associated more closely with a common culture, rather than a common religion.

Another dimension of Hindu-nationalism that has to be taken into account is the wide range of different organisation with -sometimes fundamentally different approaches. While the *Hindu Maha Sabha* or the RSS still has to be seen as the right wing, others, such as the *Jana Sangh* which for almost a decade had been considered to be liberal, were far from radical positions.<sup>41</sup> Nowadays, one can also recognise that the BJP significantly tries to downplay the card of extremist *Hindutva* policy<sup>42</sup> in order to place the party solidly within the centre of Indian society.

However, a common ideological basis can be identified. The starting point of the whole Hindu-nationalist movement can be found within the rise of aryanism in British and German orientalism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the consolidation of the 'upper' castes in colonial India.<sup>43</sup> This

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<sup>38</sup> Embree. "Religion." 191.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 199.

<sup>40</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. 97.

<sup>41</sup> Graham. "The Leadership and Organisation of Jana Sangh." 163.

<sup>42</sup> Hansen. *The Saffron Wave*. 226.

<sup>43</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. 3.

adoption of a western, rather cultural definition of Hinduism appears to be preliminarily based on common Hindu civilisation, culture, history, and most importantly a common Hindu race.<sup>44</sup> Even within this framework, as promoted by the likes of the ideal champion of Hindu-nationalism, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, anti-western sentiments are an integral component of the ideology. Western materialism maybe has conquered India, but the Indian spirituality will conquer the world.<sup>45</sup> This is especially interesting, since spiritual interpretations of Hinduism have been replaced by nearly exclusively cultural conceptions by Hindu-nationalists. In order to ensure their sole agency, Hindu-nationalists often rely on the interpretation of religious texts. However, it has to be said that these are mostly not in sync with scholar's point of view. An example of this can be found in the Hindu-nationalist interpretation of *dharma* as a force independent from caste. This assumption cannot be backed by religious writings.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, religious interpretation like the one stated above fulfil a certain political function. The inclusion of the 'lower' castes and people outside of the caste system has always been a political necessity in order to gain as many votes as possible.

#### 4.4. Theories of Nationalism

By the very name of the movement, it can be seen that conceptions and theories of nation and nationalism play a central role. Therefore, the Hindu-nationalist interpretation of Nehru's secular/territorial nationalism as alien to Indian society offers an interesting field of scrutiny. This conception has been described as imposed upon India by the colonial oppressor<sup>47</sup> in order to separate Hindu people from each other by using the principle of 'divide and rule'.<sup>48</sup> It has to be said that this explanation of the emergence of territorial nationalism cannot be backed by scholarly findings, especially because the Hindu majority benefited from the British rule in terms of administrative participation in contrast to Indian Muslims who saw a decline in political power.

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<sup>44</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Embree. "Religion." 213.

<sup>46</sup> Berglund. *Hindu Nationalism and Democracy*. 58.

<sup>47</sup> By ascribing the invention of territorial nationalism to the British, Hindu-nationalists can create hatred towards the whole conception.

<sup>48</sup> Berglund. *Hindu Nationalism and Democracy*. 78

Still, Hindu-nationalists insist on their own interpretation of India as a suppressed Hindu nation.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, the definitions of nationalism of Hindu-nationalists and the definition of Nehruvian nationalism differ widely. While Nehru defined nation on the basis of economic and social necessities such as national defence, industrialisation, public transportation, communication, and domestic trade, Hindu-nationalists stress the fact that a definition of an Indian nation is impossible without a central role of Hinduism.<sup>50</sup> These assumption lead to two integral components of Hindu-nationalism and the definition of a Hindu-nation. Firstly, the rejection of a secular state and secondly a certain policy concerning minorities. The rejection of the secular state leads to the definition of India as a Hindu-nation whose borders can be defined only on the basis of a common culture and a common religion.<sup>51</sup> These assumptions have been promoted especially by the RSS and the BJP, whose cadres consist mainly of RSS men.<sup>52</sup> In the rhetoric of these organisations the Nehruvian state and the supporters of a secular India have been denounced as non-*dharmic* and westernized.<sup>53</sup> It is comprehensible that the Hindu-nationalist propaganda in India appeals to a wide public, since the Nehruvian state faced one central problem:

"As a secular state, the government could not in any way favour Hinduism, but as a nation state it had the right and the duty to promote Indian culture, however – its art, literature, music- is saturated and coloured by Hinduism, as the European Middle Ages were by Christianity."<sup>54</sup>

This quotation is on the edge of being considered as euro-centric, giving India the role of the Hindu-reflection of medieval Europe. Nevertheless, it shows the main-dilemma of all secular states: Ensuring a common identity and culture without using religion as an integrating force. This aspect of a secular society has been attacked by Hindu-nationalist activists throughout the years following Indian independence in 1947. In contrast to these insecure patterns of identity-formation, Sarvarkar and other Hindu-nationalists try to construct a common Hindu-

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<sup>49</sup> Six. *Hindu-Nationalismus und Globalisierung*. 113.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 116ff.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 118.

<sup>52</sup> Embree."Religion." 217.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 220.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 221.

nation by using euhemerism in order to set up a common history reaching back to the Vedic forefathers of modern day Hinduism.<sup>55</sup>

„Savarkar tries to establish a twofold image of a monolithic history of a monolithic nation of Hindus and of vitality and power of Hindutva as the grand motor force of history [...] [and] must be seen as an attempt to mobilize political identification through an affective dimension based on the cultivation of a nostalgic remembrance of a fiction.“<sup>56</sup>

This statement illustrates that *Hindutva* is definitely not a civic democratic nationalism, but rather an ethnic and religious majoritarian approach, based on racial and sacred conceptions of physical territory.<sup>57</sup> Within this sphere of politics, legends are used to justify political demands.<sup>58</sup> The rejection of a secular Indian state is based on the idea that the image of this state is one of weakness, foreign domination, and fragmentation.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the concept of secularism is considered to be alien to Indian thinking. Within the Hindu-nationalist ideological framework the only possibility of a conception of secularism, is secularism as multi-religiosity.<sup>60</sup>

The arising problem of such a conception of a nation is the situation of religious and ethnic minorities, who would have to change their lives dramatically in order to meet demands of Hindu-nationalists.<sup>61</sup> In the following paragraphs the situation of religious and ethnic minorities will be analysed.

#### **4.5. Minorities & Hindu-Nationalism**

In a Hindu-nationalist understanding, the religions of the Semitic tradition form an external threat to the health of the Indian society. Especially Islam is seen as a danger of an alternative identity against Hinduism. The central assumption is that Muslims, but also Christians and Jews are more attached to their holy land than to their fatherland and therefore ruin India. Accepting Indian Muslims, Christians and Jews is only possible through a thoroughly dedication of these particular groups to their fatherland in terms of a 'Hinduisation' of their religion which would

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<sup>55</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. 91.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>58</sup> Berglund. *Hindu Nationalism and Democracy*. 75.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 74.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 79.

ultimately lead to an integration of Allah/God, Muhammad, and Jesus into the Hindu-pantheon of gods and goddesses. These assumption of Hindu-nationalist politicians is based on neo-Hindu ideas of reformist such as Shri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) who came to the conclusion that God is everything and everywhere. Therefore, his conclusion was that all religions are true.<sup>62</sup> The problematic dimension of this assumption can be seen when his ideas are included into politics, since a central dimension of the Semitic tradition is its exclusivist' approach that – judged from a Hindu perspective – appears as one of bigots.<sup>63</sup> The complexity of the problem is heightened by the Hindu-nationalist exclusion of a secular state as alien to Indian/Hindu society. This understanding of society and state leaves little hope for a multi-cultural state.<sup>64</sup>

Another problem of minorities in India is the fact that the ideology of the rigid caste system is transferred into the sphere of religious conversion. Hinduism is acquired genetically through birth and therefore conversion is not possible within one life. By means of thorough research, observers may also find the ideological/political background of this assumption: Conversion is seen as a destructive force that endangers the social cohesion. Even Gandhi was of the opinion that Christian Indians tended to becoming denationalised. This argument has repeatedly been deployed by Hindu-nationalist<sup>65</sup> and marks a central outcome of the attempt to ensure social/national cohesion through definition of 'selfness' through denunciation of other religious groups as being disloyal to their fatherland.

Nevertheless, the emergence of the Hindu-nationalist ideology towards minorities must be seen as a consequent development. While Nehru attempted to ensure social cohesion – not only among the majority of Hindus, but also between different religious groups – through the construction of the common foe, the colonial oppressor, Indira Gandhi could not follow this path, since the image of the British oppressor began to blur relatively fast. In the 1980s she attempted to gain political ground through intervention in religious, regional conflicts on a national level in favour of Hindus. Furthermore she stressed the necessity of minorities to

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<sup>62</sup> Embree. "Religion." 213.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 226

<sup>64</sup> Berglund. *Hindu Nationalism and Democracy*. 70.

<sup>65</sup> Embree. "Religion." 225.

adapt to the religious circumstances of a majoritarian Hindu society.<sup>66</sup> These developments were reinforced under Rajiv Gandhi who introduced the model of a synthesis of neo-liberal belief in the corrective power of the markets and a national culture based on *brahmanical* Hindu values.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, Clemens Six came to the following conclusion:

“Mit dem Abbröckeln dieses politischen Zentrums (Congress Party) fiel jene integrative Kraft der politischen Mitte weg, die bislang mehr oder weniger erfolgreich und konsequent für einen Ausgleich zwischen den sozialen Bevölkerungsgruppen gesorgt hatte. Der Aufstieg der Sangh Parivar brachte mit dem Primat der Religionszugehörigkeit einen neuen, bisher nur latent wirksamen Maßstab der Fragmentierung in der Innenpolitik, der die Gestalt dieser in den 80er und 90er Jahren ausmachte.”

The interesting point here is, that this decline of Congress from the dominant political force to a competitor of the BJP and other parties can be tracked back to Congress' attempts to gain votes from the Hindu majority. Rajiv Gandhi managed to ensure social cohesion, but strengthened Hindu-nationalist forces by giving their ideology the necessary legitimacy. In a next step, the RSS and other organisation enriched the approach described above with figures on the higher average earnings of Muslims in order to paint an image of a cultural battle as a fight of distribution.<sup>68</sup> The aim of the Hindu-nationalist movement is to provide the Indian majority with an opportunity to escape the feeling of dislocation that came along with a widening of opportunities through the process of globalisation.<sup>69</sup>

In the field of minority politics, the main demand of Hindu-nationalists is to cut back the quota-policy that ensures the representation of religious groups, proportional to their occurrence in India or a particular region.<sup>70</sup> As a consequence of this policy, especially small minorities might not be represented through the constitutional body. This will ultimately lead to a creeping discrimination of minorities in India.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Six. *Hindu-Nationalismus und Globalisierung*. 124ff

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 132.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 135.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 142.

<sup>70</sup> Embree. “Religion.” 225.

<sup>71</sup> Six. *Hindu-Nationalismus und Globalisierung*. 121

#### 4.6. Hindu-Nationalism & Islam

A minority that has to face special hostility of Hindu-nationalists are the Indian Muslims which are seen as “our forlorn brother.”<sup>72</sup> This world-view depicts the Indian Muslims as the prodigal sons whose minds have been corrupted by an alien religion. Therefore these elements of the Indian society constitute an internal threat that is nourished by illegal immigration from East Pakistan.<sup>73</sup> As a consequence Hindu-nationalists favour an immigration policy biased in favour of Hindu immigrants<sup>74</sup> In combination of an understanding of Hinduness that is mainly based on culture, blood and heritage, an immigration into India from Pakistan or occidental countries appears to be nearly impossible. Indian Muslims and Pakistan form the major enemy against whom the construction of a Hindu identity should be built up. This became obvious through the nuclear tests in 1998, shortly after the BJP had won the national elections. This nuclear test was followed by numerous celebrations throughout India. The detonation was interpreted as India's emergence as a global super-power and most importantly as a necessary act that puts the arch-enemy Pakistan in 'her place'.<sup>75</sup> According to the Hindu-nationalist ideologists, Pakistan and her treacherous accomplices, the Indian Muslims which are seen as a 'fifth column', lead to Hinduism being threatened by extermination. As a consequence of this threat Hindu-nationalists formulated the demand for the militarisation of all male Hindu-citizens aged fourteen upwards. These assumptions and the subsequent demands of Hindu-nationalists must be perceived as severe discrimination and provocation against Indian Muslims.<sup>76</sup>

This discrimination which culminated in communal violence between Hindus and Muslims leads to another dangerous development. The radicalism of the arguments strengthens orthodox forces among Hindus, as well as Muslims which leads to more and stronger tensions between the religious groups.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, one has to admit that these tensions are by no means a new phenomenon and that they cannot be related directly

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<sup>72</sup> Berglund. *Hindu Nationalism and Democracy*. 77.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 77.

<sup>74</sup> Hansen. *The Saffron Wave*. 220.

<sup>75</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 78.

<sup>77</sup> Six. *Hindu-Nationalismus und Globalisierung*. 124.

to the rise of the BJP in the 1980s and 1990s. Already in the 1920s frequent riots with much loss of life could be observed. Finally, these tensions of communal violence led to the separation of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947.<sup>78</sup> Unfortunately, the separation of the subcontinent proved to be insufficient in terms of easing the communal tensions. Even today provocations between the religious groups can be found. Examples of these are Hindus organising processions, marching through streets, playing music in front of mosques. Nevertheless, provocations can also be found with Muslims slaughtering cows in order to incite Hindus.<sup>79</sup> What can be said is that Muslims and Hindus have a very special and difficult relation. Reasons can be found in the common past and the different perspective on the period of Muslim rule.

The most outstanding difference between the viewpoint of Hindus and non-Hindus is that according to Hindu-nationalist ideology there was no Muslim period in India's history, but rather a long history of foreign aggression towards the glorious Hindu-culture.<sup>80</sup> This period of foreign aggression has been parcelled from the 11<sup>th</sup> until the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as one single war between indigenous Hindus and Muslim invaders and tyrants.<sup>81</sup> This struggle is described as monstrously unequal, since India was pitted against 'nearly all of Asia' followed by 'nearly all of Europe'.<sup>82</sup> The arising question at this point is – following Hindu-nationalist patterns of thought – what was the *karma* of Hindus that they deserved nearly a millennium of uniquely monstrous oppression?<sup>83</sup> Unfortunately, this question has never been discussed, neither by Savarkar, nor by later outstanding ideologists of Hindu-nationalism.

However these ideas were relatively unimportant, if they did not contradict the opinion of anthropologists, historians, and theologians alike. According to most scholars Islam is firmly rooted in the Indian society. The theory of a millennium of oppression is mainly based on three false

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<sup>78</sup> Embree. "Religion." 215.

<sup>79</sup> Six. *Hindu-Nationalismus und Globalisierung*. 215.

<sup>80</sup> Berglund. *Hindu Nationalism and Democracy*. 78.

<sup>81</sup> This perspective was promoted especially by Savarkar and his Hindu Maha Sabha. Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. 92.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 92.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 94.

assumptions of the relation between Hindus and Muslims. Firstly, that there is a legacy of thousand years of hatred. Secondly, that the Muslim invaders offered the defeated people the choice of conversion to Islam or the sword,<sup>84</sup> and thirdly, that there was a widespread destruction of Hindu-temples by the new Muslim rulers.<sup>85</sup> The myth of oppression by Muslim rulers has been invented to disguise the legacy of coexistence between Muslims and Hindus. The Arabs who arrived on Indian soil in the 8<sup>th</sup> century came to the subcontinent as traders and, unfortunately, then sought to improve their status through military conquest. The Turkic intrusion, anachronistically, has also been interpreted as a clash between religions, but one has to admit that much of the Indian life remained unchanged due to the fact that the majority of Indian people remained Hindu.<sup>86</sup>

Reasons of this anachronistic interpretation of history can be found in Hindu-nationalist attempts to construct Hindu unity between the different castes and sects. The difficulties of this project will be depicted in the next few paragraphs.

#### **4.7. Hindu-Nationalism as Integration**

The Indian Muslims and Muslims in general are the most prominent group symbolising 'otherness' in contemporary India. This is especially true after the end of British colonial rule. Nevertheless, in order to create a Hindu identity of 'selfness' Hindu-nationalists need the Muslims as the binary opposite of Hinduness in a religious dichotomy. The basic ideas underlying such an approach can best be depicted by a quotation of Savarkar:

"Nothing can weld peoples into a common nation and nations into a common state as the pressure of a common foe."<sup>87</sup>

In order to achieve unity among Hindus, Hindu-nationalists try to construct an anachronistic history of the devastating rule of a common Islamic enemy of all Hindus. The basis of this attempt to unite all Hindus is a -still present- situation of different sectarian doctrines of different

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<sup>84</sup> Although there is little evidence of large-scale forced conversions.

<sup>85</sup> There was a destruction of Hindu temples, but not a widespread one, as the number of still existing Hindu temples suggests. Embree. "Religion." 204.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 204ff.

<sup>87</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. 92.

groups of Hinduism contradicting each other in terms of belief, religious practice, and caste. A good example of these differences are the opposing world-views of Sanatanists and Aryas.<sup>88</sup> There are scholars who believe that Savarkar developed *Hindutva* in order to overcome these religious and cultural boundaries.<sup>89</sup> Hence, the common enemy had to have a central position within the ideological framework of the movement.

However, there is not only need for integration of the different Hindu sects, but also of the different social strata and the castes. Nevertheless, a general ambiguity concerning the caste system can even be found among Hindu-nationalists. The BJP promotes a unity of all Hindus, but is generally associated with hegemony of the *brahmanical* nobility. The attempts to overcome this dichotomy is based on the strategy of stressing common features and the argument that it would be wrong to put the whole concept of Hinduism at risk only because of the caste system.<sup>90</sup>

Therefore, the BJP attempts to include members of the lower castes and outside the caste-system in order to give the party the appearance of advocates of the lower classes of the Indian society.<sup>91</sup> There were also attempts to integrate *dalits* through celebration of the Dr. Ambedkar whose guidance of many Hindus to conversion to Buddhism has been interpreted as a strategy to prevent a conversion to Islam.<sup>92</sup> Generally, the strategy on this topic is marked by a double discourse by the Hindu-nationalist organisations, since different wings of the movement have widely differing opinions on the topic.

On the one hand, one can find severe criticism that heads into the direction that in a modern Hindu society there would be no place for untouchability and that this change of present day Hinduism is not only possible, but necessary, since the source of power of Hinduism has always been its infinite capacity for change.<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, the RSS members within the BJP believe that the involvement of BJP activists in massive corruption affairs can be tracked back to the growing

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<sup>88</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism..* 85.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 85.

<sup>90</sup> Six. *Hindu-Nationalismus und Globalisierung.* 138ff.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 139.

<sup>92</sup> Hansen. *The Saffron Wave.* 226.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 227.

proportion of low-caste or casteless politicians within the BJP that are lacking intrinsic moral obligation of *brahmanical* activists.<sup>94</sup>

This illustrates a viewpoint on the caste system that is marked by the general believe of the *brahmanical* RSS-cadres that a clean society can only be ensured by the morally superior *brahmans*. These ideas can also be found in the ideology of Savarkar, since he defended a caste system founded on a hierarchically conceived nobility. Furthermore, he believed in the purity of the upper caste.<sup>95</sup> The arising question is, how these dimensions of Hindu-nationalism discussed above are reflected by the BJP's rise to power and the nature and structure of the BJP voters, as well as supporters of the whole movement.

## 5. Hindu-Nationalism & Party Politics

Accordingly, the following section of this paper will be dedicated to the political landscape of India. Within the discussion of this topic, it is not only the BJP that is of interest, but also its associated organisations (BJP+). Moreover, the alterations of the electoral behaviour and regional differences will be analysed.

An interesting aspect of the rise of the BJP is the fact that the development from a relatively unimportant small local party in the Hindu heartland to a major political force took place in three steps that can be identified easily. The first wave can be found in the late 1950s and the early 1960, when the BJP's historical predecessor, the *Jana Sangh*, became a noticeable political force against the Nehruvian secular state in certain Hindu dominated areas in India.<sup>96</sup> The second wave can be seen in the acquisition of new territory after 1980 which have been described as secondary states. Thirdly, one has to take into account the rise of the BJP in the 1998 election were the BJP won due to their political growth in the so called tertiary states.<sup>97</sup>

Generally, it can be said that members of the upper caste are by far most likely to vote for BJP.<sup>98</sup> The upper castes have been voting *Jana*

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<sup>94</sup> Hansen. *The Saffron Wave*. 222.

<sup>95</sup> Bhatt. *Hindu Nationalism*. 95.

<sup>96</sup> Heath. "Anatomy of BJP's Rise to Power." 233.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* 233.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 236

*Sangh* and BJP+ for the last thirty years. This has to be interpreted as expressing a strong degree of continuity. Irregardless, it has to be said that the proportion of upper caste BJP+ voters has fallen by 10% since 1990. The reason of this is not a declining BJP+ vote amongst upper caste Indians, but a growth among the lower castes.<sup>99</sup> However, one has to be aware of the fact that there are huge differences between the different regions.

The caste seems to be less important in states that were infiltrated by the BJP only recently.<sup>100</sup> Accordingly, one has to say that downplaying the card of caste differences is a major aspect of the BJP+ success in the tertiary and secondary states. This seems to be quite an important aspect of the Hindu-nationalist quest for national recognition, since the BJP largest total of votes comes from these tertiary states.<sup>101</sup>

## 6. Résumé

Even though the governance of the BJP came to an end, the rise of Hindu-nationalism still must be seen as a central dimension of a changing Indian political landscape. The Congress party and other organisations had to adjust their rhetoric and their platforms in order to be able to compete with BJP+, which is especially interesting since the growing religiousness in Indian politics must be seen as a process which has been started by the Congress party. Today Hindu-nationalism is a central dimension of the daily life of one of the world's fast growing super powers. Therefore, a basic understanding of the patterns of thought of the Hindu-nationalist movement has to be seen as an important subject of the humanities as well as diplomatic discourse.

In order to identify those patterns one has to look at central topics of the Hindu-nationalist agendas of organisations such as the BJP and the RSS. It can be said that minority-rights, Hindu unity and Hindu self esteem form central components of the Hindu-nationalist ideology. In order to avoid misunderstandings, one has to be aware of the fact that the perception of Indian history as one of permanent struggle against foreign

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<sup>99</sup> Heath. "Anatomy of BJP's Rise to Power." 237.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 250.

<sup>101</sup> Although the proportional support is still strongest in primary states. Heath. "Anatomy of the BJP's Rise to Power." 241.

aggressors collides with the western view of Indian history of foreign domination. In this context it is especially interesting that the Indian understanding of a glorious Hindu legacy is used as a basis of political demands. Consequently, these rather chauvinistic preconditions that are neither in sync with those of minorities in India nor with those of the Occident lead to different assumptions of the patterns of integration of minorities in India and fundamentally different expectations in an international discourse.

Interestingly, there is a common basis that can be identified. Both, Hindu-nationalism and European-style nation building are mainly based on the ideas of 19<sup>th</sup> century European nationalism. Nevertheless, this concept is combined with fundamentally different general conditions. Within the Indian context, a western-style secularism is virtually unthinkable. Even Gandhi did not believe in a secular state. Consequently Nehru's attempt to establish such a state, exclusively based on rational need for cooperation, failed.

There are numerous reasons why this project of establishing a secular nationalism was doomed to fail in India. Most scholars would possibly opt on an explanation based on the assumption that there are fundamental social and ideological differences between India and Europe. This difference can be found in the European enlightenment, a period that is lacking an equivalent in Indian history<sup>102</sup>.

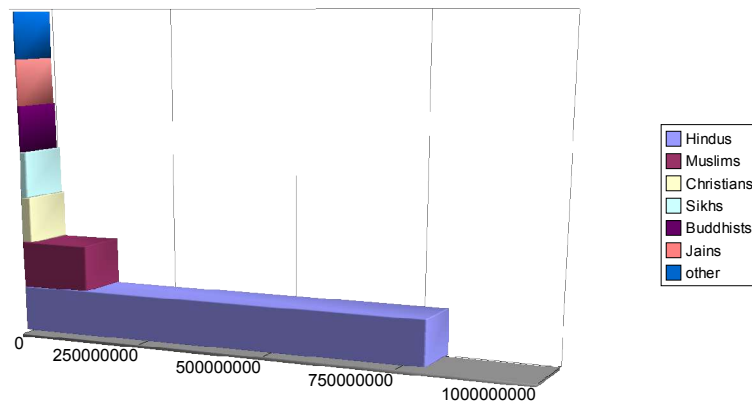
This assumption should not be read as a value judgement. It rather should be seen as an attempt to explain, that different concepts of nation could be developed on the basis of the same principles. It seems to be inappropriate to promote a superiority of the European, secular conception of nation and state. This should be avoided. Moreover, one has to understand that the inclusion of these cultural and racial conceptions in the process of nation-building lead to a problematic constellation in India in terms of minority rights and relation to foreign influences. Another source of problems is the collision between the

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<sup>102</sup> It seems to be to far fetched to see Hindu-reformism as an equivalent to the European enlightenment. At best Hindu-reformism matches a few aspect of the European reformation.

Hindu-nationalism conception of religion as a more or less individual affair and the Judeo-Christian tradition of a monolithic truth.

Consequently, the principles of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are



seen as intolerant. This leads to a difficult relationship, especially between Hindu-nationalists and Muslim. As a reason of this, the mere amount of Indian Muslims can be identified.

### III. 1: followers per religion in India

Due to the large proportion of the Muslims of the Indian population, it can be said that their principles and religious rules take a more prominent spot than those of marginal religions such as Zoroastrians.

But even beyond the conflicts of communalism the religious Hindu right plays a central role in Indian society. It is understandable that the conservative forces try to participate in the process of liberalisation of the Indian society in order to affect the ongoing processes. Nevertheless, the Hindu-nationalist organisations express different points of view in the ongoing discourse, especially in the discussion on the caste-system. While some stress Hinduism's extraordinary capacity of change, other Hindu-nationalists say that a discussion on one dimension of a society should not put the whole society at risk. A third group believes that only the moral superiority of an upper-castes leadership gives the Hindu-nationalist movement the opportunity to fight the evil of corruption. This illustrates that it is impossible to give a general position of Hindu-nationalists in this discourse. As the main reason of this, can be said that it is not only difficult to differentiate between different political opinions within the Hindu-nationalist movement, but almost impossible to relate

those opinions to the different religious backgrounds – especially different sects – of the activists. Furthermore, the different opinions on several crucial topics in an ongoing Indian social discourse fulfil the function of meeting the demands of the different voters of the BJP+ clientèle. In this context the different upper caste/lower caste/casteless ratio in primary, secondary, and tertiary states should be named.

Unfortunately, important aspects of Hindu-nationalism, such as the connection between the rise of the BJP+ and the economic liberalisation of the Indian market und premisses of the WB and the IMF could not be discussed thoroughly in this paper. Furthermore, it would be necessary to compare the political demands and world views of different Hindu-nationalist organisations with the original Vedic texts in order to differentiate between demands that are rooted within the Hindu-belief-system and anachronistic misinterpretations of religious texts. Another aspect that would be important is a comparison of different Hindu-nationalist organisations of the BJP+ spectrum, in order to differentiate between liberal and conservative forces. These aspects should be of interest for an upcoming scholarly discourse.

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