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Harmony of Religions in Secular Nepal”

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List of Abbreviations

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party

CA: Constituent Assembly

CPN-(Maoist): Communist Party of Nepal, (Maoist)

CPN-UML: Communist Party of Nepal, United Marxist Leninist (See also, UML)

HSS: Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh

ISI: Inter-Services Intelligence

JTMM: Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha

MJF: Madheshi Janadhikar Forum

MNLF: Madheshi National Liberation Front

MP: Member of Parliament

NDA: Nepal Defence Army

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

OBC: Other Backward Class

PADT: Pashupati Area Development Trust

RPP: Rashtriya Prajatantra Party

RSS: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

SPA: Seven Party Alliance

UCPN-M: Unified Communist Party of Nepal, Maoist

UML: Communist Party of Nepal, United Marxist Leninist

UP: Uttar Pradesh

VHP: Vishwa Hindu Parishad

WHF: World Hindu Federation

I. Introduction

Nepal has previously not been associated with radical, militant Hindu nationalist groups, unlike its neighbor India where the rise of the Hindu right to mainstream politics has been much discussed ever since the late 1980s and early 90s. However, after the developments that led to the end of King Gyanendra's short authoritarian rule and a peace agreement with the Maoist insurgents following a ten-year-long civil war in 2006, Nepal suddenly witnessed the emergence of these forces into the public arena. These Hindu nationalist groups were reacting to a declaration made by the interim government that changed Nepal from a Hindu Kingdom first into a secular constitutional monarchy and later in 2008 into a secular republic. Ever since 2006, groups supporting a return to a Hindu kingdom or nation have been arranging protest marches and threatening a change into the relatively peaceful inter-religious relations of the country. This thesis examines the reactions these groups have had to secularism and how the present situation can be expected to affect the relations between different religious communities in Nepal.

While the militancy and aggressiveness of these groups has largely been a new phenomenon in Nepal, the Hindu nationalists of India have had a historical relationship with the Nepalese polity that extends all the way to the 1940s when the autocratic Rana regime of Nepal and the Indian Hindu nationalist party Hindu Mahasabha forged a mutually beneficial relationship in opposition to secular forces in both countries. These ties became more pronounced with the coup of King Mahendra in the 1960s when the king actively sought the support of the Indian Hindu nationalist organizations, also known as the Sangh Parivar, to gain legitimacy for his rule. Later in the 1990s Nepalese branches of these organizations were launched in the country as a response to the state relaxing its policy towards conversions - the fear of which has always been at the heart of the Hindu nationalist ideology. This ideology, also known as Hindutva, has its roots in India in the 19th century Hindu socio-religious movements and the 1920s – a time when it developed more specifically as a political response to both the secular nationalism of the Congress Party, most prominently spearheaded by Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Khilafat movement of the Muslims. The core of the ideology lies in a majoritarian concept of a Hindu *rashtra* or

nation that excludes all groups that adhere to religions that have their origins outside of South Asia, meaning of course mainly Muslims and Christians. The Bharatiya Janata Party, a political front of the Hindutva forces, rose to power in India in the 1990s, and subsequently the tremendous popularity of the Hindutva ideology, termed the “saffron wave”, was followed by some of the worst incidents of communal violence since independence. These violent incidents are often provoked by the Sangh Parivar activists, and in some cases they have even been preplanned and actively tolerated by a BJP-led state government. In Nepal the Hindu nationalism promoted by the state was, however, in the beginning quite different from the Hindutva ideology, as it centered on rigid casteism, which the Hindutva ideology at least claims to oppose. Ever since the 1960s there has been a constant rapprochement towards Hindutva from the side of the Nepalese state. This Hindutva-ization of the Nepalese polity did not, however, lead to the kind of a saffron wave or mass mobilization at the grassroots level that has been witnessed in India.

While a great deal has been written about nationalism in Nepal, much of the work has concentrated mainly on the relation between the state and minority ethnic groups, also known as the Janajatis (for example, Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton 2008). The Hindu bias of the state has also been the center of some studies (for example, P.R. Sharma 2004; S. Sharma 2002; Toffin 2006), but the state’s tie-up to the Indian Hindutva organizations has received very little scholarly attention. The Hindu and minority mobilization around a debate about secularism in 1990 has been well documented (Hoftun, Reaper and Whelpton 1999; Bouillier 1997), but a deeper study on the general phenomenon of Hindutva in Nepal has been missing. The aim of this thesis is to attempt to fill this gap by firstly, examining the history of the relations between the Nepalese state and the Sangh Parivar, and secondly, by looking at the Hindutva rhetoric and strategies that emerge in the new secular context with regard to the Muslims, Christians and other minorities. The main purpose is to try and examine whether a mass mobilization in the name of Hindutva has the potential to take place in Nepal now in a political climate where the traditional state-propagated nationalism has been challenged by minority groups.

The main research questions are as follows:

- How is the Hindu right reacting to secularism in Nepal?
- Can the popularity of the Hindutva ideology be expected to rise significantly, thus leading to an increase in religious violence?

In addition, the following smaller questions will be addressed

- What consequences do the Hindu nationalists see secularism having for the inter-religious relations in Nepal?
- What potential threats to Hinduism are identified in the Nepalese context?
- How is a Hindu Rashtra legitimized in a multi-ethnic, -religious and –cultural country?
- How will the Hindutva groups attempt to mobilize the Nepalese people?

My hypotheses were that the Hindu nationalists feel threatened by the fall of the Hindu Kingdom and they are now turning more radical in their rhetoric and activities. They see “foreign” religions such as Islam and Christianity as a threat to Hinduism because they fear that the followers of these religions will increase their proselytizing activities. Hence, they are turning to intimidation through violence and propaganda, which has the potential to harm the inter-religious relations in the country.

This thesis is divided into three main parts. The first part traces the history of Hindu nationalism both in India and in Nepal, all the way to the present. Nepalese history is given more attention, and the analysis goes more into detail about political developments and minority assertions. The second part deals with the reaction to Nepalese secularism, both on the rhetorical and practical level. At last, the third part examines the way propaganda is used to construct an idea of threatening Others versus a Hindu majority.

Research Methods

I started my research by consulting secondary literature on Hindutva, Nepali nationalism and religious minorities. I concentrated first mainly on extracting the differences and similarities between the Hindu nationalist experiences of India and Nepal. This helped me in placing much of the data I later gathered from my interviews into the right perspective

and proved to be quite central to many of the observations and arguments that developed. Hence, a comparison between the Indian and Nepalese contexts forms a crucial part of my work.

My field visit to Nepal lasted about two months from 14th of February 2011 to 12th of April 2011, and during this time I conducted altogether 21 interviews in Kathmandu and Birgunj. Because the southern border region to India, known as Terai (also Tarai), is considered the area where the Hindutva groups of Nepal are most active, I thought it important to visit also this area even though these groups are also well represented in Kathmandu. I chose Birgunj mainly because many Hindu protests have taken place there in the past. I also managed to make contacts that helped me in accessing the field better there than for example in Nepalgunj, another Terai town known for its Hindutva activism. My visit to Birgunj was, however, extremely short compared to the time I spent in Kathmandu, and in retrospect a longer stay in the Terai would, of course, have yielded much more information, especially with regard to the Madheshi movement that has become central to the political tactics of the Hindutva groups.

I interviewed mainly leaders of various Hindutva-oriented organizations and political parties, such as the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, Shiv Sena Nepal, the World Hindu Federation and Nepal Janata Party, all with close contacts to the Indian Sangh Parivar. I also interviewed leaders of minority religious organizations and members of the Inter-religious Council, an organization which aims to promote interfaith dialogue and peace in Nepal. I also managed to gain access to an education center run by the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh for the ethnic minorities, or Janajatis, of Nepal in Kathmandu where I was able to observe a *shakha*, a daily training session. I briefly conducted participant observation there.

I used semi-structured interviews, consisting of mainly open-ended questions, and codified and analyzed them with the help of grounded theory, as described by Bernard and Ryan (2010). Even though I formulated a hypothesis at the start of my research, I did not apply it to the interview analysis. I felt that the grounded theory method which lets “understanding emerge from the close study of texts” suited the topic of my interviews better than a

deductive method (ibid.288). Most of the interviews were conducted in English, but some of them, mainly those that took place in Birgunj, were carried out either partly or completely in Hindi. I had an interpreter available to help me in both formulating my questions and making sure everything was understood. The recorded interviews were later transcribed and translated into English by myself, at times using the help of a native speaker.

What leads to Hindutva's rise?

The central question for this thesis is to analyze whether the present conditions in Nepal provide a framework in which the popularity of the Hindutva ideology can be expected to rise significantly among the public, thus leading to an increase in inter-religious violence. The reasons that have led to the rise of Hindu nationalism in India have been a topic of some scholarly debate, with some attributing it to being a natural outcome of the organizational strategies adopted by the Hindutva organizations and the utilization of new political tactics (Jaffrelot 1996; Basu et al. 1993), while others see it as drawing on a religious nationalism that has always been present in other forms of Indian nationalisms (van der Veer 1994). Chetan Bhatt (2001) also sees Hindutva's rise partly in this religious light, as he argues that while it must be seen as a response to various processes of globalization, it has also "unraveled older, if now seemingly provisional, certainties about the meanings of secularism and secular nationalism for national populations living under, and immediately amenable to the charm of religions" (ibid. 209). This religious explanation might in fact fit the Nepalese context, where Nepali nationalism was from the beginning defined by Hindu religion, Hindu king and the Nepali language. Nevertheless, as this understanding of nationalism has now become challenged and the Hindu kingdom has fallen, it is not entirely sufficient for the analysis of the current situation. Simply the use of organizational strategies does not seem to be able provide a fertile ground for the growth of Hindu nationalism either, as the Hindutva organizations have been active in Nepal already since 1960s and especially since the 1990s. The use of new political strategies, on the other hand, seems to be something that one can see at least having been attempted in Nepal ever since the 1990s and especially after the declaration of secularism in 2006. The Hindutva

groups of Nepal have clearly adopted a rhetoric that has been more aggressive towards minorities and has aimed to mobilize the Hindus to keep Nepal a Hindu country. But what has led the Hindutva groups to adopt these strategies?

T.B. Hansen (1999) describes the success of Hindu nationalism in the following way:

“Hindu nationalism represents a “conservative revolution”, premised upon and yet reacting against a broader democratic transformation of both the political field and the public culture in postcolonial India. The intensification of political mobilization among the lower castes and the minorities has, along with the rise of ambiguous desires of consumerism in everyday life, exposure to global cultural and economic flows, and so on, fractured social imaginings and notions of order and hierarchy, not least within the large middle class and dominant communities in contemporary India. I argue that it was the desire for recognition within an increasingly global horizon, and the simultaneous anxieties of being encroached upon by the Muslims, the plebeians, and the poor that over the last decade have prompted millions of Hindus to respond to the call for Hindutva at the polls and in the streets, and to embrace Hindu nationalist promises of order, discipline and collective strength” (Hansen 1999: 4-5).

When looking at the situation in Nepal from the 1990s onwards, the emergence of minority assertions is something that has clearly challenged the traditional, state propagated version of nationalism. There were mass demonstrations for secularism, and even though the Hindutva forces gained the upper hand in this struggle, the religious minorities were able to get some of their demands through, such as the release of religious prisoners. This was all followed by an increase in communal violence in the Terai and the launching of various Hindutva organizations and parties in Nepal. Simultaneously, the Hindutva rhetoric turned more aggressive towards the minorities (S. Sharma 2004). A similar development can be observed in the post-2006 environment: the Hindutva rhetoric has in fact turned more aggressive than ever before, and militant terrorist groups targeting mosques and churches have emerged.

Arjun Appadurai’s (2006) concept of “predatory identities” could also fit into the Nepalese Hindu nationalist context:

“I define as predatory those identities whose social construction and mobilization require the extinction of other, proximate social categories, defined as threats to the very existence of some group, defined as a we. Predatory identities emerge, periodically, out of pairs of identities, sometimes sets that are larger than two, which have long histories of close contact, mixture and some degree of mutual stereotyping. Occasional violence may or may not be part of these histories, but some degree of contrastive identification is always involved. One of these pairs or sets of identities often turns predatory by mobilizing an understanding of itself as a threatened majority.” (Appadurai 2006: 51)

Appadurai in fact uses the example of Hindutva, although in the Indian context. He notes how a constructed idea of a Hindu majority is used to hide the fact that the upper castes, the ones who in reality benefit the most from such constructs, are, in fact, themselves a minority. Simultaneously, the contrasted minority, in India’s case mostly the Muslims, is linked to larger global movements, identities and networks, in order to claim that they are backed by much more powerful forces. The small minorities are, thus, made to seem like secret agents of these global forces in their countries (ibid. 110). Appadurai also draws attention to how the increasing assertiveness of cultural minorities for the recognition of their rights inside different nation states led to the rise of majoritarian or predatory identities in the 1990s. The growing assertiveness of cultural and religious minorities is of course something that can be seen in Nepal, ever since the 1990s. The current situation of Nepal might, in fact, present exactly the kind of situation that both Hansen and Appadurai describe: the increasing mobilization of minorities that threatens the constructed majority’s dominant position, either in reality or in imagination.

Majorities and Minorities in Nepal

The categories of majorities and minorities are modern constructs, emerging in history simultaneously with census data and the systematic calculation of populations. In Nepal’s case the terms “minority” and “majority” become somewhat problematic, since there is no single ethnic or caste group that could be said to construct the absolute majority in the country. In fact, all groups could be argued to be minorities, depending what definition is used. The 2001 census of Nepal lists 100 caste and ethnic groups, 92 languages and dialects

and 9 religions in the country. The easiest way to classify the people of Nepal is to divide them between first Pahari (Hill) and Madheshi (Plains), secondly between Janajati (ethnic) and Jat (Hindu caste) and lastly within the Jat (Hindu caste) between lower caste and upper caste. Historically it has been the upper caste Hill (Pahari) elite, the Bahun and Chettri castes making up about 28.54 percent of the population, who have held the power in Nepal. Nevertheless, the main criterion for what constructs the majority in Nepal has always been the Nepali language and Hindu religion (Hachhethu 2003a). When looking at the situation from this angle, the Pahari Jats make up about 48.61 percent, where as the entire Hindu population, including also the non-Nepali speaking Madheshis inhabiting the Terai region close to India, is quoted as 80.6 percent in the 2001 census.

The Madheshi and Pahari caste Hindus are ethnically closely related, both being of Indo-Aryan descent, and linguistically Nepali and the languages spoken by the Madheshis (mainly Maithili, Bhojpuri and Awadhi – closely related to Hindi) are also quite similar, both belonging to the Indo-Aryan group. Nevertheless, due to the historically dominant status of Nepali speakers, a conflict exists between the Madheshis and Paharis. The Janajatis on the other hand are both ethnically and linguistically sharply differentiated from these Indo-Aryan groups, being mostly of Tibeto-Burman descent, resulting in what Lawoti (2005) calls a “racial/physical difference conflict”.

The religious minorities are principally found among all these historically marginalized groups. The Buddhists, constructing the largest religious minority of Nepal, make up about 10.7 percent of the population. They are often found among the Janajati groups. Muslims, the second largest religious minority with 4.2 percent, mainly inhabit the Terai region. Kirant, an animistic religion practiced by the Janajati Kiranti group, is the third largest minority religion with 3.6 percent. Christians are in the 2001 census one of the smallest groups with only 0.4 percent. They are often of Janajati origin. It must be noted, however, that the census data produced by the government of Nepal has been contested by most groups, in particular the minorities by saying that it attempts to exaggerate the percentage of Hindus. In the 2001 census the percentage of Hindus has in fact decreased from the 86.5 percent recorded in 1991. This, according to Lawoti (2005) is due to the increasing identity

assertions of minorities, and also to the fact that groups that have previously been included under Hindus have been added as their own category (ibid. 87-90).

In this thesis I have chosen to use the terms majority and minority out of practical reasons. With ethnic minorities I mean the Janajatis, the mainly Tibeto-Burman groups of Nepal. When referring to religious minorities, all religions other than Hindu are meant. Hinduism, comprising extremely varied and pluralistic religious practices and traditions, is of course hard to define in similar terms to most other religions. Also, since there is a great deal of overlapping between different religious practices in Nepal, mainly Buddhism and Hinduism, it can be difficult to draw clear lines between these two. With these difficulties in mind, the term Hindu, as used in this thesis, refers more to self-identification and less to the categorization in official data.

II. Analysis

1. History

1.1. History of Hindutva

1.1.1. Arya Samaj

The development of Hindutva as a political ideology in British India ran parallel to the formation of secularly oriented Indian nationalism, as spearheaded by Jawaharlal Nehru of the Indian National Congress, and Muslim separatism. The ideological roots of Hindu nationalism can be traced back to the 19th century socio-religious movements that were emerging in India simultaneously to resistance to British colonial rule. As Christian missionary activities had significantly increased in India and Hinduism was systematically being vilified by both the missionaries and the colonial forces, some Hindu Brahmins started to feel their religion was being attacked by the British (Jaffrelot 1996: 12-14). The fear that the Hindu society was being undermined made these upper caste Hindus feel that their religion and society needed to be reformed in order to resist these perceived threats. The movements that were born out of this feeling were simultaneously trying to save what they understood to be the core of Hinduism, mostly defined in Brahministic terms, and trying to adapt to Western modernity (ibid.). The most important one of these movements for the development of Hindu nationalism was the Arya Samaj, a militant organization that is often described as neo-Hindu, but according to Bhatt (2001) such a label ends up emphasizing its religious dimension too much over its political implications. Indeed, by the turn of the century movements such as Arya Samaj had contributed to the formation of a particular strand of nationalism so much that Hinduism and nationalism became synonymous for some (ibid.16).

Arya Samaj was founded by Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) in 1875 in Bombay and in 1877 in Lahore partly on the intellectual foundations laid by Brahma Samaj, a reformist organization started in 1828 by Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal. Dayananda drew heavily on European Orientalists' writings on the ancient Hindu society, in particular

the ones glorifying a Golden Age of Vedic Aryanism. In these writings India was often described as the original homeland of humanity and the cradle of civilization, and the speakers of Indo-European languages were thought to construct a single Aryan race. This idea of a Golden Age was extremely important to the Hindu reformers and nationalists because it could be used to create a contrast with the current weak condition the Hindus supposedly found themselves in and hence to call the society to restore itself to its former glory. This glorious Aryan past was crucial in invoking ethnic pride in the Hindus (Jaffrelot 1996: 16).

While emphasizing the superiority of the Vedic Hinduism of the past, Dayananda was simultaneously busy constructing a new version of Hinduism that could better resist the threat of conversions. In doing so, Dayananda partly accepted Western criticism, but at the same time he tried to argue that none of the “evils” associated with societal practices or forms of worship had been present in the Vedic times, and thus the Hinduism practiced now was simply a degeneration of the authentic religion of the Aryans. Dayananda indeed tried to prove that the ancient Aryans had worshipped an abstract “Absolute” rather than multiple gods (Jaffrelot 1996: 14). Another important ideological construction was the view that the Aryan society had been egalitarian. Dayananda did not deny the existence of the caste system in the Vedic age, but instead he saw it as “merit based division of labor” rather than hierarchical relations based on heritage (Jaffrelot 2007: 9). The Arya Samaj even came up with a reconversion ritual known as *shuddhi*, which was used to convert individuals and groups “back” to Hinduism (or Vedic Aryanism, as the Arya Samaj saw it) – mainly meaning Muslims whose ancestors had been Hindus, or lower castes who had converted to Christianity (Bhatt 2001: 20). All of this was done for the purpose of countering the Christian threat, and in doing so the Arya Samaj in fact ended up emulating some aspects of Christianity and Western culture, although there was a clear attempt to find a justification for this in the history (Jaffrelot 1996: 16).

Even though the Arya Samaj was not a political organization by definition, its ideology was used for political purposes. Many concepts that would later be strongly associated

with Hindutva were already present in Arya Samaj, such as a militant form of patriotic nationalism and intolerance towards “foreign” religions, i.e. Islam and Christianity. Paradoxically, stigmatization of both Islam and Christianity went hand in hand with their emulation, a tactic that is fundamental to Hindutva even today (ibid. 17). Dayananda and Arya Samaj were therefore extremely influential to the later development of the Hindu nationalist movement and they laid the foundations for Hindutva to take its concrete shape in the 1920s.

1.1.2. The Hindu Mahasabha and V.D. Savarkar

The first Hindu nationalist party, the Hindu Sabha, which would later turn into Hindu Mahasabha, was founded in 1906 in Lahore by a group of Arya Samajists simultaneously to the founding of the All India Muslim League in Dacca (today Dhaka). Both the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha aimed to promote the interests of their specific communities, while the Congress Party adopted a more inclusive stance and defined the Indian nation as consisting of all communities, despite the fact that it was often seen as a primarily Hindu party, especially by the Muslims. The Hindu Mahasabha on the other hand was much more sympathetic to a German understanding of ethnic nationalism as the basis for a nation-state (Jaffrelot 1996: 19). At first, despite these differences, the Mahasabha worked as a pressure group inside the Congress party. The main reason behind the formation of this Hindu front was the fact that the British administration was seen to be giving in to Muslim demands, for example by granting the Muslims separate electorates in 1909 which increased their representation. In the beginning the Mahasabha had opposed all kinds of communal representation, but especially from 1920s onwards it started to see its role as the defender of the communal interests of the Hindus (Bhatt 2001: 60).

The 1920s were a time when Hindu nationalism with a coherent ideology based on Hindu supremacy and nationhood were crystallized. This period coincided with Muslim mobilization in the form of the Khilafat movement which was based on the Muslims’ outrage at the British who were at war with the Ottoman Empire, and thus by sending

Indians to the frontier they forced Muslims to fight Muslim power (Bhatt 2001: 46). Mahatma Gandhi's support of the Khilafat movement infuriated the Hindu nationalists, who at this point were still a minor force and largely external to the overall independence struggle. The Khilafat protests were directed against the British, but in some cases they also turned against Hindus which led to a cycle of inter-communal violence. All of this contributed to the inferiority complex of the Hindu nationalists. The Hindu Mahasabha hence decided to launch a movement they called Hindu Sanghathan (unity), which stood on a firmer ideological ground than the Hindu nationalist movement had before (Jaffrelot 1996: 19-20). All these developments led to further radicalization of the Hindu nationalist discourse, especially with regard to Muslims.

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966), who would become the president of the Hindu Mahasabha, wrote an influential book titled *Hindutva – Who is a Hindu* in 1923, which became the cornerstone of the Hindu nationalist ideology as it is known today. Due to Savarkar's involvement in anti-British terrorist activities he was jailed for many years and it was during this time that he developed his concept of Hindutva, commonly translated as Hindu-ness from the Sanskrit suffix *-tva*. Savarkar was in fact profoundly influenced by the writings of Giuseppe Mazzini, and it was Mazzini's vision of a modern Italian nation-state that inspired Savarkar's idea of a culturally homogenous and strong Hindu nation. The main concern of Savarkar was to demonstrate the coming together of Indian culture and territory (Hansen 1999: 77-8). For Savarkar, it was the idea of a common Hindu-ness that defined the unity of the Indian nation, but this Hindu-ness was first and foremost related to Hindu identity rather than the religion itself. Savarkar in fact declared himself to be an atheist (Jaffrelot 2007: 14-15). Hindutva, for Savarkar, is something that “embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the whole Being of our Hindu race” and of which Hinduism is only a fraction (Savarkar 2003: 4). This idea of a single Hindu race was also central to Savarkar, as he repeatedly stated that the inheritance of Hindu blood was the most important characteristic of Hindutva. This led Savarkar to defend the caste system, which he saw

as a proof of the racial unity of Hindus (Bhatt 2001: 94-5). As Jaffrelot (1996) explains, while Savarkar's Hindutva does have "racial" overtones, it does not fit into the classical understanding of racism. Instead, it represents a special kind of racism that is more interested in cultural unity than racial purity (ibid. 55-8).

In Savarkar's view, only Hindus can have claim to the nation of India because they are in the majority and their civilization is the oldest. While he saw that Muslims and Christians of Indian origin also share the territory and "race" with the Hindus, the fact that they had adopted a different religion had made them also culturally different. Hindus, hence, constitute a single nation and the Muslims another, within but not of India (Bhatt 2001: 96-7). The Hindu *Rashtra* (nation) of Savarkar was defined in cultural and geographical terms as *akhand Bharat* (undivided India), including all the areas of the Indian Subcontinent south of the Himalayas, including also Burma. This shows that Hindutva first and foremost rests on the idea of a common culture rather than biological race. The communities of other cultures can live in the Hindu nation, but only as long as they accept the Hindutva culture and keep their religious practices and symbols hidden in the privacy of their homes. The Muslims and Christians will always be outsiders to the national culture and their conversion back to Hinduism should be encouraged. Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists are accepted as sects of Hinduism and do not fall into this category. It is worth noting, however, that in his early writings Savarkar was quite hostile towards Buddhism because of its universalism and rejection of violence. Later, however, he nominally accepted Buddhists into the fold of Hindutva, and this is today the stance adopted by Hindu nationalists, mainly because of the religion's Indian origins (Bhatt 2001: 90). Indeed, the main criterion for determining who is considered a Hindu and who is not was the idea of *pitrubhoomi*, the holy land, which meant the geographical location of myths and sacred sites (Hansen 1999: 78). For the Muslims and Christians these are of course mainly found in the Middle East. The division is hence clear: only religions and traditions that can be considered to have Indian roots will have a place in the Hindu *Rashtra* – outsiders will be tolerated but not accepted into the mainstream.

Savarkar's hostility towards Muslims is very clear in his writings. The Muslims are presented as a threat to the Hindu nation due to their pan-Islamism, i.e. their alleged loyalty first to Islam and only then to India, and also because the Muslims seemed more organized than the divided Hindus. Indeed, Savarkar's entire book is based on the assumption that pan-Islamism threatens the Hindus (Jaffrelot 1996: 25). Savarkar, hence, calls the Hindus to unite and resist the threat of these "pan-isms" or extraterritorial loyalties that allegedly result from the fact that Christians and Muslims have their holy lands outside of India (Hansen 1999: 79). The Hindu Mahasabha under Savarkar's leadership went as far as approving Nazism, and Savarkar himself compared the alleged anti-nationalism of Muslims of India to the Jews of Germany, in order to highlight the illegitimacy of their presence in a Hindu nation (Casolari 2000: 223-4).

All these communal and Hindu supremacist ideas entertained by the Hindu Mahasabha became too radical for the Congress Party in 1937 when the ties between the two were cut. From then on, the Mahasabha became an independent political party, but it did not gain any representation until independence and started to disappear from the political arena. At the same time a different development was happening inside Hindu nationalism with the formation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an organization that would become the most successful Hindutva outfit to date.

1.1.3. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Sangh Parivar

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (national volunteer organization), more commonly known as the RSS, was founded in Nagpur in 1925 by K.B. Hedgewar (1889-1940), whose political mentor was B.S. Moonje, a former president of the Hindu Mahasabha. Hedgewar was heavily influenced by the writings of Savarkar, and the RSS was on the one hand designed to promote the Hindutva principles in the Indian society and on the other to "infuse new physical strength" into the Hindus (Jaffrelot 2007: 16). The RSS became the most successful and important Hindutva organization after independence with millions of members (or *swayamsevaks*, volunteers, as they are called in Hindi) and today it in fact claims to be the largest voluntary organization in the world (Bhatt

2001: 113). The organization, however, is paramilitary by its nature and it borrowed substantially from extreme European nationalisms, in particular Hitler's Nazism and Mussolini's fascism, something which has often led to the organization itself being described as fascist. B.S. Moonje's trip to Italy to meet Mussolini and the impact this left on him has been well documented (Casolari 2000), and both he and M.S. Golwalkar (1906-1973), the organization's second and most prominent leader, openly admired Hitler when the atrocities committed in Nazi Germany were already partly known. Golwalkar in fact drew almost exclusively on German sources in his book *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, written in 1939, and he saw the Germans "purging" their country of Jews as a manifestation of "Race pride at its highest" (quoted in Jaffrelot 1996: 55). Today the RSS tries to deny this by either claiming that Golwalkar knew nothing of the Holocaust, or that the book was not even written by him, but by Savarkar's brother (Nussbaum 2007:160).

The borrowing of fascist ideas and practices happened in the guise of reinterpreting traditionally Indian institutions and values, for example asceticism and *akhara*, a weightlifting and body-building tradition commonly associated with the god Hanuman, as Jaffrelot (1996) points out (ibid. 34-5). The RSS's aim was from the beginning the creation of a unified, aggressive and strong force which could remedy the perceived weakness of the Hindus. The underlying idea behind the functioning of the RSS is to work at the grassroots level, establish *shakhas* (branch offices) in towns and villages all over the country and train young Hindu men in martial arts and Hindutva ideology. The concentration thus rests heavily on "character building" of the youth. In the beginning the organization did not attract many lower caste members due to the Sanskritized and Brahminical culture it promoted. Nevertheless, it tried to present itself as an "egalitarian vanguard of the Hindu Rashtra", while it simultaneously continued to believe the ideal society was based on the traditional *varna* system (Jaffrelot 1996: 45-7.)

The RSS has had an extremely controversial image in India ever since independence, mainly due to the fact that the organization was accused of having been involved in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. The assassinator, Nathuram Godse, had in

fact been an RSS *swayamsevak*, but had left the organization because he was disappointed with its lack of involvement in politics (ibid. 86-7). The RSS was nevertheless temporarily banned because of all this, while the Hindu Mahasabha, from where all the masterminds behind Gandhi's killing hailed, was allowed to continue unhindered. It was because of the Gandhi controversy that the members of RSS soon started discussing the possibility of launching a wing that would represent them at the parliamentary level (Jaffrelot 2007: 17). Even though the Mahasabha was not banned, its public image suffered greatly because of the link-up to the assassination, and this decreased the party's support significantly (Bhatt 2001: 110).

As the violence that followed the Partition of India and the creation of Pakistan as a separate homeland for Muslims had led Nehru to reaffirm his commitment to secular nationalism as a way of protecting the rights of the minorities, the Hindu nationalists felt the political void left by the Mahasabha needed to be filled (Bhatt 2001: 151-2). Therefore, many Mahasabha members joined the RSS which had now been acquitted of the assassination charges, and the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, a political wing of the RSS, was formed in 1951. This party would later mold into the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Indian People's Party (henceforth the BJP). The RSS had in fact only been allowed to continue after it accepted several conditions, mainly the renouncement of violence and recognition of the Indian constitution. This is when arguments about the inherent tolerance of Hindus and the true secularism of the Hindu Rashtra started. Golwalkar was clearly desperate to make the RSS legal again and he modified his earlier, more aggressive views (ibid. 146). From now on, he saw the RSS's role in politics as that of a *Raj guru*, a traditional Brahmin advisor to a Hindu king (Jaffrelot 1996: 115).

In addition to founding a political front for the RSS, many different branches of the organization were also launched in the years after independence, for example a students' wing, a women's branch (Rashtriya Sevika Samiti) and even a trade union. The aim was to penetrate all aspects of Indian public life by infusing Hindu nationalist values into them (Jaffrelot 1996: 114). This is how, by creating various branches and targeted groups, the Sangh Parivar (the family of associations) started to take form, and

the initial aspiration to only work at the grassroots level was increasingly left behind during the 1970s and 80s. An important addition to this family was the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the World Council of Hindus, the main aim of which was to bring a centralized structure to the unorganized model of Hinduism and to unify all Hindus, with the underlying motivation of resisting conversions (Jaffrelot 1996: 193-202). The VHP has been at the forefront of many Hindu nationalist campaigns and has been implicated for its involvement in various violent incidents ever since it was founded. Bajrang Dal, a militant youth organization of the VHP, has gained a reputation for being particularly violent and radical. All of these organizations are autonomous to a certain extent, although they share the basic ideology of the RSS. Especially the BJP has been trying to distance itself from some of the ideological stances and strategies taken by the core organization, which has in recent years led to conflict inside the Sangh Parivar (Hansen 1999: 224-5).

1.1.4. Hindutva's Rise to Political Mainstream

From the 1980s onwards the formerly marginalized Hindutva ideology has risen to the political mainstream in the guise of the BJP, and Hindu nationalist discourse has become commonplace in India. All this happened simultaneously to various political developments in India, some of the most significant ones being the increasing mobilization of the lower castes and farmers which started to threaten the traditionally dominating sections of the society, and the Congress Party's attempts to appeal to Hindu nationalist voters (Hansen 1999). The BJP in fact presented itself as a party committed to modernization, nationalism and national integration, but also to what it saw as "positive secularism", based on the assumption that Hinduism is not a religion but a culture and can hence be nothing but secular. Nevertheless, the Hindu nationalists simultaneously heavily criticized the secularism practiced by the Congress, as they saw it as special treatment or appeasement of minorities (Bhatt 2001: 168-9). Much of the BJP's rise can also be attributed to several events that the Sangh Parivar exploited in order to convince the public that Hinduism was "under siege". These events included the Shah Bano case, a Supreme Court ruling about a Muslim woman's right to alimony

that Rajiv Gandhi overturned in 1985 in the face of mass protests from the Muslim community who saw the ruling as infringing the Muslim personal law (India still to date does not have uniform personal code, but instead several ones), and the mass conversions of Dalits (untouchables) to Islam in Tamil Nadu.

In addition, the Sangh Parivar decided to launch several popular campaigns in the 80s and early 90s, one of them being VHP's Ekamata Yagna ("sacrifice for unity") which was a ritual procession around India (interestingly starting off from Nepal), symbolizing the unity of all Hindus. Another such campaign was the Ramjanmabhoomi movement for rebuilding the temple of Ram in Ayodhya in a place where a medieval mosque, the Babri Masjid, stood. The Hindu nationalists claimed that the mosque had been built on the ruins of a temple that allegedly marked the birthplace of the god Ram. In 1990 L.K. Advani, the second leader of the BJP, decided to launch a *rath yatra*, a procession where he traveled around India in a jeep that was decorated as Ram's chariot, ending the journey in Ayodhya with the aim of diverting attention from the emerging caste based mobilizations and concentrating on emphasizing the idea of Hindu unity (Jaffrelot 1996: 431). Most of these processions had a distinctively anti-Muslim character to them as they symbolically excluded Muslims from the concept of Hindu India, and communal violence often followed in their wake (van der Veer 1996: 260). In 1992 the long campaign for rebuilding the Ram temple culminated in the demolition of the Babri Masjid by Sangh Parivar cadres, which led to massive communal violence, Muslim outrage all over the Subcontinent and a subsequent (although again temporary) ban of the RSS. After the Babri Masjid demolition the BJP was forced to adopt a more moderate stance in some ways. The party rose to power in 1998 and it started to advocate economic liberalization, in contradiction to RSS philosophy (Bhatt 2001: 176-7). Nevertheless, while the rhetoric of some of the national leaders of the BJP may have become somewhat diluted, the RSS remains behind the scenes and many of the BJP's important figures are *swayamsevaks*.

The rise of the BJP to national mainstream coincided with two of the worst instances of communal violence in the history of independent India, with the Muslim minority

bearing the brunt of Hindutva wrath. The first large-scale attacks were in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition and the second serious incidence was witnessed in 2002 in the state of Gujarat. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that the Gujarat violence that resulted in the deaths of at least 2,000 Muslims was largely pre-meditated and even state sponsored (for example Spodek 2010; Nussbaum 2007). The police did little to stop the attacks on Muslims, and Hindutva leaders were making inflammatory statements. The Gujarat state government, led by Narendra Modi of the BJP, and many of the national BJP leaders saw the mass murders and rapes as “action-reaction”, referring to an incident in Godhra where a train carriage full of *kar sevaks* (Sangh Parivar activists) had burst in flames, killing 59 passengers after a confrontation with Muslims. The BJP’s Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Prime Minister of India at the time, in fact stated that “The subsequent events (the massacres of Muslims) were no doubt condemnable, but who lit the fire?” (Quoted in Spodek 2010: 350) There is, however, evidence that the fire might even have been accidental (ibid. 351). The most significant aspect of the Gujarat pogrom is that ten years later Narendra Modi, who is widely accused of having instructed the police not to interfere in the violence, is still the Chief Minister of Gujarat and very few of the masterminds behind the violence have been convicted. In 2004 the BJP was voted out of power from the union government, but it is still in majority in many states, including Gujarat, and forms the biggest opposition party at the national level.

1.2. Hindu Nationalism in Nepal

1.2.1. Prithvi Narayan Shah and the *asali Hindustan*

Unlike India with its experiences of foreign rule (first Muslim and subsequently colonial) and post-Independence secularism, Nepal’s history up until recently was characterized by a Hindu king’s reign over a Hindu state. It was indeed this Hindu-ness that was used to define Nepal as a unified kingdom when the people inhabiting the eastern areas of Nepal were first brought under the rule of a single monarch, Prithvi Narayan Shah (1723-1775) of the Gorkha kingdom in the late 18th century. Before this military conquest, the area that now comprises Nepal was made up of 48 smaller

kingdoms of different ethnic groups. Nepal has long been a multi-ethnic area with various groups of mainly Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan decent practicing different religions and speaking a myriad of languages. It is hard to date when all the ethnic groups arrived in the region, but it is quite clear that many of the Tibeto-Burman groups were there before the Nepali-speaking Indo-Aryans (Whelpton 2008: 11). The Indo-Aryans that settled in the Nepalese Hills were mainly high caste migrants from Northern India who were fleeing the Muslim conquest of the Ganges plains. They brought with them a form of Hinduism that Sharma (1992) calls “defensive Hinduism” due to the fact that their entry into the Hills was motivated by a will to protect their religion (ibid. 267). This defensive Hinduism set the tone for the politics of Nepal for the centuries to come as the Hindu rulers conquered more and more areas and finally united all the scattered kingdoms. By the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah’s death the kingdom of Gorkha comprised all of what is today Eastern Nepal and parts of Sikkim. Later in 1816 a border was drawn to the south after a war with the British colonial forces. The Gorkha conquest was therefore not only the point in history where the foundations for a unified state of Nepal were laid, but also the beginning of Hindu high caste Nepali speakers’ rule over other ethnic and religious groups.

What Prithvi Narayan Shah, the first king from the Shah dynasty, came to be perhaps best known for, is his description of Nepal as the *asali Hindustan*, the real or genuine land of Hindus. The reason why Prithvi saw his kingdom as somehow more genuinely or purely Hindu than India can be put down to the fact that India was being ruled by non-Hindus at the time. Already before the Gorkha conquest, the inhabitants of the Hills referred to the Ganges plains as “*Muglan*”, a land ruled and defiled by the Muslim Moguls (Sharma 2002: 24). It is clear, therefore, that the Hindu-ness of the state was of immense importance to the unifier of Nepal. This Hindu-ness was in part nurtured by an alliance between the kings and the Brahmin priests who played an important role as advisors on secular matters. They interpreted the *dharmashastras* (texts relating to religious and legal duties in Hinduism), and this created a symbiotic relationship between the rulers and the priests in Nepal - something that would continue all the way

into the 21st century (ibid.). In this way the Hindu way of governance was continued in Nepal, while in India the Hindu kingdoms fell first to Muslim rulers and then to the British. Many Hindu nationalists today like to see the Gorkha conquest particularly in this religious light and refer to Prithvi as the “savior of Hinduism” (Bouillier 1997: 92).

This Hindu character of the state and more importantly of the monarch himself was the source of legitimacy for the Shah rulers. In Hindu tradition, the king is seen to derive his authority from a divine source, which in turn makes him “a sovereign lord, a protector of territory and subjects, a guardian of moral order, an upholder of traditions, and the source of all spiritual and temporal power” (P.R. Sharma 2008: 475). In this sense, the king also exercised ritual authority in a socio-religious realm in addition to the authority his political powers granted him. Hence, the Hindu-ness of the king was of immense importance for the purity and order of this realm. As the Maratha kingdom in India fell to the British in 1817, the Gorkhals became the only independent Hindu rulers in the Subcontinent, and this greatly increased the importance of this former periphery in a spiritual sense. Suddenly, the Gorkha kingdom was the “terrestrial center of the universe” in the realm of Hinduism (Burghart 1984: 104-6). This conception of Nepal as the last Hindu kingdom in the world was from now on central to the self-identification of the state.

Since the rulers gained their legitimacy from Hinduism, it is no surprise, then, that the Hinduization of the conquered people in Nepal became “the *raison d’être* of the Gorkhali state”, as Harka Gurung puts it (2008: 501). The process of spreading Hinduism to all corners of the kingdom intensified in the period after the unification of the state, and it was done for the single purpose of homogenizing the cultural and religious diversity prevalent in the area. The idea was to construct a pan-Gorkhali identity, defined by the Nepali language and the Hill version of Hinduism, something which was specifically used to create a difference to the Hinduism practiced in the plains of India (Dastider 2007: 16-17). There is, however, quite a lot of disagreement among scholars as to whether this Hinduization was as aggressive as some make it out to be, or whether it happened more in a melting-pot manner (Hachhethu 2003a).

Nevertheless, the construction of a homogenous Nepali identity was to continue hand in hand with further isolation and imposed casteism in the Rana period that followed in the 19th century.

1.2.2. The Ranas and the *Muluki Ain*

The transition to the autocratic rule of the Ranas happened in 1846 as Jang Bahadur Rana (1816-1877) rose to the Prime Minister's position, took himself the title of "maharaja" and put the royal Shah family under house arrest. The Rana period lasted over a hundred years and was characterized by hereditary, dictatorial Prime Minister's rule (although by title the Ranas were also monarchs) and rigidly imposed casteism - a step that now followed the Hinduization process started in the previous century (Hachhethu 2003a: 223). This casteism was enforced by introducing a set of hierarchical laws based on the Hindu caste system in 1854. The rationale behind creating this kind of a legal codex, known as the *Muluki Ain*, was most probably to further unify and integrate the different ethnicities, but in practice the laws, of course, only served to create more and more sharp inequalities among the people. As Hachhethu puts it, the legal code "translated diversity into inequality" (ibid.).

The *Muluki Ain* indeed worked as a kind of division of the Nepalese society by ascribing all the different ethnic and religious groups a place in the Hindu caste system. Punishments were awarded on the basis of caste status – lower castes receiving harsher punishments than higher ones. The *Muluki Ain* divided the people into four *varnas* and 36 *jats*, ranging from the pure highest castes to the impure untouchables. The Muslims, for example, were ascribed the status of the second lowest, impure, but still touchable *Sudra* caste. The Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups were mostly placed in the middle, in the *Matwali* caste, although some groups like the Magars were considered equal to the Chetris (Kshatriyas), the second highest warrior caste. The highest ranking was of course reserved for the Bahun (Brahmin) priestly caste. In this way, the laws at the same time brought the entire Nepalese society under a single legal system based on

orthodox Hindu notions and also consolidated the power of the ruling class over its subjects.

Since casteism became so central to the homogenization efforts and the entire legitimacy of the Ranas, the Hindu reform movements that were gaining popularity in Northern India at the time were actively prevented from entering Nepal. Among these reform movements was, of course, the predecessor of the Hindutva ideology, Arya Samaj, which opposed the traditional view of the caste system. An office of the organization was opened in Kathmandu by Madhav Raj Joshi in 1896, but Joshi was quickly put behind bars, beaten publicly and forced into exile into Darjeeling. A similar fate awaited others who later tried to launch the organization under the Ranas, with one of these Arya Samajists even ending up hanged in 1941. This illustrates firstly the importance that maintaining the caste system carried for the polity, and secondly the fear the Ranas felt towards anything that might weaken their rule (Toffin 2006: 232). In this way, Nepal resisted the developments that were taking place inside Hinduism in India and further asserted its identity as a more pure Hindu country than its neighbor India.

The purity of Hindu Nepal was further underlined by imposing a ban on cow slaughter and prohibiting foreigners from entering the country, especially Christian missionaries. Jang Bahadur Rana himself wrote that “We have our own country, a Hindu Rajya, where laws prescribe the cows shall not be slaughtered; nor women and Brahmins be sentenced to capital punishment... In this age of Kali this is the only country where Hindus rule.” (Quoted in Sharma 2002: 25) Protecting cows and Brahmins was, thus, seen as central to the purity of the state. The importance of the holy cow to the rulers of the country is already apparent in the etymology of the word Gorkha which is derived from the Sanskrit word *goraksha* meaning a cow protector. In fact, the name of the state was only changed from Gorkha into Nepal (a Newari word formerly describing only the Kathmandu Valley) by the Ranas in 1909 (Gellner 2008: 5). Axel Michaels (2008) argues that the cow was often used as a symbol to promote Hinduization and national integration, but at the same time enforcing the ban on cow slaughter very strictly “could

(and, in fact did) endanger Nepal's political cohesion" (ibid. 81). As some of the Tibeto-Burman groups and Muslims traditionally eat beef, a complete ban could have worked against the rulers' interest by turning these groups against them. Hence, keeping Nepal "pure" and untouched by outside influences (whether Hindu reformist or Christian) and thus maintaining national unity were the first and foremost priorities of the Ranas. As mentioned, the Ranas did not allow foreigners to enter the country, and along with this came a ban on conversions – a law that came to be the most important symbol of the Hindu-ness of the state (S. Sharma 2002: 30).

A movement to topple the autocracy of the Ranas started to gain momentum towards the 1950s, especially among the Nepalese who had gone to India to study. As it happened, the Ranas could certainly prevent foreigners from entering Nepal, but they could not stop the Nepalese from leaving the country and being influenced by the movements and ideologies that had become popular in India. In the mid-40s India was on the verge of independence and the Congress-led movement naturally inspired the Nepalese who wished to see an end to the oppression practiced by the Ranas. Many Nepalese even took part in the Indian Independence struggle (Gellner 2007: 52). Simultaneously, as it started to become clear that it would be the secular Congress leading the independent India in future, the Ranas started to feel insecure. They had consistently sided with the British Raj, aided them in trying to oppress the independence movement and they knew now that they would not find a friendly ally in Nehru's future government. Hence, the Ranas turned to the Hindu Mahasabha. B.S. Moonje and V.D. Savarkar of the Mahasabha had indeed already approached the Nepalese rulers and a set of Indian princes to form an alliance in 1938 (Copland 2002: 221). The following year Juddha Shamsheer J.B. Rana had visited Northern India and the Mahasabha's newspaper the *Hindu Outlook* had praised the maharaja to the skies by calling him a "powerful, popular and gracious Ruler with the true spirit of 'Hindutva' invigorating his veins" (quoted in Michaels 2008: 93). Subsequently the Mahasabha's press became the Ranas' avenue to present their views in India. In 1945 the Ranas even hosted B.S. Moonje in Kathmandu where he was allowed to hold a series of lectures at

the Trichandra College (Joshi and Rose 1966: 61). Thus, the relationship between the pro-Hindutva forces of India and the Nepalese rulers had been initiated.

1.2.3. The Panchayat Era and the Turn Towards Hindutva

The newly developed alliance between Nepal and the Hindu nationalists of India was briefly stalled when King Tribhuvan (1906-1955), a direct descendant of Prithvi Narayan Shah, decided to side with secular forces in order to overthrow the Ranas. He fled to India in 1950 from his house arrest in Kathmandu where the kings had remained all throughout the Rana rule. The Nepalese people who had chosen to go into exile to India had started political parties there, the Nepali Congress being the most important one of them. After maneuvering an armed coup with the Nepalese parties in India the king returned to Kathmandu in 1951. The elite protest movement against the Ranas was mainly based in the new democratic values that the exiled Nepalese had acquired in India, but it also drew on the Arya Samaj ideology, especially on questions about equality and social justice (Whelpton 2005: 79).

The overthrow of the Ranas hence brought the Shah dynasty back in power and opened the country up to outside influences. The following decade was a time of power struggles and quickly changing governments. The interim constitution of 1951 still, however, rested the supreme executive powers with the king, and it was only in 1959 after general elections that the first democratic constitution of Nepal was promulgated. This decade of democratic experiments also saw ethnic and cultural assertions coming to the fore, and religious minorities started to organize themselves - albeit only for the short period of time that democracy was to last in Nepal (Dastider 2007: 143-5). It was Tribhuvan's son Mahendra (1920-1972) who a few years after his father's mysterious death dismissed the elected government and took full control in 1960. Claiming that parliamentary democracy was alien to Nepal, he promulgated a new constitution in 1962 which made Nepal a party-less "Panchayat democracy". This system was based on town and village councils from which a Rashtriya Panchayat (national legislature) was chosen. This legislature had, however, little power over the king's decisions, and

the entire system was in practice designed so that power could be exercised from above (Hoftun 1993: 14).

The new constitution of Mahendra defined the country for the first time as a monarchical Hindu state, something which had not been explicitly mentioned before. The Hindu-ness of Nepal was thus reinvigorated and the nascent pluralism of the past decade was deliberately stalled. Still, at the same time the old caste-based Muluki Ain from the 19th century was done away with and replaced by a new one in 1963. In order to secure his support the king was forced to take a progressive stance and remove all legal recognition of caste and laws based on it (P.R. Sharma 2004: 165). This marked the beginning of promoting a slightly reformed type of Hinduism by the state (Hachhethu 2003b), even though this development was largely superficial. It is quite clear that Mahendra was reluctant to make these changes into the law, and from now on instead of talking about caste, the state became the defender of “local traditions”, something which in a roundabout way referred to the caste system all the same (Burghart 1994: 5). Also, even though the constitution now recognized Nepal as a nation of “...the Nepali people, irrespective of religion, race, caste or tribe” (quoted in Sharma 2002: 26) and “unity in diversity” became the standard rhetoric of the nation, a strong Hindu bias continued to dominate the politics. For example, the killing of cows was punishable with up to 12 years of imprisonment (Höfer 2004: 188). The unity the regime was talking about seemed to only be achievable through suppression of the differences and promotion of the culture of the ruling elite, as had been the case before (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2008: 434). In other words, the power remained concentrated in the hands of the high caste Paharis whose culture, language and religious practices were to be emulated by others.

The old tradition of seeking legitimacy from Hindu nationalism was thus continued by Mahendra, albeit in a new form which now no longer saw the socio-religious Hindu movements of India as a threat but rather as possible allies. The new seemingly egalitarian position of the palace was indeed taken in much the same ambiguous fashion as by the Sangh Parivar, whose discourse rejects casteism, but simultaneously promotes

a highly Sanskritized and Brahminical version of Hinduism. The purpose of this is to consolidate the Hindu society rather than to reform it in an egalitarian spirit (Hansen 1999: 121-2).¹ As Hachhethu (2003b) points out, Hindu nationalism was always promoted by the kings when they had little public support, and it was indeed in the Panchayat era that Nepal was vigorously advertized as “the world’s only Hindu state”. The logic behind this was twofold: firstly, to differentiate Nepal from the newly secular India and, secondly, to cultivate support from the neighboring country’s Hindu nationalists, especially the RSS and the VHP (Gurung 2008: 505). One of Mahendra’s greatest fears was the threat posed by a possible alliance between the secular forces in both countries and he undoubtedly felt compelled to find a strong support network from across the border to secure his stay in power (Hachhethu 2003b). This is where the Indian Hindutva organizations proved to be the perfect solution, and strong ties were created between them and the palace. And indeed, Tulsi Giri, the first prime minister that King Mahendra appointed, was a former RSS volunteer (Dahal 2006). The relationship between the Nepalese monarch and the Sangh Parivar of India was mutually beneficial: the king let the organizations now spread their networks into Nepal and the Sangh Parivar in turn vowed to protect the monarchy. The Hindu nationalists of India have indeed long been looking to Nepal as a fulfillment of their own dreams of creating a Hindu Rashtra (nation) and drew great consolation from the fact that such a state was in fact in existence right across the border (P.R. Sharma 2004: 295). Nepal is often also seen as a part of the greater or undivided India, *akhand bharat*, by the Indian Hindu nationalists, which further explains their agenda in Nepal.

Even though Hindutva had now officially entered Nepal, the Sangh Parivar’s influence in the country seems to have largely remained limited to the palace. The Indian organizations did not feel the need to start a massive campaign to mobilize the Nepalese

¹The upper caste bias of Hindutva is of course already apparent in the history of the ideology, but a good example of it in recent times is also the visibility of the Sangh Parivar in the 1990 protests opposing the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report which recommended that the reservations enshrined in the Indian Constitution for Scheduled Castes in public sector employment and higher education should also be extended to “other backward classes” (OBCs). This would have significantly increased the percentage of lower castes in these fields that had traditionally been the stronghold of upper castes (Bhatt 2001: 171, Basu et al. 1993: 89).

public because Hinduism seemed protected under the king's rule. On the other hand the Sangh Parivar was also not yet as powerful in India in the 60s as it would come to be from the 80s onwards. The 80s was a time when the situation in Nepal also started to change. Mahendra's son Birendra had become the king in 1972, and it was after heavy student protests erupted in the year 1979 against the Panchayat rule that King Birendra was forced to agree to hold a referendum and let the people decide between multi-party democracy and an amended Panchayat constitution. Even though the slightly reformed Panchayat system narrowly won, the ruling class was undoubtedly starting to feel less secure in its position. As a result, there was a sudden increase in projects undertaken by the Nepalese palace that were designed to "reinvigorate" Hinduism and to secure the position of the monarchy. One of these projects was Queen Aishwarya's Sanatana Dharma Seva Samiti, an organization which officially aimed to expand and redefine Hinduism but which in practice only propagated a highly orthodox and ritualistic form of the religion (Sharma 1992: 274). Another such organization was the Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) where the queen was acting as the chairperson. The most important one was, however, the Vishwa Hindu Mahasangh or the World Hindu Federation (WHF), which the king founded in 1981 with the support of the Indian RSS. This organization was supposed to be a global federation of all the Hindu organizations in the world, but in practice it turned out to be completely dependent on its Indian counterpart, the VHP (Jha 2007b). In 1988 the WHF and VHP crowned King Birendra the *Vishwa Hindu Samrat*, the Emperor of all the Hindus of the world, which seemed to be an attempt to extend his symbolic legitimacy across Nepal's borders.

Despite this increase in Hindutva-oriented projects and the deepening relations between the palace and the Indian Sangh Parivar, the organizations' presence at the grassroots level in Nepal remained quite small. Hence, most of the Hindu nationalists' activities in the 1980s had only symbolic value and were simply aimed at securing the position of the monarchy. This was in stark contrast to the RSS's campaign in India where the society was being organized from the ground up with an attempt to penetrate all areas of public life in order to establish a Hindu Rashtra. The organizations' presence in

Nepal started to only increase in the 1990s as a popular movement overthrew the Panchayat regime and suddenly the Hindu attribute of the country came heavily under question.

1.2.4. From the People's Movement to a People's War

The reasons why public resistance to the Panchayat regime began to mount towards the end of the 1980s were many but much of it was based on economic factors (Whelpton 2005: 109). India had imposed a trade embargo on Nepal in 1989 and there was growing discontent at the government's inability to solve the situation. The opposition parties seized this opportunity to launch a protest movement to topple the Panchayat, drawing inspiration from the simultaneous revolutions in Eastern Europe (Hoftun 1993: 16). The 1990s saw ethnic politics and questions about religion entering public debate for the first time, but the mass uprising that overthrew the Panchayat in 1990 and forced the king to give up much of his power was not particularly religiously or ethnically motivated. The demonstrations that had started in February 1990 were mainly led by students and party supporters, demanding an end to the ban on political parties. The opposition parties did not, however, direct the protests against the king himself, but the Panchayat system which guaranteed the monarch his absolute power. In this way, the symbolic value the king held for the unity of the country could be left untouched, and it was only his political powers that came under question (ibid. 15). As a result of the heavy protests that later came to be known as the People's Movement, King Birendra had to finally end the Panchayat system and legalize political parties in April of the same year.

As the interim government was being formed, questions about language, ethnicity and suddenly also religion came to the fore. There had been a gradual growth of ethnic and religious consciousness and a growing opposition to the Hindu state in the last years of the Panchayat when the reforms had permitted some space for such sentiments. Now in the post-revolution power vacuum these sentiments translated into several violent incidents and the formation of numerous ethnic and regional parties (ibid. 23). This is

also when the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), the political mouthpiece of the pro-Hindu kingdom forces made up of mainly former Panchayat-era politicians, was formed, along with the Shiv Sena Nepal, a militant right wing Hindutva party operating much in the same fashion as its Indian counterpart in the state of Maharashtra²³. As the drafting of the new constitution drew closer, the religious sentiments started to boil over. The main question was the status of the country: would the new democratic constitution define Nepal as a secular state or would it remain Hindu? The country faced mass demonstrations both for secularism and against it in the months leading to the promulgation of the constitution. For the first time the voices of religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians were also heard, and the Buddhists emerged as an independent force separate from the Hindus. The minorities wanted the state to be secular, and much to the shock of the Hindus the Buddhists also joined the Muslims and Christians in these demands. The Buddhist resistance to the Hindu state was based on the fact that also they had been persecuted by the state, especially during the Rana rule, for not being Hindu. This was something the Hindu majority was, and still is, quite ignorant about (Sharma 2002: 32). The demands of the religious minorities greatly unnerved the more conservative Hindus, especially the Hindutva-oriented ones (Hoftun, Reaper and Whelpton 1999: 312-13).

The issue was, however, not simply secularism, but also religious freedom. The mass mobilization in the name of religion started when the small Nepalese Christian community held a public meeting in Kathmandu and demanded the release of religious prisoners and the declaration of a secular state. The Communists and many members of the interim cabinet agreed that Nepal should, in fact, no longer be a Hindu state and proceeded to release the prisoners. The response from the orthodox Hindu community was strong. The release was seen by the World Hindu Federation as having “hurt the

² The Indian Shiv Sena, a particularly violent and “thuggish” Maharashtra-based political party, is distinct from the Sangh Parivar, although it endorses the Hindu nationalist ideology and has formed an alliance with the BJP.

³ Later in 1999 the party split into two factions: the original Shiv Sena Nepal led by Arun Subedi and Nepal Shiv Sena led by Kiran Singh Budhathoki. The latter has retained links with the Maharashtrian party, while the Subedi-led one denies any such connections.

feelings of 95% of the Nepalese people” (ibid. 314) and Achyut Raj Regmi, one of the founding members of the WHF, even threatened to place himself in front of the gates of the Pashupatinath temple and start a hunger strike (Bouillier 1997: 92). Many outraged statements were made, and around five to six thousand people took part in a protest march opposing secularism. The next day, 25-30,000 Buddhists demonstrated in favor of secularism, which again took the Hindus by complete surprise. At this point, most of the political parties were starting to seriously consider adopting secularism. However, the pro-Hindutva forces were not going to give in so easily: in August L.K. Advani, the leader of the Hindutva-oriented BJP from India, came to Nepal to pressure the interim government to keep Nepal a Hindu state (Hoftun, Reaper and Whelpton 1999: 315). In November, after much debate, King Birendra announced the new constitution, which defined Nepal as “a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual (---) Hindu, constitutional monarchical kingdom” (quoted in Hutt 1991: 1035). It prohibited discrimination and granted the freedom to practice one’s religion, but simultaneously it illegalized conversions and made no mention of Nepal also being a multi-religious state. Hence, the Hindutva forces had gained the upper hand. Linguistic and ethnic concerns went also largely unheard, as the Constitution Recommendations Commission had considered taking up such issues as “unfortunate” and discarded them as “peripheral” (Hutt 1991: 1028). Although now a constitutional monarchy, confusion about the king’s role vis-à-vis the government also continued, and rumors about a planned coup were circulating from time to time.

Even though the Sangh Parivar affiliated forces had won this round, it seems they were no longer feeling quite as secure as before. After all, the king no longer had absolute power and the mass demonstrations had proved that quite a powerful opposition to a Hindu Rashtra was in fact in existence. It was perhaps because of these concerns that a Nepalese branch of the RSS was launched in 1992 under the name of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS).⁴ Various other Hindutva-affiliated organizations also sprung up and several WHF conferences were held in the 1990s. Achyut Raj Regmi

⁴ This is not only the name given to the Nepalese branch but also to the branches of the RSS based in Diaspora communities abroad, for example in the US (Nussbaum 2007: 305).

proposed in one of these meetings that Nepal should be declared a “Conversion Exclusion Zone” (Bouillier 1997:95). The “Christian threat” started to appear more frequently in the speeches held by the pro-Hindutva forces: for example Ashok Singhal, the President of both the VHP and the WHF’s Indian chapter at the time, remarked on his visit to Nepal how the country was becoming a victim of Christian aggression in the guise of NGO activities (S. Sharma 2004: 131). Achyut Raj Regmi even admitted to having threatened the director of the United Mission in Nepal by warning him of “the force of the stick” of his Hindu cadres (Bouillier 1997: 95). The Hindutva-rhetoric was now clearly becoming both louder and more hostile in Nepal. This period also coincided with the Ram Janmabhoomi movement led by the BJP party and the rest of the Sangh Parivar in India which had led to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 in Ayodhya, not far from the Nepalese border. As the RSS was subsequently banned in India, many Hindu extremists crossed the border into the Nepalese Terai (S. Sharma 2004: 119-120). These developments planted the seeds for a slow rise in Hindu extremist sentiments in Nepal – especially in the Terai region.

Meanwhile, dissatisfaction was growing among those left out of the constitution drafting process, namely the ethnic and regional parties and a previously unknown extreme faction of the Communists, the Communist Party of Nepal –Maoist (CPN-Maoist), led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) and Baburam Bhattarai. This small party had boycotted the 1994 elections because the Election Commission had not recognized their faction (Lawoti 2005:46-49). In 1996 the Maoist party gave the Congress -led government a list of 40 demands, listing concerns like poverty, discrimination and the domination of foreign capital in Nepal, but the most important issues on their agenda were clearly ethnic/linguistic equality and secularism. The party threatened the state with civil war if these demands were not met and indeed, soon after the Maoists launched a “People’s War” against the government and monarchy which would in the course of the next ten years claim the lives of more than 16,000 people.

1.2.5. Towards the End of Monarchy

Five years after the beginning of the People's War the Nepalese were in for a tragedy that shook the entire nation. The Maoist conflict had kept on intensifying towards the beginning of the 21st century and the "People's Army" had gathered a large support base from some of the ethnic minorities and Dalits. Although being one of the only parties that addressed the concerns of these groups, the Maoist leadership was mainly high caste Pahari and the party also enjoyed a considerable amount of support among college students (Lawoti 2005: 44). The People's Army was waging a guerilla war towards the capital with the aim of establishing a communist state and toppling the monarchy. In the midst of this, the news about the royal massacre on the 1st of June 2001 brought ever increasing feelings of instability into the country. It is difficult to establish what exactly took place at the family dinner in the Narayanhiti Palace because no post-mortem investigations were conducted and the palace strictly controlled all the information that was given to the media. Nevertheless, according to the official story King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya and seven other members of the royal family were shot dead by the crown prince Dipendra due to what is said to have been disagreement about the prince's choice of a fiancée (Whelpton 2005: 211-216). Dipendra also apparently shot himself to the head and he later died in the hospital. Curiously, the king's brother Gyanendra had been out of town on that evening and his son Paras survived the shooting spree with only minor injuries while King Birendra's immediate family was entirely wiped out. As it was the brother Gyanendra who was crowned the next king, it is perhaps not surprising that many had a hard time accepting the official version of the story, and various conspiracy theories started to circulate.

The royal massacre changed the public's relation to the institution of monarchy for good. Gyanendra had always been seen as a hardliner inside the palace, and it is said that he had been trying to urge his brother not to give into the demands of the pro-democracy protestors in 1990 (ibid. 215). In addition, the fact that Gyanendra's ascendance to the throne was not exactly in line with tradition, he now clearly faced a legitimacy problem. Hence, Gyanendra proceeded to use the same old tactic of actively promoting Hindu nationalism and sought the support of the Indian Hindutva

organizations (Hachhethu 2003b). Indeed, Gyanendra made numerous visits to religious places in India and cultivated a close relationship with the WHF, the chairman of which happened to be his personal aide-de-camp Bharat Keshari Simha (Toffin 2006: 231). Gyanendra was also crowned the Emperor of all Hindus by the WHF, like his brother before him.

In 2002, only a year after ascending the throne, Gyanendra started to gradually take over power from the government by dismissing the prime minister and assuming executive powers. This obviously resulted in a confrontation with the major political parties like the Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal, United Marxist Leninist (UML) that had previously been in favor of maintaining constitutional monarchy (Hachhethu n.d.: 10). After 2002, the traditional religious legitimacy of the king came increasingly under attack from almost all sides (Toffin 2006: 233). As a response to this the 7th World Hindu Conference held by the WHF in 2003 in the Indian town of Gorakhpur passed a resolution to protect the monarchy of Nepal (Hachhethu 2003). It was in 2005 that Gyanendra proceeded to take full control of the government, declared emergency and started to rule the country in an absolutist and authoritarian manner. The human rights situation deteriorated in the country rapidly as control over media, forced disappearances and custodial killings became commonplace (ICG 2005). The WHF and the Indian VHP were of course quick to jump to Gyanendra's support, while the international community strongly condemned the coup (Jha 2005). Later the chairman of WHF and aide-de-camp of the king, Bharat Keshari Simha, received a large amount of funding from the palace to organize a rally with *sadhus* (Hindu holy men) preaching to the public that democracy is against the principles of Hinduism. It was in the backdrop of all this that most political parties (the royalist parties like RPP being the obvious exceptions) started demanding secularism again (Toffin 2006: 231). The parties had undoubtedly grown weary of the nexus between the palace and the Hindutva forces.

Gyanendra's politics and a ruthless crackdown on the Maoist insurgents pushed the parties to form a Seven-Party Alliance (SPA), from which the RPP was absent, and start direct negotiations with the CPN-(Maoist) leaders a year after the coup. This resulted in

an agreement, and the two forces launched a popular movement to restore democracy, which later came to be known as the *Jana Andolan II*, or the Second People's Movement. From the 9th of April 2006 the streets were filled with millions of demonstrators all over the country for 19 days, and subsequently Gyanendra was forced to capitulate and restore the parliament. The king was then stripped of his administrative powers and the country was quickly declared secular on the 18th of May 2006. Hindu monarchy, hence, had come to be seen as the biggest obstacle to democracy in Nepal, both by the political parties as also by the majority of the people (Hachhethu, Kumar and Subedi 2008: 2-3). In November a Comprehensive Peace Accord was signed between the SPA and the CPN-(Maoist) which finally ended the decade old conflict. The fate of the monarchy was decided after Constituent Assembly (CA) elections in 2008 in which the Maoists quite unexpectedly won the largest amount of seats. Nepal was declared a secular republic and Gyanendra was forced to vacate the Narayanhiti palace. Despite many cries for help by the Nepalese Hindutva forces, even the Indian Sangh Parivar that had been weakened by an electoral defeat in 2004 could not come to the Hindu monarchy's rescue.

At the time of the writing, four years have passed since the elections, and the CA has failed to promulgate a new constitution, having extended the deadline several times. New elections have been called for November 2012, the CA has been dissolved and the country seems to find itself in a serious political crisis. During the past four years there were frequent resignations by Prime Ministers, the Maoists left the government and returned again and split into factions and emerged again unified under the name of Unified Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist (UCPN-M). Overall, the peace appeared fragile, although there was some progress made recently in initiating the integration of the Maoist combatants into the Nepalese Army. One of the issues that was significantly slowing down the constitution writing process and in the end was the reason for the CA's failure is a debate about federalism and more precisely on how and if the state should be restructured (ICG 2011: 1). Ethnicity or identity-based federalism is bitterly opposed by royalists and other formerly dominating groups who seem intimidated by

the demands made by many Janajati groups and Madheshis who have been at the forefront of demanding greater representation in the state apparatus. The Madheshi question especially has been a topic of much debate after an interim constitution was promulgated in 2007 and heavy protests erupted in the Terai, forcing the government to amend it. The present political chaos has once again stalled the constitution writing process, and might create a favorable climate for the royalists and other pro-Hindu nationalist forces.

1.2.6. Exclusion and Inter-religious Harmony

Ever since the 1990s the image of Nepal as an ethnically and religiously harmonious state has become tarnished. The mobilization that was witnessed in the name of secularism in the months leading to the promulgation of the 1990's constitution spoke volumes of the religious minorities' underlying resentment towards the dominant position of Hinduism, and the Maoist insurgency had a strong ethnic and caste dimension to it. The carefully constructed mono-cultural Nepali nationalism based on the Nepali language and Hindu religion became hence challenged by minorities who started to assert their own individual identities, based on ethnicity, religion and culture. Minorities' assertiveness becomes a problem for nationalist narratives, because it undermines a nation's claim to being a homogenous whole (Appadurai 2006). As Lawoti (2005) points out, the Maoist insurgency highlights the fact that political exclusion can lead to violent conflict. Excluded groups are especially prone to violence in an open society where they are able to voice their demands, but due to a highly centralized nature of the government they are unable to affect any changes into their situation. This was the scenario in the post-1990s Nepal (ibid. 39-40). In addition to ignoring ethnic and regional grievances, the constitution of 1990 also failed to fully address the concerns the religious minorities had voiced during the pro-secularism protests, and it continued to describe Nepal as a Hindu state. Nevertheless, the state's stance towards religious minorities changed slightly, as religious prisoners were released and the law that illegalized conversions was by and large no longer implemented. The representation of the minorities in the parliament also improved,

although not significantly, as for example the amount of Muslim representatives changed from the Panchayat era's 1.4% to 2.3% in the 1991 elections (Dastider 1995: 89). Although the changes were small, the pro-Hindutva forces started to feel their dominating position had become questioned and they now started to feel insecure for the first time.

According to Sudhindra Sharma (2004), the years after the promulgation of the 1990's constitution saw all religious communities increasingly turning away from syncretistic and tolerant practices and towards what they considered to be the essential teachings of their religions. In the case of Hinduism this meant an increasing popularity of Hindutva and the launching of various organizations affiliated with the Indian Sangh Parivar, as has been discussed. The Nepalese Buddhists who had mainly followed the Mahayana and Tantric traditions started to increasingly turn towards Theravada, and the Muslims became more attracted to literal and more conservative interpretations of Islam (ibid. 107-8). Attitudes clearly hardened among the religious communities, and while all these developments must also be viewed each in their global contexts, it could be said that they were also pronouncements of increasing inter-religious tensions. What also undoubtedly greatly contributed to this trend was the fact that the Hindutva rhetoric of the World Hindu Federation was becoming more aggressive, and the Sangh Parivar affiliated groups were now actively working towards gaining a stronger foothold in the country. The developments among the religious communities of Nepal in the post-1990s climate have not been studied enough to be able to draw conclusions about their exact reasons. Nevertheless, the hardening of sentiments among minority religions could in part have been a response to the provocative stance of the Sangh Parivar, at least among the Muslims. In India the anti-Muslim campaign of the Hindu right in the 1980s and the many ensuing communal riots caused an increasing number of angered Muslims to turn to radicalism (Hansen 1999: 152).

Tellingly, the post-1990 period coincided with an increase in Hindu-Muslim violence in the Terai region of Nepal (Dastider 1995). There were several instances of riots, and especially the town of Nepalgunj gained a reputation for having become extremely

communalized. Many of the riots came in the heels of the Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodhya and the subsequent influx of Sangh Parivar cadres into the Terai, which started to polarize the inter-religious relations in the border region. The World Hindu Federation had been turning more hostile towards the minorities after 1990, and in the wake of the Ayodhya incident many of its leaders traveled to the towns bordering India such as Nepalgunj and Birgunj and made provocative statements towards Muslims (S. Sharma 2004: 120). The years 1992, 1994 and 1995 saw the most serious incidents of Hindu-Muslim riots in the Terai and the involvement of Hindutva organizations, such as Shiv Sena Nepal and the WHF in the riots further polarized the situation. What was significant in the 1995 riots was the fact that the RPP and even the Nepali Congress chose to get involved in the communal tensions by making statements that sided with the Hindu community (Dastider 2007: 163). This increase in confrontation between the dominant Hindus and the minority religions was on the one hand clearly the result of deliberate provocation by Hindutva groups whose presence in the country grew significantly in the 1990s, and on the other hand it also indicated the majority's difficulties in tolerating the increased mobilization of the minorities (Dastider 2007: 157). The democratic periods when the minorities have been able to assert their demands indeed seem to clearly coincide with an increase in Hindutva mobilization and communal violence: the brief period of democracy in the late 1950s also saw some incidents of Hindu-Muslim riots in the Terai region.

The year 2004 saw another incidence of Hindutva provocation in the form of an attack on the Muslim population in Kathmandu. Following the execution of Nepalese migrant workers taken hostage in Iraq by a group of militants, angry mobs attacked and set fire to Muslim organizations, businesses and the Jama mosque in the capital in what is considered high-security area close to the royal palace and army headquarters. The police was seen to be idling nearby, reluctant to act (Varadarajan 2004). It is not entirely clear what happened here because a credible investigation was never held, but the involvement of Hindutva elements in the incident is quite clear, especially since the attacks resembled the ones often seen arranged by for example the Shiv Sena, a militant

Hindu nationalist party in India. Silent approval from the palace also seems to be a possibility (Jha 2007b). After all, this was a time when demands for secularism were being raised again and the popularity of monarchy was extremely low. This was the first time Muslims were targeted in the Kathmandu Valley and it differed from previous instances of Hindu-Muslim violence in the Terai in a sense that it seemed to clearly have been preplanned. Ashok Singhal, the president of the Indian VHP had indeed written a provocative letter to the king a day after the killing of hostages took place and had claimed that the executions had been “particularly brutal because the victims were Hindus” (Varadarajan 2004). It was reported that some leaders of the Pashupati Sena, yet another extremist Hindutva organization, were openly boasting about their involvement in the attacks, and a leader of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh was in fact arrested in connection to the violence (ibid.).

As Dastider (2007) argues, as long as the Muslim minority kept a low profile and did not object to their inferior status in the society, communal violence was rare. However, as soon as the minority community has started to show signs of assertiveness, the Hindu majoritarian state and society have responded aggressively, “pressing home the point that (---) the religious minorities must remember that the Hindu upper-caste groups will always dominate because of the country’s declared status as a ‘Hindu Kingdom’” (ibid. 164). The increase in ethnic and religious minorities’ assertiveness has indeed challenged the Hindu-Nepali definitions of nationalism and has led to the Hindutva groups becoming more aggressive. What Arjun Appadurai (2006) calls “predatory identities” seems to be of importance here: when the majority identity is mobilized to feel its dominating status is threatened, it turns predatory. In other words, the majority starts fearing it may turn into a minority and feels it must exterminate this threat.

Religious violence has indeed been at its lowest in Nepal during the times of absolute monarchy when the minorities have been forced to contend to their second-class status in the society. Hence, while there may have been a relative absence of communal violence in the past, this does not mean that a potential for a religious conflict does not exist. The peaceful relations between religious communities in the past can largely be

put down to the authoritarian and feudal rule that Nepal has experienced, and the fact that the kings systematically prevented conflicts from escalating (Dastider 1995: 107). The entrance of extremist organizations to the Terai (both Hindu and Muslim) in the wake of the Babri Masjid demolition has greatly contributed to the polarization of the communal sentiments in the area. As Nepal has now been declared secular and the interim government is trying to build a more inclusive state, the Hindutva groups feel the Hindu majority's status is more threatened than ever before. The next chapter deals with the Sangh Parivar's reaction to the declaration and their attempts at mobilizing the Nepalese masses.

2. The Reaction

2.1. Saffron Backlash

2.1.1. Hindu Demonstrations in Nepal

Prior to 2008 the Sangh Parivar still clearly thought it could somehow salvage the world's only Hindu kingdom. As the declaration to make Nepal a secular state was announced on the 18th of May 2006, protests began first as rather small in Kathmandu and a few days later they flared up in the south of the country in bigger numbers. Birganj, a border town to India, saw a complete shutdown for two days as around 6,000 Hindu demonstrators took to the streets demanding a return to Hindu Kingdom (Haviland: 2006a). The demonstrators were seen waving tridents and saffron flags and carrying pictures of the god Ram – symbols that have come to be strongly associated with the Sangh Parivar of India, especially after the Ramjanmabhoomi movement in the 1990s. Still, the demonstrations were perhaps not as intense as the Sangh Parivar leaders would have hoped. They could not create any considerable pressure towards the government and it was only in the Terai region that the number of protestors exceeded thousands.

Nevertheless, the Hindu right of Nepal attacked the government in strong words: Shiv Sena Nepal leader Arun Subedi said: "If Nepal is not a Hindu Kingdom, then there is no Nepal. We are entering into a holy war" (Haviland 2006b). Subedi also pointed out that

secularism could worsen the Hindus' relations with the minority religions. Many others also started to paint pictures of religious unrests. Chintamani Yogi, the principal of Hindu Vidyapeeth school feared that "Under secular Nepal missionary activities could flare up and age-old harmony among various religious groups in the country could be endangered" (Dahal 2006). Some comments were outright aggressive. A young person attending a Hindu rally said to the BBC: "In secularism it will be very difficult for them (minorities). The churches will be destroyed, the mosques will be destroyed." He added that "the people who are very much (of a) religious mind, they will spontaneously blow up these churches and mosques. The fight between the religious communities ... is not going to stop. It has been ignited" (Haviland 2006b.). The rhetoric of the Hindutva forces had clearly now reached a new level of hostility towards the religious minorities.

Although now a secular and a "multiethnic, multilingual, multi-religious and multicultural" state, and thus exhibiting a clear departure from the previous constitutions' Hindu bias, the interim constitution still retains the clause that grants each person a right to practice his or her religion, but only "as handed down to him or her from ancient times". It also adds that "no person shall be entitled to convert another person from one religion to another, and no person shall act or behave in a manner which may infringe upon the religion of others" (UNDP 2008: 12). These are indeed clauses that have remained unchanged ever since the first Panchayat Constitution of Mahendra and they are also something that the pro-Hindutva forces have always insisted on retaining. It is, however, true that this law has by and large not been implemented since 1990s and jail sentences have been extremely rare, so in practice the declaration of secularism simply meant that the last sign of Nepal's Hindu-ness was now removed. Thus it seems that much of the protests were against the removal of a single word that for some contained the symbolic identity of the country and that for others meant state protection against the enemies of Hinduism against whom a holy war now needed to be declared. As Sudhindra Sharma (2002) argues, the constitution of 1990 already made Nepal a *de facto* secular state, because the only Hindu institution safeguarded by the state was Hindu kingship (ibid. 35). At the time of the protests the

future status of monarchy was also still undecided. This is perhaps why many suspected the involvement of royalists and Sangh Parivar activists from across the border in staging the protests. This may, indeed, be true but at the same time there is no denying the fact that it was not just the monarchists and hardliner Hindus who were unhappy about Nepal's Hindu status being gone, or the manner in which it went. Some people felt that even though adopting secularism had been the correct decision, it had been a hasty one and should have been left for the Constituent Assembly (Dahal 2006). This would clearly have been a more democratic move.

An extensive survey conducted by International IDEA suggests that in 2004, 66 percent of the "commoners" (i.e. people who were not members of the parliament) were indeed in favor of a Hindu state. In 2007 this percentage was 61. Even though the survey shows a slight trend in an increasing support for secularism, the numbers still quite clearly point that the majority of the Nepalese are in favor of a Hindu Rashtra. Perhaps surprisingly, the support was especially high among the Madheshis and unlike among most other groups, it seems to be on the increase: in 2004 74 percent of the Madheshi caste Hindus favored a Hindu Rashtra and in 2007 the percentage had grown to 85. Another group obviously highly in favor a Hindu state is the Pahari caste Hindus, although even among them the support had dropped from 73 to 66 percent. Unsurprisingly, the Hill ethnic groups and religious minorities make up the portion of the society that is most in favor of secularism (Hachhethu, Kumar and Subedi 2008: 85-6). All in all, this and other similar studies prove that the protests against secularism in 2006 cannot be shrugged off as simply having been staged by the royalists or the Sangh Parivar. It is clear that in addition to the Hill caste Hindus, especially among the Madheshis, an overwhelming majority of the people would have wanted the state to remain Hindu. The Sangh Parivar and the royalists were, of course, well represented among the protestors and probably even arranged them, but a great deal of moderate Hindus were also equally disappointed by the government's decision. Of course, a simple preference for a Hindu state does not mean an endorsement of the entire

Hindutva ideology, but this sentiment is certainly something the Hindu right of Nepal tries to exploit now.

2.1.2. The Sangh Parivar across the Border

It was not just in Nepal that Hindu groups were outraged over the new secular status of the country. As expected, the Sangh Parivar of India reacted with strong words. Mohan Bhagwat, the general secretary of the RSS, lamented the fate of Nepal and its symbolic identity and said that “now the people of Nepal will have to maintain eternal vigilance to safeguard it (Hindu identity)” (Dahal 2006). Uma Bharti, a prominent former BJP member of parliament, now a Bharatiya Janshakti Party leader, stated that the declaration would have “far-reaching” consequences both for Nepal and India and that “in the present parlance, secularism is equated with minority appeasement”, which according to her would lead to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism (OneIndiaNews: 2006). These statements were echoed by a BJP member of parliament from Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath. At a protest march led by him in the border town of Sonauli, he was reported saying that a secular Nepal would bring India under the threat of ISI (the Pakistani intelligence agency) and the Nepalese Maoists (Hindustan Times 2006).

Adityanath’s interest in Nepal’s affairs seems to go much deeper than simple worry for India’s security, however. Also acting as the head priest of the Gorakhnath *math*, a Hindu monastery close to the Nepalese border with traditional relations to the royal family of Nepal and a long history of involvement with the Hindu Mahasabha⁵, Adityanath is known for his active links to Nepalese Hindutva organizations (Jha 2007a). Not only is he the national president of the Indian chapter of WHF and listed as an advisor of the Shiv Sena Nepal’s journal “Dharmayuddha” (translatable as holy war or war of righteousness), but he has also organized several conferences where the secular status of Nepal has been discussed. These conferences were attended by a large delegation from Nepal, including Bharat Keshari Simha of the WHF, Arun Subedi of

⁵ The Gorakhnath *math* is an important center of the Kanpatha Yogis (a tradition to which Yogi Adityanath also belongs) who are followers of Guru Gorakhnath. These Yogis are said to have provided assistance to Prithvi Narayan Shah in his conquest, and the Shah kings consider Gorakhnath their parton saint (Bouillier 1986).

Shiv Sena Nepal and others with close links to the palace and various Hindutva organizations, such as Madhav Bhattarai, the *Raj guru* of the king and Swami Prapannacharya. In April 2008, shortly before monarchy was completely abolished in Nepal, Adityanath gathered Hindu leaders from 39 countries to draw up a strategy for a “movement to save the monarchy from extinction and also to restore Hindutva pride in the neighboring nation” (A. Singh 2008). Another aim of the meeting was to unite the scattered Hindu organizations of Nepal. It was in the next meeting with WHF at the end of April in Balrampur that Bharat Keshari Simha hinted on the conclusions they had come to: “If Maoists can take up arms, why can’t religious people like us?” (S. Singh 2008)

Yogi Adityanath, who owns another *math* in the Nawalparasi district of the Nepalese Terai, has become an extremely controversial, yet powerful personality with a large support base in Uttar Pradesh (UP) (Srivastava 2007). In the past few years, he has been accused of instigating over 20 communal riots, financing Hindutva terrorists and turning the region around Gorakhpur into a “communal cauldron” by provoking massive Hindu-Muslim violence. Several criminal complaints have been filed against him, but the police seem either unable or unwilling to take action (Mohan 2009). Much of Adityanath’s power is based on an organization he has founded, the Hindu Yuva Vahini, or Hindu Youth Organization, which is reportedly made up of mainly unemployed youngsters and petty criminals who can easily be mobilized for riots. The youngsters chant slogans like “*UP mein rahana hoga to Yogi Yogi kahana hoga*” (If you want to stay in UP you must say Yogi, Yogi). Adityanath himself described his influence on these cadres to the *Tehelka* magazine in the following way: “When I speak, thousands listen. When I ask them to rise and protect our religion, they obey. If I ask for blood, they will give me blood”. He has openly declared that his plan is to “eliminate the Muslim population in UP” by turning the state into another Gujarat, while he himself aspires to become “the next Narendra Modi” (ibid.), the controversial BJP Chief Minister widely accused to be at least partly responsible for the 2002 pogrom where over 2,000 Muslims were killed. Indeed, the region around Gorakhpur has

witnessed several incidents of provoked riots and attacks against the Muslim population in recent years. It is Adityanath's aggressive anti-Muslim rhetoric and the powerful, Hindu Youth Organization-based following that make him a dangerous force to be reckoned with – at least within India. However, as the border between India and Nepal is open, and many of the residents in the adjoining areas hold dual citizenship, Adityanath and the rest of the Sangh Parivar are certainly capable of affecting the politics and communal sentiments also on the Nepalese side.

The conferences held in India highlight the fact that the Hindu right of Nepal is hardly ever alone in what it does. An Indian element seems to be frequently involved and strong backing is provided to their Nepalese allies by the Sangh Parivar forces. The strategies of the Nepalese Hindutva groups are also clearly formulated in close cooperation with their Indian counterparts. The Nepalese Hindu right is somewhat ambiguous about these connections and often refers to them as simply “moral support” or “sympathizing”. Nevertheless, the HSS admitted that the “RSS helps HSS (---). We learn from them. Indian RSS members sometimes visit, Mohan Bhagwat was just here” (Interview 6. Govinda Sah). Vijay Prakash of the WHF in fact said in an informal conversation that the HSS is “provided by the BJP” and gets “hundred percent support” from the party, implying financial assistance. According to him, these connections are not something either party would like to openly declare. Especially in Nepal admitting to too many Indian connections could be interpreted as being anti-national – something which of course would not suit these Hindu nationalists at all.

2.1.3. Bomb Blasts and Violent Attacks

Already a year before Simha's hints about taking up arms against the state, a previously unknown pro- Hindu kingdom group called the Nepal Defence Army (NDA) had claimed responsibility over a series of fatal bomb blasts. The group seems to be mainly based in the Terai region, and it is held responsible for many acts of violence, including the murder of a Christian priest in Eastern Nepal, an attack on a mosque in Morang district and a bomb blast in a church in Lalitpur, all in the years following secularism

(Timsina 2010). The NDA claims to be made up of 1,200 former soldiers and police officers, among them also former Maoists, who are now fighting for the restoration of Hindu kingdom and allegedly also training suicide bombers in al-Qaida style (Sarkar 2007a). It is, however, highly unlikely that the organization would have so many active members, and many have suspected it to be largely a “one man show”. The NDA is, however, also suspected of having ties to the Indian Sangh Parivar, although some RSS activists have dismissed the NDA as insignificant (ICG: 2007: 10). In 2009, following an attack on a church in the capital, the NDA’s leader, Ram Prasad Mainali or “Parivartan” (translating as “change”) was captured by the police and the attacks seized for a while. Mainali himself said in an interview that he was being supported by militant Hindu organizations from India (The Times of India 2011). In March 2011 the NDA resurfaced, despite Mainali having been put behind bars, and several followers of his were captured planning a series of bomb blasts against Christian buildings in Kathmandu (Parajuli 2011). In November 2011 leaflets of the NDA were left at the venue of a bomb blast in front of the headquarters of United Mission to Nepal. The NDA has repeatedly asked Christians to leave Nepal and threatened them with more violence if their conversion activities do not end (Timsina 2010).

Nepal Defence Army is not the only terrorist organization that has emerged in Nepal in the aftermath of secularism. Ranbir Sena (also Ranvir or Ranabir), another Terai-based outfit, has claimed responsibility over several bomb blasts in the country in recent years. The group originates in the Indian state of Bihar, where it has been active since the 1970s as a militia of upper caste landowners attacking and murdering members of the landless lower castes and Maoist supporters (Mathema 2011: 22-3). Ranbir Sena has been listed as a terrorist organization and banned by the government of India. It is believed that the outfit enjoys support by some royalists in Nepal, in much the same way as the NDA. In fact, Ranbir Sena’s activities in Nepal have concentrated on terrorizing the public and demanding a return to a Hindu kingdom, whereas in India it has made the headlines on the grounds of targeted killings of Dalits and other members of lower castes. In Nepal, the group was first thought to be only active in the Terai

region, but in May 2008, just after the government had adopted the resolution to declare Nepal a republic, Ranbir Sena bombed the Birendra International Convention Center in Kathmandu – the venue chosen for the ceremonial ending of the monarchy. On 27th of December 2008 there was a bomb blast in front of the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu and on the following day a bomb went off in the Durbar High School area of the city. Ranbir Sena's leader, Bhagirath Singh, said in an interview to Avenues TV that the bombings were a warning to the government and the Maoists, who had “not responded seriously to demands for the withdrawal of the constitutional provision declaring Nepal a secular state” (quoted in CSW 2009).

Coinciding with these attacks there was yet another incident of Hindu-Muslim violence in the Kapilavastu region of Terai in 2007. The violence erupted as a response to the assassination of Mohammed Abdul Moit Khan, a politician with strong links to the palace and a connection to the killing of 12 Maoists in 2005 after Gyanendra had assumed direct rule (Sarkar 2007b). The assassination caused the supporters of Khan to resort to looting and arson that spread to the neighboring districts and took on a sectarian character. What had first been a primarily Madheshi-Pahari political conflict now became a Hindu-Muslim one. Violent mobs attacked mosques, and many Muslims fled to India as the government failed to contain the violence. Many called this the worst communal riot in the history of the country and concluded that the new secular transitional government did not have the power to keep the violent communal forces in check (Timsina 2010).

In the past two years two prominent Nepalese Muslims have also been assassinated in the capital amidst accusations that the government has not done enough to investigate the killings. In 2010 Jamim Shah, a media personality, was shot dead in Kathmandu by two masked men who the Nepalese police suspected belonged to the Chhota Rajan criminal gang which is active in India. Shah had been accused of having links to Pakistan's ISI and the Mumbai underworld by Indian officials, which raised doubts of the involvement of both the Indian and Nepalese police in the assassination. Shah himself had denied all the accusations against him (BBC 2010). In September 2011

Faizan Ahmad, the chairman of Nepal Islami Sangh, was also gunned down in similar style in the capital in broad daylight close to the police headquarters. The Islami Sangh is mainly active in charity work. The Muslim organizations of Nepal have accused the Nepalese police of having allowed the killing to happen and of being slow to take action. The government's probe into the assassination claims the same criminal gang as in Shah's case was behind the murder. The Muslim community has objected to the probe in strong words and accuses the government of trying to portray Ahmad as an agent of Pakistani terrorist groups (The Kathmandu Post 2012). It has also been reported that the government was under immense pressure not to take the probe forward (Ghimire 2011). Ahmad's murder has caused a great deal of fear and anger amongst Muslims in Nepal, who staged many protests across the country following the incident. The assassins of both Ahmad and Shah have still not been captured, and the government's slowness to take action points to a spreading culture of impunity and unaccountability (Shneiderman and Turin 2012: 143). Such incidents, of course, raise the Muslims' doubts about the government's ability and willingness to protect their rights.

It is relatively clear that not only has religious violence increased, but its nature has also significantly changed in recent years, especially since secularism in 2006. Bombings and assassinations targeting not only Muslims but this time also Christians, have appeared alongside communal riots, and the violence has now made its way into the capital area as well. While groups like the NDA and Ranbir Sena may represent a very marginal section of the society and enjoy extremely limited public support, they can certainly create a great deal of fear among the minorities with their actions. It seems that most of these violent acts have been carried out by extremist fringe groups of Hindu kingdom supporters who at least claim to have connections to Indian Hindutva organizations. Whether these groups are being supported by the Sangh Parivar, or its allies in Nepal (including the former king, Gyanendra), is unclear. It is, however, telling that these groups have emerged simultaneously with some Hindu leaders' comments about religious unrests. Such acts of terrorism targeting religious minorities are a

completely new phenomenon in Nepal and point to a new level of radicalism among groups that advocate a return to a Hindu kingdom.

The motives behind the two Muslim leaders' assassinations are also far from being clear, but it seems that their alleged connections to Pakistani organizations might have been a factor. The Indian media has long been pointing its finger to the Terai region where it is believed that Pakistan's ISI is active in planning an offensive against India, using the Nepalese Muslims as cover (S. Sharma 1995). This is something that the Hindu nationalists have of course also repeatedly claimed, especially now that Nepal has been declared secular. Whether these incidents are a sign of the government's unwillingness to protect the minorities' rights or not, the fact that the state does not seem to be seriously trying to catch the culprits behind the assassinations is a discouraging sign for the religious minorities. Imran Ansari, the President of Millat-e-Islamiya Nepal saw the dominating Hindu identity of the political leaders as a possible reason for the inaction: "The more mosques come up, the more they (Hindu extremists) will try to instigate violence. Hopefully there will be enough political will that will not let them cause much more harm. (---) Congress, the Maoists, UML, they are still Hindu-minded deep in their hearts. The more the other communities are being seen to have gained, the more violent the Hindu extremists will try to get" (Interview 8.).

A fear that the government does not protect the minorities from violence can in fact lead to increasing support for a return to a Hindu kingdom, as Ansari also pointed out: "Right now many people keep revisiting their thoughts and think that maybe the king was indeed good (---). The monarchy probably had some substance. There was no violence against Muslims while the king was there. Now Muslims are being targeted so maybe the king indeed was better in that sense" (ibid.). Such a development can, in fact, already be seen in the survey conducted by International IDEA: in 2004, 16 % of the Muslims supported a Hindu state, whereas in 2007 this support had risen to 21 %. A similar trend can also be seen among the Christians (Hachhethu, Kumar and Subedi 2008: 86). Of course, one of the worst incidents of targeted violence against Muslims happened in 2004 in Kathmandu when King Gyanendra was still very much in power.

Still, as Dastider (2007) points out, there is a common belief among the Muslim community that the state will not respond favorably if the Muslims start demanding their rights, and this has caused them to often think that it is better to remain loyal to the king (ibid. 159). This is, of course, exactly what the extremist Hindutva groups would like to achieve through their violent actions.

2.2. Rhetorical Tactics of the Hindu Right

2.2.1 Hindu Rashtra as the Reason for Religious Harmony

So far, the more mainstream Hindutva organizations like the WHF and the HSS have distanced themselves from the attacks of the NDA and Ranbir Sena and have refrained from openly advocating violence in public (Simha's comments aside). Nevertheless, the comments made by many of the leaders and members of these organizations leave much to be hoped for in terms of completely condemning the use of violence. The Hindu right of Nepal has now come to adopt various tactics from the Indian Sangh Parivar and one of these tactics has been the use of fear-inciting rhetoric by speaking in veiled threats about the religious minorities. The main argument of the pro-Hindutva forces in both countries is that if Nepal is not a Hindu state, something terrible will happen. Behind this claim is an idea that a conflict will break out between the religious communities because the secular government will allow Hinduism to be threatened, and the Hindus will thus need to rise to protect it. Still, however, the violent attacks committed as a response to these perceived threats are not seen to be the reason for the religious unrests, but rather a natural reaction that cannot or should not be prevented. The only thing able to halt these supposedly inevitable attacks is the establishment of a Hindu Rashtra. This logic guides all of the Hindutva organizations' statements. Madhav Bhattarai, the President of Rashtriya Dharma Sabha (National Religious Council) and a former *Raj guru* of King Gyanendra said in an interview: "In future there will be many incidents. Bomb blasts et cetera. If Nepal is not a Hindu Kingdom or a Hindu Rashtra, there will be a religious war or conflict. This will take place for sure". When asked about the reasons behind the bombings targeting religious minorities, he answered that "the church bomb was the result of secularism" (Interview 13.). Similarly, Govinda Sah

of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh and Nepal Janata Party said that “Muslims are trying to interrupt cultural practices. The people who were behind the bombings were only trying to protect their religion. No one can remain silent when such things happen. Hindus have a right to action. It will happen more in the future if Christians and Muslims continue their activities. They should be stopped” (Interview 5. Govinda Sah).

The blame is, hence, invariably placed on both the secular government that supposedly fails to protect Hinduism and the minority religions whose activities are seen to be either disturbing the Hindus, interrupting their cultural practices or simply making them feel insecure. This, in turn, somehow forces a violent response out of the threatened Hindus. The issue that emerged in every single interview with Nepalese Hindutva activists was the threat posed by Christian missionary activities. The activities of Muslims, however, did not receive the amount of attention that they usually do in the statements made by the Indian Sangh Parivar. Nevertheless, the Pakistani ISI, terrorism and madrassas allegedly built by illegal Bangladeshi immigrants were often enough identified among the elements potentially disturbing inter-religious peace in Nepal. The Hindu character of the state is seen as an answer to such problems: “Hindu parties will come to power and will stop terrorism. (---) In a Hindu Rashtra it would be very easy to stop their activities”, Govinda Sah said (Interview 6.). It was, however, difficult to get a clear answer to how exactly the Hindu state would proceed to put an end to Islamist terrorism and missionary activities, or why a country identifying itself as Hindu should prove to be more successful in this task than a secular one.

The answer seems to lie in the Sangh Parivar’s desire for a strong government that would keep the disturbing behavior of the minorities in check. Madhav Bhattarai’s answer gives a clear example of this: “In a secular country, there will be more conversion and terrorism (---) In Hindu rashtra there will be no such activities. It tolerates religions. Government rule would be strong, it would stop such activities” (Interview 13.). *Arthashastra*, an ancient Sanskrit text on statecraft seen as central to the Sangh Parivar’s Hindu rashtra –model gives us a clue on how such a state might operate in practice. According to Basu et al. (1993) the text “recommends a police state under a

single despotic head” (ibid. 66) with “a highly organized surveillance system, complete monarchical and bureaucratic controls and monopolies” (ibid.78) – something which certainly sounds familiar in the Nepalese context. This makes it clear that the simple addition of the word “Hindu” into the constitution and in a sense a return to the 1990s would not be enough to satisfy most of the Hindutva advocates. The HSS in particular is advocating a complete restructuring of the state “according to Hindu philosophy” (Interview 6.) and sees that the Hindu state of the past did not do enough to “implement the Hindutva principles” (Kharel and Mulmi 2011). In this light Bhattarai’s simultaneous remark about the religious tolerance of a state that puts an end to conversions seems quite contradictory and out of place. The Hindu state has, however, in the Hindu nationalists’ view always protected the rights of the minorities. Indeed, a plenty of examples of religious harmony during the Hindu Kingdom were cited in the interviews, such as the king letting the Muslim community build their mosque in front of the royal palace. At the same time, many interviewees pointed out how the demands of these communities to build more madrassas or burial grounds are now making the Hindus feel insecure. The guiding logic behind this is, of course, that of control: in a Hindu state the Hindus can decide how much breathing space they want to give to the Muslims and Christians, whereas in a secular state this power is lost.

The Hindu-ness of the state is thus presented as the only thing able to guarantee inter-religious peace and harmony. Religious harmony, however, is not understood to mean the same thing as religious equality, but rather control over the religious minorities’ activities. If the Hindus lose this control, the peace and harmony prevalent in Nepal are also lost because the minorities can now do as they please and the Hindus cannot be expected to tolerate this. At the same time, the common Hindutva rhetoric of emphasizing the tolerance and peacefulness of Hinduism is used to justify their rule over other religious groups that supposedly lack these attributes. As Basu et al. (1993) describe, this rhetoric tries to brand all the followers of Christianity and Islam as intolerant, violent and expansionist, with the intention of presenting them as dangers that need to be resisted (ibid. 74). In this way, the Hindutva forces can put forward an

image of themselves as simply defenders of tolerance and peace. Furthermore, in the Nepalese context peacefulness is made out to be a specifically Nepalese characteristic, something which sets them apart from the “more violent” Indians. When the communal trouble of secular India is contrasted with the inter-religious peace that resided under the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal, the Hindutva forces again aim to blame secularism for the conflicts between religious communities. They warn that Nepal could now turn into India, as if secularism alone would be responsible for unleashing the alleged menacing potential of the minority religions. Insisting that a violent response is justified - or at least understandable - the Hindu right tries to place the blame for the violence and conflict on others.

Meanwhile, some interviewees were paradoxically even ready to admit that their own actions might provoke conflicts. A good example of this is Govinda Sah’s comment: “An incident like Babri Masjid could also happen in Nepal. For instance, in my village the Christians keep going to Hindu wedding ceremonies, give them money and tell them to marry according to Christian tradition, to wear white and so on. White is the color of the widows in our culture. We will go and demolish a church if their activities don’t stop”. When asked if this would not anger the Christians and lead to conflict rather than promote inter-religious peace, the answer was: “In a state of conversion we are ready for conflict. Hindus have suffered already great losses. We are ready to die for our religion. We are not extremists. It is only a reaction to their activities. There is an extent to tolerance” (Interview 6.). Hence, while the Hindus are made out to be inherently tolerant, this tolerance seems to come to an abrupt end when faced with the activities of Christians and Muslims. In this way the Hindutva rhetoric often blames the minorities for forcing the Hindus to turn intolerant (Mukta 2000: 450). On the other hand, Basu et al. (1993) point out that the tolerance the Hindutva rhetoric attributes to the Hindus seems to go so far that it attempts to stamp out all that is branded intolerant, just to be secure (ibid. 75). Thus, resisting Muslims and Christians is, in fact, not always seen to be intolerant in the eyes of the Hindutva advocates, but a way of securing the survival of real tolerance, which can only exist in a Hindu nation.

The groups that have used violence against the minority religious communities after 2006 have simultaneously been voicing threats to the political parties behind the decision to declare Nepal a secular country. The idea is clearly to attempt to provoke religious unrests in order to pressurize the government to make Nepal a Hindu Rashtra again and simultaneously to intimidate the minorities. While the violent acts have been committed by fringe groups with no clear evidence of contacts to the WHF or the HSS, most of the Hindutva leaders have tried to rationalize the violence and some have even condoned it. If nothing more, these groups are at least ideologically closely tied together and use the same Hindu supremacist rhetoric. In a Hindu rashtra, the religious minorities' demands do not matter because they are not seen to be genuinely Nepalese: "*Christians aur musalman baahar se aayen hain, to unka kya matlab?*" (Christians and Muslims have come from outside, so what is the meaning of them?⁶), as Swami Prapannacharya puts it (Interview 7.). Similarly, Khem Raj Keshav Sharma of the Sanatan Dharma Seva Samiti had already in the 1980s questioned the minorities' entitlement to equal rights in a Hindu state: "(---) it is not right for such a country to adopt a 'policy of equality towards all religions', nor to give them the same opportunities as the Hindus, in my opinion" (quoted in P.R. Sharma 2004: 294). Hence, while the Hindu right argues that the Hindu-ness of the state was the reason for inter-religious harmony in Nepal, what it understands under religious harmony is actually based on ideas of domination and control, rather than equality and freedom of religion. The secular government is seen as a conspirator in destroying this imposed harmony, as it gives too many freedoms to communities whose inherent nature is believed to be to disturb and threaten the Hindus.

2.2.2 Nepalese Secularism as Conspiracy

If the Hindutva advocates see the Hindu kingdom as the reason for the inter-religious harmony of Nepal, and secularism is seen to cause Hinduism to be threatened, the declaration itself must have been a plot to weaken the Hindus. As already pointed out, the negative reaction to secularism did not only come from the Hindu hardliners, but

⁶ My translation from Hindi.

also from other sections of the society. Many moderate Hindus, especially high caste Paharis and Madheshis felt that there was no need to make Nepal secular because the state had always protected the rights of religious minorities. This view obviously bases itself on the fact that there had been a relative absence of large scale communal violence in Nepal in the past, but at the same time it fails to take into account the feelings of alienation that labeling the state as “Hindu” caused in ethnic and religious minorities. It also ignores the fact that the Hindu bias of the state led to the state promoting Hinduism over other religions. Does this mean that the Hindutva rhetoric has a sympathetic audience in the middle class Hindus, then? For the most part, the reasons for wanting to keep Nepal a Hindu state seem to be quite different from those of the Hindutva advocates’. In a study conducted by the Asia Foundation and Interdisciplinary Analysts in 2007, only 5 percent of the people who had answered they would like Nepal to be a Hindu state chose the answer “If not Hindu, it will invite conflicts in the name of religion” as the rationale for their opinion. The overwhelming majority chose answers that justified retaining the Hindu state because it was “part of tradition” (60 %) or Nepal’s identification worldwide (29 %) (Sen and Sharma 2007: 46). The Hindutva proponents’ logic about secularism causing religious conflicts, hence, escapes the vast majority of the people of Nepal, even those who may agree with them on some points. It is also interesting to note that the leaders of minority religious communities all said in the interviews that inter-religious relations have improved in Nepal since secularism. While they were obviously concerned about the increase in violence, they emphasized the importance of the inter-religious dialogue that has now emerged in the country. All this is of course in sharp contrast to the claims the Hindutva leaders keep making about the consequences of secularism.

One additional reason for people wanting to keep Nepal a Hindu state was also the fact that the issue of secularism received very little attention in political discussions leading to the declaration. Political parties did not explain what they meant by the concept, even though it was included in the campaigns of many (Jha 2008). The Sanskrit term *dharma nirpeksha* that was used in the interim constitution as the translation of the word

“secular” has proved to create even further confusion around the issue. Translating the word “*dharma*” into English is difficult, because it does not simply mean religion. In fact, it should be understood more in the sense of moral code, rather than religion in its Western sense, as it also means “essential or inherent quality; attribute; duty;” and “prescribed course of conduct” (Raker and Shukla 2002). Chintamani Yogi, the founder and director of the Hindu Vidyapeeth School in Lalitpur was of the opinion that the term used in the interim constitution was not appropriate and neither was the concept of secularism: “The term should be revised. Is there some other word that could be used? (---) In fact, it (*dharma nirpeksha*) means avoiding or ignoring dharma. Freedom of religion is more important, perhaps the word dharma should be replaced by something that means sects” (Interview 4). In his view, secularism is not needed in Nepal because “there was no conflict between religious communities”. In a similar manner, Keshav Chaulagain, the general secretary of the Inter-religious Council also questioned the rationale of secularism: “Secularism is not what should be strived for, but religious freedom. (---) Now, what is the difference between a secular state and a Hindu nation? It has not been clearly defined” (Interview 1.).

The criticism on the lack of definition of secularism is perhaps valid. Secularism as a concept has been interpreted and implemented in different ways in different countries in the course of history. The roots of secularism go to the 16th century Europe and the idea of separation of church and state. This was a direct result of the religious wars that had been raging in Europe, and secularism was an attempt to bring the warring sides together and establish a feeling of religious non-alignment from the side of the states. In this sense, many have come to argue that secularism is an inherently Western concept that was imported to South Asia, and therefore it would be incompatible with the deeply religious nature of the Hindu society (for example Madan 1987). This is indeed an argument that has also often been used by the proponents of Hindu Rashtra in India and Nepal, and the Congress party of India has been often accused of being “pseudo-secular” by the BJP. However, when one looks at the interpretation of secularism in India, it is clear that it is quite different from for example the French model of “negative

secularism” where religion has no place in the public sphere. In India secularism was from the very beginning taken in a “positive” sense to mean an equal treatment of all religions, and as Pantham (1997: 525) notes, while the opposite of the word “secular” in the West could be considered to be “religious”, in India this would be “communal”. The Indian state has hence always aimed to practice equal and balanced treatment of all religious communities, while it has actively regulated and institutionalized the practices of these communities, for instance through the introduction of different civil codes (Hansen 1999: 53). The reasons for adopting secularism in India were according to Chandhoke (2004) in fact very similar to those in Europe in the 16th century. It was the experience of Partition and division along religious lines that led to a need to re-establish a sense of mutual belonging for all religious communities that were to somehow co-exist in a newly independent India.

What the interim constitution of Nepal, in fact, says about secularism is that “Nepal is an independent, sovereign, secular, inclusive and fully democratic State”, which according to the UNDP’s “Simple Guide to the Interim Constitution of Nepal” is to mean that the state “is not attached to one particular religion (---). This does not mean that it is against religion - just that religion is a personal not a government matter” (UNDP 2008: 12). The right to practice one’s religion is guaranteed, which already is an example of the state’s recognition of the fact that religion constitutes an important part of many of the citizens’ lives. Despite all of this, it remains unclear as to what kind of a version or interpretation of secularism the interim constitution means and more importantly, what the interpretation will be in the new constitution. Obviously, no matter what interpretation Nepal chooses, it will not mean that religion is going to be banned or even discouraged, as the Hindu nationalist groups have started to claim. Making the practice of religion illegal has, of course, no place in an inclusive, democratic state – something that Nepal is now striving to be.

Despite the interim constitution’s clear commitment to secularism, it still falls short of completely protecting the freedom of religion by not extending the right to practice one’s religion to people who have converted. Similarly, the interim constitution also

explicitly forbids proselytizing, as in the past. This is not much of a consolation for the Hindu nationalists, as they fear this last remaining hope for them is going to be scrapped from the law soon as well. Furthermore, they are constantly accusing the present government of not having the political will to implement this law, and this has, of course, been true ever since the 1990s. Why this formulation has then been left in the constitution is an interesting question. Most probably, many (though most certainly not all) of the high caste political leaders still harbor fears of conversions, even though from a study conducted by the International IDEA, it becomes strikingly clear that there was almost complete unanimity in the interim government in 2007 about the secular status of the country, as 94 percent of the parliamentarians were in favor of secularism (Hachhethu, Kumar and Subedi 2008: 86).

Because the meaning of secularism in Nepal has not been clearly defined, the Hindutva groups have sensed an opportunity to exploit the confusion. The fact that the Maoists were at the forefront of demanding a secular state and that they should in an ideological sense be atheists helps the Hindu right in spreading its propaganda about the government's supposed anti-religious stand. An instance such as the Maoists' attempt at expelling the traditionally Indian priests of Pashupatinath is also seen as a sign of this, although the incident probably had more to do with the Maoists' anti-India stance. In the interviews I conducted, many Hindutva activists seemed to deliberately misunderstand the term "secularism" to mean something completely anti-religious. Swami Prapannacharya, a prominent Sanskrit and Hindu scholar who is closely associated with royalists and Hindutva groups is a perfect example of this with his views about the true nature of secularism: "There will be conflict between the religions in a secular state. This is because secularism doesn't believe in religion, which is the meaning of *dharma nirpeksha*. This will be written in the law of the land, the constitution. The government makes the laws and people have to live by these laws. This means people will not follow religion. There will be two sides: those against religion and those for it (---). The religious people will hence be breaking the law and

they will be against it”⁷ (Interview 7). Damodar Gautam of the World Hindu Federation and Inter-religious Council also tried to present secularism as being against the practice of religion: “Hindus are not satisfied with the secular state because secularism is anti-religious, anti-righteous. It is wrong.” (Interview 2) In a similar vein, Akileshwar Singh, the president of Nepal Janata Party tried to argue that the state is trying to force people to live without religion. He went on to state that “ours is the true secularism”, because in a Hindu Rashtra “all religions can be practiced” (Interview 14).

The underlying logic of such a statement returns to the notion of the supposed tolerance of Hindus and the intolerance of Muslims and Christians. Since the secular state gives more rights to these “intolerant expansionists”, the existence of Hindus and of tolerance itself becomes threatened. As Govinda Sah of the HSS remarked, “We cannot simply lose our people because of secularism” (Interview 6). The Hindutva advocates believe that it is the Muslims and especially Christians’ conspiracy to convert the entire Hindu population and to rule them according to their own intolerant ways in a state where there will be no space left for Hindus to live (Basu et al. 1993: 74-5). Indeed, Sah also talked about how “Christianity should not be used as a tool of ruling this country” (Interview 6). A Hindi language pamphlet of the Nepalese HSS called “*Rashtriyata aur vaishvik avadharna*” (Nationalism and the global conception) spreads propaganda about how Islam and Christianity are on a quest to conquer the world. According to the pamphlet, these two religions are in a constant state of rivalry about which one of them can boast the highest number of converts and thus rule the entire world with their manpower (Mishra n.d.: 31-32). The Hindu right again speaks in veiled majoritarian terms: while they claim to advocate the freedom of religion, in their view this freedom can only be guaranteed by restricting the rights of the minorities. Thus, secularism becomes an evil conspiracy to subjugate the Hindu majority, and true secularism can only come into being in a “tolerant” Hindu Rashtra that does not let intolerance take over the world. The “true secularism” of Hindutva hence has nothing to do with secularism itself, but with the alleged tolerance of Hindus, which is rather understood in

⁷ My translation from Hindi.

terms of toleration, meaning that minority religions are allowed to be practiced – but only if the superiority of Hinduism is accepted.

The Hindu Rashtra advocated by the Hindutva groups and parties hence represents the complete opposite of the inclusive and impartial nature of secularism by wanting to exclude the “religious Others” from this nation, thus rendering them to second-class citizens with limited rights. In Nepal, already the declaration of secularism seems to paradoxically have provided a basis for its crisis. The Sangh Parivar knows that the declaration was not received well by even some of the more moderate Hindus and it aims to exploit this feeling. Similarly, it hopes to be able to use the fear of conversions and the dislike of the Maoists that many middle class Hindus harbor. The manner in which the declaration was made also gives the Hindu right an advantage: it can present itself as a defender of democracy, while the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance “illegally” decided to declare Nepal secular without taking into consideration “the will of the public”. Furthermore, many Hindutva advocates tried to claim in the interviews that nobody wanted to make Nepal a secular country, not even the religious minorities, and that the political parties behind the declaration were bribed. Such claims are of course needed to perpetrate the illusion that religious minorities were happy about their status in the Hindu kingdom and also to create an idea that secularism is an evil conspiracy of outside forces. The forces blamed for this conspiracy ranged anywhere from the Pakistani ISI to the king of Norway, who was claimed to be the “biggest agent of Christianity” and an “advocate of Vatican” (Interview 13), even though Norway of course is a secular, predominantly Protestant country with no connections to the Catholic Pope. Naturally, no Nepalese (Hindu) would ever want to subject their country to the evil plans of Western and Islamic nations, and hence it must be insisted that Nepal has now become a victim of a huge international conspiracy in the guise of secularism. More than anything, hence, secularism seems to mean to the Hindutva advocates that Nepal’s doors have been opened to the expansionist and intolerant forces that they want to resist at all costs.

2.3. Political Mobilization

2.3.1. A Hindu Andolan

Despite the attempts of the NDA and Ranbir Sena to provoke communal tensions and polarize people's religious sentiments, the situation has not radically changed for the Hindutva forces. The Hindu right still lacks public support at the grassroots level and it is very much aware of this. Govinda Sah of the Nepal Janata Party and HSS said that ever since secularism the Nepalese have shown more interest towards the Hindu nationalist cause, but there is uncertainty on how to take the movement forward (Field notes, 27.3.2011). As long as the masses are not mobilized for Hindutva, the violent attacks committed by extreme groups might, in fact, work against the Hindu nationalist cause by presenting a far too radical and violent image of the movement to the general public. This is precisely why most of the Hindutva organizations try to distance themselves from these groups by refusing to directly advocate violence and by arguing that the terrorist groups are "fundamentalist" while they themselves are more moderate. It is not entirely clear what happened to the WHF's hints about armed struggle made in 2008, because today the organization claims it never advocates violence and Bharat Keshari Simha's remarks were simply made in his own name (E-mail communication, Vijay Prakash, 2.10.2010). It is probable that the organization realized it needs to adopt a softer line at least in public in order to appeal to a larger audience. The WHF is now even involved in the interfaith dialogue and one of its offices is right next door to that of the Inter-religious Council's in Kathmandu, where a poster of the VHP was paradoxically hanging on the wall. Damodar Gautam is the president of the Inter-religious Council and also the chairman of the Nepalese branch of the WHF. According to Parita Mukta (2000), the VHP of Britain has gotten involved in the inter-religious dialogue in the UK in order to project itself as the true representative of all Hindus of the world (ibid. 444). In Nepal, this is also most certainly a motivator for the WHF, but involvement in inter-religious dialogue also presents a softer image of the organization to the public. The importance of public support to the cause of Hindutva cannot be stressed enough, as the mobilization of the masses is crucial to the future success of the

ideology. Nevertheless, in Nepal this mobilization process was not seen to be necessary while the king was in power. The present situation, of course, is vastly different and the Sangh Parivar must now seek ways to rise to power through electoral politics.

By and large, most of the Hindutva organizations I interviewed also appear to believe in democratic means to bring about a change. They talked about demanding a referendum on the issue of Hindu Rashtra and about political lobbying. Especially the younger leaders and activists were noticeably inspired by the Arab Spring – in particular the Libyan resistance movement which was currently unfolding at the time when the interviews were conducted. Vijay Prakash, the president of the youth wing of the WHF talked about an *andolan*, a movement, which would be launched in order to turn Nepal into a Hindu Rashtra (Interview 5.) He said that they would go to the streets and “fight the government like in Libya”. Govinda Sah also talked about the struggle for Hindu Rashtra turning into “a strong movement like in Libya” (Interview 6.). It seems that the comparison with Libya was mainly used in order to conjure up images of a just struggle against an oppressive government. Still, knowing that the WHF has already once issued a statement advocating an armed struggle, there is obviously no guarantee that they would not do this again, despite their current softer rhetoric. Swami Prapannacharya, aged 90, did not shy away from stating that he was prepared to use the force of “bombs and swords” in order to turn his dreams of the Hindu state into a reality. On the whole, however, it does not seem like armed resistance is something the Hindu right would want to pursue at the moment. The Sangh Parivar clearly realizes that it needs become more active in the political field and mobilize some support. In line with this, Vijay Prakash said that the WHF plans to spread awareness among the youth and aims to turn Hindu Rashtra into “a political issue” (Interview 5.).

As Hansen (1999) argues, the success of the Sangh Parivar in India the late 1980s owes much to the wide dissemination of communal stereotypes about Muslims, but it was the prevailing political environment in the country that provided the framework in which the BJP could in the end gain momentum. The rapid rise in militant Hindu nationalism was partly aided by the shortsighted decisions made by Congress leadership, in

particular Rajiv Gandhi. He adopted much of the Hindu majoritarian discourse used by the BJP at the time, hoping to accommodate some of the Hindu nationalist sentiments. These tactics, however, only led to increasing Hindu-Muslim tensions and the subsequent electoral defeat of the Congress Party (ibid. 148-130). The simultaneous emergence of lower caste (especially the Other Backward Classes, the OBCs), farmer and regional assertions within a framework of majoritarian democracy where the middle-class upper castes had long occupied a dominant position, contributed greatly to the resonance of the Hindu nationalist discourse. These dominant groups had formerly provided the backbone of the Congress Party. The recommendations made by the Mandal Commission in 1980, that suggested that greater representation should be granted for the lower castes in the public sphere (mainly in the form of positive discrimination, i.e. reservations), caused these groups to increasingly turn towards the BJP (ibid. 144-5).

The present situation in Nepal where the Janajati, religious and regional assertions have challenged the upper caste Hindu majoritarian state of the past represents a very similar situation to the 1980's Mandal agitation in a sense that the formerly dominant sections of the society have started to feel threatened. The federalism debate that intensified leading up to the 27th of May 2012 caused Bahun and Chetri organizations to take to the streets to oppose identity-based state restructuring, and the UML and Congress party refused to accept a 10-state model, thus leading to the failing of the Constituent Assembly. Many of the Congress and UML politicians were uncomfortable with the changes this would have caused in traditional power structures (Jha 2012). The Congress and UML are obviously not right wing parties, but the federalism debate has clearly tilted them towards conservatism. Still, what makes the Nepalese situation quite different from the Indian is the fact that the only party that could at the moment be thought to channel both Hindu nationalist and anti-federal sentiments is the RPP, a party that is still advocating the reinstatement of monarchy. Monarchy, however, sharply divides the opinions of the people, and the results of the Constituent Assembly elections in 2008 did not bode well for the right-wing royalists' aspirations. This is

precisely why a Hindu nationalist party that does not support monarchy was founded, namely the Nepal Janata Party, the Nepalese equivalent of the BJP. This party is still very new and small, but acting in close cooperation with the HSS it might yet manage to gain momentum. The royalist Hindu right will most probably direct its mobilization towards the groups that are opposed to identity- based federalism, in particular the Bahuns and Chetris and also Dalits, who do not have much to gain from state restructuring (Mulmi 2010). The present situation where the Constituent Assembly has been dissolved has, however, caused the RPP to demand the reviving of the 1990's constitution and reinstatement of monarchy. The failing of the CA has been precisely what the Hindu nationalist right wing forces have been hoping for and it is unlikely that they would not try to use this situation to their advantage, leading up to the proposed new elections.

2.3.2. The King, Democracy and Political Pragmatism

After all the conferences and anxious calls to save the monarchy, it may indeed come as a surprise that many of the Hindutva-affiliated groups immediately backed down after monarchy was abolished and declared that they no longer supported the king. In fact, as Bharat Keshari Simha emerged from Yogi Adityanath's conference in Balrampur in 2008 and hinted on the possibility of taking up arms to salvage the Hindu state, he simultaneously said: "We don't bother about the king's support. Our aim is to restore Nepal's status as a Hindu Rashtra" (S. Singh 2008 Express India). This comment is significant in the sense that it separates the Hindu king from the concept of a Hindu nation – something that would have been unimaginable in Nepal before. As Sudhindra Sharma has noted, the reason that kingship was so closely entangled to Hinduism was the fact that the Brahmins acted in alliance with the kings as advisors, and hence, "it is unlikely that Monarchy will be retained and Hinduism will not, or that Hinduism will be retained and Monarchy not" (S. Sharma 1992: 276). The fact that this breach with tradition is exactly what many of the former royalists are now demanding suggests a change in their political tactics.

Most organizations and Hindutva advocates I interviewed indeed emphasized the importance of the Hindu Rashtra over the king, and some even outright rejected the institution of monarchy, like the HSS. Very few in fact supported the reinstatement of monarchy and the only ones who stressed the utmost importance of the king were the leader of Shiv Sena Nepal Arun Subedi and Swami Prapannacharya (Interviews 3. & 7.) . The RPP and other royalist parties would also fall into this category. The WHF, an organization that was formerly extremely closely associated with the palace, now claims it has broken this political relation and “changed its memorandum about monarchy” (Interview 11). Nevertheless, some ambiguity remains about the matter: Damodar Gautam, the chairman of the WHF’s Nepalese chapter said that “the World Hindu Federation is not so much in favor of the king. Monarchy is not the important issue but Hindu Rashtra is. We are not against the king either, but not actively fighting for him like some groups are” (Interview 2). Even Madhav Bhattarai, the former *Raj guru* of the king, said that “If the people want the king it is the opinion of the people, through voting. But Hindu state has to be established” (Interview 13).

Considering the historical relations between the king and the Hindutva groups and the centrality of Hindu monarchy to the construction of Nepali nationalism, this change of heart came somewhat unexpectedly. Yet, as the Sangh Parivar sees the mobilization of the masses now as its main priority in Nepal, the monarchy could be sacrificed with relative ease in the end. Some of the Indian leaders of the Sangh Parivar have even revealed their contempt of the former king and believe that it was due to Gyanendra’s incompetence and a board of bad advisors that led to the demise of the Hindu state, according to an article written by Prashant Jha (2007b). King Gyanendra’s unpopularity among the Nepalese people especially after the coup of 2005 came to be the biggest reason for the Sangh Parivar to finally abandon his support. After all, it was this unpopularity that also in the end eroded the Hindu nationalists’ own credibility in the country as they were seen to be siding with anti-democratic forces (Mulmi 2011). Bharat Keshari Simha’s rally to oppose democracy in the name of Hinduism and the fact that he advocated the use of force against the protestors in April 2006 undoubtedly

made him an equally unpopular figure in the eyes of the public, which in turn affected the reputation of the WHF. Simha has now ceased to be the President of the federation and has been replaced by Hem Bahadur Karki.

Of course, it was not so much the fact that the palace adopted an anti-democratic stance that bothered the Sangh Parivar, as it never has in the past, but rather the fact that Gyanendra was not willing to compromise in the face of a popular uprising so that he could still have saved the Hindu Rashtra. Despite its history of sidelining with the dictatorial rulers of Nepal, one of the Sangh Parivar's tactics in the political field is paradoxically to present itself as a defender of democracy. The Hindu right's understanding of democracy is, however, distinctively majoritarian: the Hindutva advocates argue that since the Hindus constitute the majority in both countries, their rights and privileges should always be put first (Hansen 1999: 157). For this reason the Hindu right sees any action or policy decision that aims to promote or safeguard the rights of the minorities (mainly of course secularism) as "appeasement" or as being "anti-democratic". This is where the problem of the People's Movement of 2006 for the Hindutva advocates lies: it would be difficult to argue that the popular movement opposing the king had been anti-democratic or against the wishes of the majority of the people. In line with this, the HSS today claims that it in fact supported the movement of 2006 and says that "the Hindu king did nothing for the Hindus" (Kharel and Mulmi 2011). The organization also now states that it believes Nepal should be called "the Hindu Republic of Nepal", underlining its commitment to a republican form of government (Interview 6).

The issue of monarchy seems to have created a conflict of interests inside the Hindu right. There are those who believe in maintaining ideological purity (i.e. supporting the monarch) and those who would rather opt for political pragmatism. The division between the ideologues and the pragmatists has become a common problem for the Sangh Parivar ever since its increased involvement in party politics and especially since the BJP rose to power (Hansen 1999; Jaffrelot 1996). The Indian Sangh Parivar, and more precisely the BJP, has learned to compromise - at least in public - in order to gain

political power. Nevertheless, the compromises taken by the party have often driven it into conflict with the mother organization RSS. The Sangh Parivar's reaction to the coup of Gyanendra spoke of such conflicting interests: while the VHP and WHF supported it, many leaders of the BJP cautiously condemned it. If the HSS's claim about having supported the People's Movement of 2006 is true, this of course speaks of even deeper rifts inside the Sangh Parivar on the issue of monarchy. The division to the pragmatists and the ideologues among the Nepalese Hindutva organizations is relatively clear: the ones that are more or less Nepalese outfits of the RSS and VHP are following their mother organizations' line of letting go of the issue of monarchy. This is most certainly the case with the HSS and also the WHF. These two organizations are also most probably depending on Indian financing. Organizations and parties that are working more independently still support the king, for example the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party, made up of mainly Panchayat era politicians.

Contrary to what is often believed, the importance placed on Hindu kingship is not peculiar to the Nepalese form of Hindu nationalism. Remembering the centrality of *arthashastra* to the Hindu Rashtra model, it can be concluded that at least on the ideological level, authoritarian monarchy is seen as an ideal way of governing the Hindu nation by the Sangh Parivar. *Arthashastra* is not the only clue pointing to this, however, as the glorification of the Hindu kings of the past and present has long been an important strategy of the Hindutva forces in India. Shivaji, a 17th century Maratha king, from whom the Shiv Sena party takes its name, is a central figure in the Hindutva ideology and much loved by the Hindu right because he managed to resist Muslim rule and establish a Hindu kingdom during the oppressive rule of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. In fact, the saffron flag, which the RSS cadres salute in the beginning of each of their *shakha* and which the organization considers to be its guru is the flag of Shivaji. The Maratha king's coronation is also an important date in the RSS's calendar (Jaffrelot 1996: 36).

The glorification of Hindu kings has more concrete examples in the history of Hindutva as well. It was already V.D. Savarkar and B.S. Moonje of the Hindu Mahasabha who

sought to form an alliance with the Hindu rulers of the princely states of India and the Ranas of Nepal. As Copland (2002) describes, this alliance was born out of common political interests, but also out of ideological reasons. First of all, the kings and princes, coming from the Kshatriya warrior caste, represented a perfect, strong and courageous model for the Hindu man. B.S. Moonje also saw the Hindu rulers as representatives of the “Hindu Raj of the past” and as containing in themselves the “traditions of dignity, suffering and fighting for maintain the Hindu Raj against foreign aggressors” (quoted in Copland 2002: 218). But since the princes of India did not wield any true power under the British Raj, the Mahasabha directed its interests towards Nepal. V.D. Savarkar continuously praised the “independent Hindu kingdom of Nepal” in his speeches to the Hindu Mahasabha and even suggested that the king of Nepal should be made the emperor of Hindu India (MacKean 1996: 90). The crowning of both Birendra and Gyanendra as “emperors of all the Hindus of the world” by the WHF and VHP has a striking similarity with Savarkar’s suggestion.

Bearing in mind the concept of *akhand bharat*, the Greater India to which Nepal also belongs, the ultimate end on the ideological level seems to be the unification of all the Hindus under a single Hindu monarch and nation. The glorification of the oppressive Rana regime reveals a great deal about the Mahasabhaites views on what an ideal Hindu *Rashtra* should look like and how such a state should be ruled. Quite clearly it was not the “divine” or other religious aspects of Hindu kingship that were of interest to Savarkar and the rest of the Mahasabha, but rather the majoritarian way in which the Hindu kings and princes governed their states and placed the minorities on an inferior standing in the society.⁸ As Copland (2002) puts it, the Hindu princely states and Nepal “made the idea of *Hindutva* real” (ibid. 221). The importance of an authoritarian central figure for the Sangh Parivar is also clear in B.S. Moonje’s (who also happened to be K.B. Hedgewar’s mentor and one of the founding members of the RSS) comments

⁸ This is not to say that the Hindu rulers would have been in any way more intolerant than for example Muslim rulers at the time. For the Hindu nationalists, however, the fact that Hindus were able to rule over Muslims was what made the Hindu princes and the Ranas particularly admirable.

about wanting to bring about the standardization of Hinduism “with a Hindu as a dictator like Shivaji of old or Mussolini or Hitler” (quoted in Casolari 2000: 221).

The BJP, identifying itself as a “people’s party”, is of course no advocate of monarchy in India, even though it has continuously demanded the establishment of a “Ram Raj” or Ram’s kingdom. The term was often used by Mahatma Gandhi, who separated it from its royal connotations – having seen it as synonymous with self-rule and relating it to religious transformation in the society. The BJP on the other hand intends to appeal to Hindu voters and uses “Ram Raj” as a synonym for a Hindu majoritarian state (van der Veer 1996: 258-9). The issue of monarchy would surely find very little resonance among the Indian voters. Instead of advocating authoritarian monarchy, the BJP supports a somewhat ambiguous idea of a “presidential system”, something which A. B. Vajpayee saw would produce strong governments, unlike the present “instability of parliamentary democracy” (quoted in Hansen 1999: 220-1). This is clearly still in line with the ideals the Hindutva ideologues had of a strong Hindu leader. Hence, even today it is not the religious implications of Hindu kingship that are of importance to the Sangh Parivar, as becomes evident in the abandonment of Gyanendra. The ideal Hindu ruler does not necessarily have to be a king; he can also be a strong president.

For the Nepalese Hindu right abandoning the idea of a Hindu king might not be so simple, however, as can be observed from the ambiguous statements given by many leaders. First of all, the institution was closely tied to state-propagated nationalism and national identity, and the fact that Nepal now no longer is the world’s only Hindu kingdom also means that the country cannot be presented as “more Hindu than India” anymore. Secondly, the king guaranteed the dominating position of much of the Hill caste elite in the society, and for some royalists this will most probably be a factor in continuing to hope for the king’s return. It must also be noted that kingship has a special place in Hinduism outside the political arena - even in India where the political institution has long since vanished. On the religious and social level the idea of a Hindu king still has a great deal of importance, even outside its Hindu nationalist interpretations, as a maintainer of order and protector of *dharma* (Fuller: 1992: 106-7).

The same importance is, of course, placed on the institution in Nepal as well. This highlights the fact that everyone who supports the reinstatement of monarchy does not automatically also endorse the Hindu nationalist agenda.

It is relatively clear that most of the Hindu nationalist organizations calculated that supporting the king would be detrimental to their own aspirations. They decided to count on the fact that despite the ambivalence felt towards monarchy, a Hindu state still enjoys quite a lot of support among the Nepalese, especially the Madheshis. Nevertheless, as the RPP is now clearly trying to turn the post-CA situation to its advantage by increasing its demands for the reinstatement of monarchy, the stance of the Sangh Parivar may still change. If the pro-monarchy sentiments start to receive more support among the public, the first organization to again align itself with the king would probably be the WHF. Should the king manage to return to power, the rest of the Sangh Parivar would probably waste no time in jumping back to his support.

2.3.3. Madheshi Movement and the Sangh Parivar

As the Sangh Parivar has now seemingly abandoned the former king, it has simultaneously turned its interests towards a powerful potential support base in the Terai. This southern region of Nepal bordering India has long played an important role in the arena of Hindu nationalism and it has slowly grown into the center of religious extremism in Nepal, especially since the 1990s when the Hindutva activists from India took shelter there. As has been discussed, the protests against secularism were strongest in the Terai and all of the pro-Hindu kingdom attacks have been carried out by groups from this area. Most of the communal riots have also taken place in the Terai in the past. Clearly, the Hindutva ideology had already disseminated into the region quite widely even before the Sangh Parivar woke up to its need to mobilize the Nepalese people. For much of the past decade the Madheshis, the ethnic inhabitants of the Terai region, have, however, concentrated on much more pressing issues than the Hindu nationalist cause. Discrimination-related grievances led many of the region's leaders to align with the Maoists during the years of the People's War. It was the Madheshi

leadership's fallout with the Maoists and the Madheshi Uprising of 2007 that brought the interim government to its knees and turned the situation again to Sangh Parivar's advantage.

The people living in the Terai make up about half of the country's population and the majority of them call themselves Madheshis, a term derived from the Sanskrit word *madhyadesh*, meaning "middle country", to make a distinction to the Nepali speaking Hill inhabitants or Paharis (ICG 2007: 2). The Madheshis share the cultures and languages of the Ganges plains of India, more specifically of the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and they are often referred to as the "Indians of Nepal". Because of the cultural and linguistic ties to the bordering Indian states, thousands of Madheshis have married to citizens from the other side, tens of thousands go across the border every day and many even possess dual citizenship. Hindi is used as a *lingua franca* and is also more widely understood than Nepali. In addition, the Terai region is inhabited by an indigenous group known as Tharu and also by some Limbus and Nepali speakers who have migrated from the Hills. Muslims constitute a significant religious minority in the Terai and in some districts they are even in the majority. They, however, do not always want to be called Madheshis as is also the case with the Tharus, the Janajati group. The word "Madheshi" has a distinctively ethnic connotation, as the Pahari migrants living in the Terai do not become Madheshis over time, but instead they continue to be differentiated from the Madheshi community (ibid.). Madheshi identity, therefore, is not simply a regional identity. It is first and foremost based on the cultural differentiation that separates the community from the dominant Pahari culture which has long been promoted by the state, for example by imposing Nepali language education and by refusing to grant official status to Hindi. The Madheshis are, however, by no means a homogenous community. They are made up of Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Maithili, Urdu and Hindi speakers and their culture also varies depending on caste backgrounds and on the region they inhabit.

The relationship all these non-Pahari groups living in the Terai have had with the Nepalese state is characterized by oppression and under-representation in almost all

areas of national life (ICG 2007: 4). In this respect, the Madheshis share much with the Janajati groups and this was also a reason for the alliance with the Maoists. What makes the case of Madheshis unique, however, is their perceived Indian identity. Their loyalty to the Nepalese state is often questioned by the Hill inhabitants and it is often thought that the Madheshis are, in fact, not Nepalese at all, but Indian immigrants. They are frequently seen as agents of Indian “cultural colonization” (Mathema 2011: 46). This view has much to do with the construction of Nepali nationalism around Nepali language and Pahari culture, which obviously excluded the Madheshis (ICG 2007: 3). The Madheshis have also, by and large, been treated as foreigners in their own country for the largest part of the history, a good example of this being that they have faced a great deal of difficulties in obtaining Nepalese citizenship rights up until as late as 2006. This of course made life very difficult for them, as they were not protected by Nepalese law (Mathema 2011: 47-8).

The Madheshis, therefore, had all the reasons to feel angry with the state. It was the People’s War that provided the framework in which to express this anger, and the CPN-(Maoist) was a major force behind the rise of militant Madheshi nationalism during these years. Madhesh National Liberation Front (MNLF) was formed as a front organization of the CPN-(Maoist) in the year 2000, and most Madheshis turned their loyalties towards the Maoists as the government had in 1999 declared that the use of any other languages besides Nepali was illegal in government offices (Mathema 2011: 8). From 2004 onwards the Madheshi movement started to turn increasingly against the Maoists, however, especially once many different dissenting groups started splitting from the MNLF, the most significant one of them being the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (JTMM), an underground armed political party. These groups adopted the pro-secular agenda of the MNLF and claimed the Maoists’ pro-Madheshi stand was not genuine (Hachhethu 2007: 7). The splinter groups were increasingly advocating autonomy for the region, and at the same time more and more armed organizations started emerging, some of which had secessionist agendas (ICG 2007: 9). Federalism

came to be the key demand of all Madheshi groups and simultaneously anti-Maoist sentiment started to increase (ibid.12).

The Madheshi uprising that flared up in January 2007 was a response to the fact that the interim constitution, which had just been promulgated by the SPA and the Maoists, again completely ignored Madheshi grievances. The constitution was missing the word “federal”, and this angered most of the marginalized groups of Nepal (Mathema 2011: 25). This was the backdrop of the ten days long *bandh* (strike) that was called in the Terai area. The *bandh* was backed by the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF), a previously unknown organization turned political party, and the JTMM. The main demands of the uprising were the abrogation of the interim constitution, declaration of federalism and inclusion of Madheshis in the state apparatus. The protests turned violent, and government and party offices were attacked. Even though Paharis living in the Terai were also among the targets, Pahari-Madheshi violence was not the factor that defined the uprising. In fact, it was the state response that was particularly harsh with the police killing more than 30 and wounding 800 people (ICG 2007: 12) As a result of the January uprising, the government was forced to amend the interim constitution and add the word “federal” into it, although heavy debate about this topic continues. Later in the 2008 CA elections the MJF became the fourth largest national party and Madheshis were chosen as ministers and Ram Baram Yadav even became the President of Nepal. However, as Mathema (2011) points out, the Madheshi parties people voted for have now become “weak and divided”, and the political vacuum that the uprising created has remained largely unfilled by them. This has created a favorable environment for the Hindu right (ibid. 11).

It was, however, already during the uprising that the Sangh Parivar and royalists were accused of being behind the protests, especially by the Maoists (ICG 2007: 13). This, of course, is not entirely true, as the protests were led by Madheshi groups. The Sangh Parivar nevertheless sensed an opportunity in the anti-Maoist nature of the unrests and it has ever since tried to turn the Madheshi movement into a pro-Hindu Rashtra movement. As it happens, the Maoists of course constitute yet another enemy of the

Hindutva-forces by representing the extreme end of anti-religiousness and pro-secularism. The BJP MP Yogi Adityanath from Gorakhpur in particular has been vocal in opposing the Maoist movement both in India and in Nepal. In fact, the Maoists of Nepal became a crucial part of Adityanath's campaign in 2007 for the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections in that he encouraged people to vote for his candidates to defeat the Nepalese Maoist influence in the border region, which according to him was expanding to the Indian side (Jha 2007a). The Maoists pose a serious obstacle for spreading the Hindutva agenda in Nepal, and as Adityanath owns a sub-temple of his Gorakhnath *math* in the Nawalparasi district of the Terai, countering the Maoist influence is crucial in order to secure his own influence in the area (Srivastav 2007). Adityanath himself denies having yet actively supported the Madheshi movement, although he does admit to having met with some of its leaders (Jha 2007a).

The connections seem to work both ways, as some MJF's leaders have past associations with Hindutva groups, and the party has even used some inflammatory Hindu nationalist material in its publicity (ICG 2007: 11). Some Madheshi leaders have met the RSS in Delhi and while they have also openly sought for help in India across the political spectrum, it is only the BJP that has direct interests invested in the movement (ibid. 27). All in all, the Hindutva-connections do certainly exist within the Madheshi movement, but it is hard to say how much influence the Sangh Parivar has over parties like MJF and how deep the connections actually run. Despite the unreligious nature of the Madheshi uprising (both Hindus and Muslims took part in the protests) and the secular stance adopted by most Terai -based political parties and armed groups, it is true that the majority of the people belonging to the Madheshi Hindu castes were in favor of retaining the Hindu state and monarchy. It was after all in the Terai where the largest anti-secular protests took place and where armed pro-Hindu kingdom groups have emerged. Many interviewees explained this as being the result of the more religious nature of the Terai Hindus and the region's closeness to India. It is relatively clear that the Terai region has long been fertile ground for the growth of Hindu nationalism, and the Hindutva groups would certainly like to exploit the Madheshi movement in order to

expand their own influence in the area. Hindutva leaders seem to see the Madheshi uprising of 2007 as a model that can be followed for re-establishing the Hindu state. According to Mathema (2011), some Terai-based Hindutva groups hope to be able to provoke an attack from the Muslims or Maoists that would then make the Hindus awaken to their Hindu identity, leading to a “Hindu revolt” (ibid. 88).

By looking at the demands of the Madheshis, it seems, however, that the issues the 2007 uprising brought to the fore, i.e. federalism and Pahari-domination, were considered far more important by the people than the question of Hindu state. The Madheshi uprising itself had no religious undertones and the Madheshi groups have by and large advocated secularism. Nevertheless, a Hindu dimension clearly exists below the surface and it might become more pronounced now as the movement has become increasingly fragmented along religious- and caste-based lines in response to the high caste Hindu leadership’s failure to address the Muslims and Dalits’ grievances (ibid. 81-84). While linking the entire Madheshi leadership directly with Hindu nationalism is problematic to say the least, the appeal of the Hindutva ideology for many Madheshis seems to be undeniable. In the course of my research, it became apparent that Madheshis are well represented in most of the Hindu nationalist organizations of Nepal, in particular the HSS. The rhetoric of the Pahari and Madheshi Hindutva advocates was largely identical in the interviews and no great differences could be identified between them. The Madheshi Hindutva advocates are, however, often also supporters of federalism and do not hide their contempt of the Paharis, even of the Pahari Hindutva supporters, whom they blame for not having resisted the Maoists enough and thus being responsible for the fall of the Hindu kingdom (Mathema 2011: 88-9). It seems that the Hindutva ideology appeals especially to the younger generation of Madheshis, an example of this being that the HSS has more members in the Terai than in any other regions of Nepal.

Patriotism or nationalism as defined by the Hindutva groups seems to contradict the way Madheshi nationalism is constructed: Hindu nationalism precisely concentrates on removing all divisions and promotes the unity of all Hindus, while Madheshi

nationalists often emphasize their linguistic and cultural differentiation from the Paharis. The history of Pahari domination hence raises a tricky question about the popularity of a Hindu Rashtra and the Hindutva ideology among the Madheshis. The Hindu state was, of course, mainly a Pahari institution where the Madheshis had little representation. Why would the Madheshis want to retain something that has been responsible for their exclusion? And more importantly, why are the Madheshis even keener to retain it than the Paharis themselves? These are both issues that need to be studied more in the future, but first of all it must be noted that the aim of most Madheshis is not to secede from Nepal, but rather to be included in it, to expand the definition of Nepalese nationalism (Mathema 2011: 49). Secondly, it seems that the religious question needs to be separated from the Madheshis' demands for inclusion. After all, it was not the Hindu-ness of the state that alienated them, but the Nepali language and Pahari culture that were imposed on them (Hachhethu 2007: 5). Similarly, Dastider (2007) notes that the Muslims and Hindus of the Terai are united when it comes to opposition to Pahari domination but religious identities are what often divide them, especially among the more conservative or orthodox Hindus and Muslims (ibid. 135-9). As the issue of Madheshi representation has now been solved it seems that religious divisions might now come increasingly to the fore. The "Hindu Andolan" or movement many of the Hindutva leaders talked about might be on the cards next in the Terai.

Regardless of what happens in the politics of Nepal next, the Terai region will most probably continue to play an important role in the Sangh Parivar's plans, it seems. Monarchy still has quite a lot of support in the region, so even if the king returns and the Sangh Parivar chooses to support him, this will probably not alienate most of the Madheshis who are sympathetic to the Hindutva cause. Opposition to federalism is the only thing that has the potential to do this, so a more Pahari-focused form of Hindutva that opposes ethnicity or identity -based federalism, as spearheaded by the RPP, will not be an option for the Madheshis. In this sense, federalism has come to create an even larger rift among the Hindu nationalists of Nepal than the issue of monarchy. Many

royalists and Paharis can often be staunch supporters of an idea of *akhand* Nepal (undivided Nepal), whereas the HSS has even made statements that are favorable towards federalism (Mulmi 2011). Interestingly, it is precisely identity-based federalism that might lead to Hindutva's rise among the Paharis in the future as it threatens the position of formerly dominating sections of the society. Nevertheless, the identity assertions of Muslims in the Terai may similarly lead to the increasing popularity of Madheshi-centered Hindutva, as might the political vacuum in the area. It remains to be seen which form of Hindu nationalism in the end manages to find more resonance among the Nepalese. At the moment it seems, however, that the Sangh Parivar is more likely to continue to place its trust in the Madheshis, rather than the Paharis.

3. The Threat

3.1. Stigmatization and Emulation

3.1.1. The Enemy and Hindu Victimization in Hindutva Propaganda

Stigmatizing the enemies that can be seen as posing a threat to Hinduism is of utmost importance to the success of Hindutva mobilization. Simultaneously, an idea of a "Hindu unity" must also be created in order to emphasize a "we" against "them" dichotomy. Focusing on the religious minorities as the enemies and at the same time upholding an idea of Hindu unity can hence divert the attention away from the divisions in the Nepalese (Hindu) society. As Appadurai (2006) argues, the increasing mobilization of minorities can start to threaten the constructed majority identity when the minorities are seen to be aligning with global movements, and so the national minority community comes to be seen as an agent of outside forces. This perception of a threatening small group is then exploited by groups that claim to represent the majority. The Hindutva strategy of stigmatizing and simultaneously emulating the enemies, as described by Jaffrelot (1996), presents a perfect example of this: the Hindutva groups claim to represent all Hindus by constructing a standardized version of Hinduism, and they constantly emphasize the Otherness of the minorities by connecting them to global forces. For example, the Muslim mobilization around the Shah Bano case in India was seen by the Hindutva forces as proof of the Indian Muslims' link-up

to international Islamic revivalism finding expression in the Iranian revolution, Saudi financed Islamist movements etc. (ibid. 338-9). Similarly, there is a constant attempt in the Nepalese Hindutva rhetoric to present the religious minorities in connection to international forces and thus to question their allegiance to the nation. The Nepalese Christians are seen as being part of worldwide missionary networks acting on the commands of Western countries, and Muslims are mentioned only in connection to the increasing money flows from the Gulf countries, and the Pakistani ISI or Bangladeshi madrassas. As Govinda Sah remarked, “We believe that you cannot believe in patriotism if you don’t believe in Hindu gods or the Buddha” (Interview 6). Hence, the foreign origins of Christianity and Islam are seen as proof of the alleged anti-nationalism of the Christians and Muslims themselves.

To induce the feeling that these minorities pose a threat to the Hindus and thus need to be resisted, the Sangh Parivar has to be able to spread its ideology among the public. The Hindutva propaganda’s main function is first and foremost to evoke a response from the majority community (Bacchetta 2004: 97). Like its Indian counterparts, the Hindu right of Nepal uses pamphlets, books and newspapers, in addition to public rallies, as its medium for achieving this goal. As Paola Bacchetta (2004) notes, “the RSS has created a powerful machinery for the production and dissemination of its ideology. It possesses publishing companies which produce a wide array of textual materials in English and most vernacular languages, and has its own distribution network and bookstores” (ibid. 95-6). The HSS, for example, has at least two Kathmandu publishing companies at its use for producing its pamphlets in Nepali and Hindi. The organization also publishes a biweekly newspaper called the *Himal Dristi*. The Sangh Parivar’s propaganda publications are often distributed in order to incite violence in communally tense localities and situations, as was also done in the post-Ayodhya period in Nepal (Dastider 1995: 92). The exhortations to violence are sometimes more direct and sometimes more candid, as the propaganda often generates a narrative that condones the use of force against minorities, or even encourages it (van der Veer 1996: 268). The HSS’s pamphlet “*Rashtriyata aur vaishvik avadharna*” for

example recounts the story of how the gods Ram and Krishna slaughtered the demons Taraka and Putana in the Ramayana. The pamphlet then likens the demons to Christians and Muslims: “*aaj hamare saamne taraka aur putana ke roop mein islam aur isai missionary khare hain*” (today Islam and Christian missionaries are standing in front of us in the form of Taraka and Putana⁹) (Mishra n.d.: 32-3). The propaganda can often take on a much grimmer character by directly asking the Hindus to kill all the Muslims, as, for instance, a pamphlet distributed during the Gujarat carnage did: “Wake up Hindus, there are still (Muslims) alive around you” (quoted in Nussbaum 2007: 186). These incitements are both meant seriously and also taken so, as becomes apparent from the death toll of the massacres against Muslims in India. In 2004 after the attack on Muslims in Kathmandu the Nepalese home minister Purna Bahadur Khadka from the Congress party had in fact instructed intelligence officers to keep an eye on the Hindutva organizations’ publishing houses that were (and are) spreading this kind of inflammatory propaganda in Nepal (Ghimire 2005). The message of this propaganda is clear: the enemies of Hinduism must be eliminated.

The Hindutva propaganda machinery relies heavily on communal stereotypes that are generated in order to instill hatred and suspicion into the minds of the Hindus. While these stereotypes do not offer any direct motivators for violence as such, they contain in themselves the overall idea that the minorities need to be taught a lesson and shown their place (van der Veer 1996: 268). In order for the propaganda to work, however, some concrete examples of the enemies’ actions need to be cited as proof of these stereotypes’ truthfulness. In addition to linking the minorities to larger global movements, these examples are also sought from the past (ibid.). While on the one hand the Hindutva narrative has always concentrated on emphasizing an idea of a glorious Vedic past, the perceived historical victimization of Hindus is equally a driving force behind the ideology in contemporary India, where the propaganda attack has indeed mainly concentrated on revising the more recent history to suit the Sangh Parivar’s political agenda. The Hindu right has often mobilized the public around historical

⁹My translation from Hindi.

symbols of “Muslim tyranny” such as the Babri Masjid. This idea of historical humiliation of the Hindus is extremely important for the Sangh Parivar because it seems to legitimize what Parita Mukta (2002) calls the “politics of vendetta”. It is precisely from this narrative that slogans such as “*garv se kaho ham hindu hain*” (proudly say we are Hindu) emerge and mosques built centuries ago are suddenly razed to the ground by outraged Hindu mobs. The “wounded civilization” of Hindus may now be free of the conquerors of the past, but foreign tyranny is never too far from taking over India again as the secular state continues to appease the minorities and lets them grow in numbers, thus perpetuating the humiliation of Hindus in their own country. The propaganda of the present is thus heavily built on the propaganda of the past. With this “historical” proof the Hindu right can first of all claim that Muslims have made no positive contribution to the history of the Subcontinent and that it is in their nature to always subjugate the Hindus, if allowed to rule the country (Nussbaum 2007: 213). In the history of Nepal, however, the Hindus have little to feel outraged about. Since the country obviously lacks all the convenient symbols of historical victimization that can be used as calls for popular mobilization, the attention of the masses must be drawn to symbols representing future threats.

One such symbol has recently been found in the form of Shleshmantak forest. This forest, situated on the opposite side of the Pashupatinath temple, has long been used as a burial ground by Hindus for whom cremation is not allowed, such as infants and Yogis, but also by the Janajati Kirant community who mostly do not consider themselves Hindus but nevertheless believe in the sacredness of the Pashupatinath. Ever since the 1990s the Kirants have increasingly been converting to Christianity, and the sacred forest of the Hindus is now dotted with Christian gravestones. This has caused much furor among the orthodox Hindu community and especially within the Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT), an organization formerly closely linked to the palace. In 1998 the PADT started removing the gravestones, which resulted in many protests by the Christian Kirant community. Subsequently, the PADT banned all burials of non-Hindus in the forest, but it was quickly decided that the burials could continue until an

alternative solution was found. Some twelve years later, in December 2010, a ban was again put in effect with protests following in its wake. In March 2011 the Supreme Court decided that the ban should be lifted, although a Hindu activist quickly filed a counter petition that again stayed the ban (Mulmi 2011). The government of course finds itself in a difficult position in this debate: if the Hindus feel the state does not do enough to protect their rights, it will most probably translate into an increase in the support of the Hindutva forces. On the other hand, failing to take into account the minorities' legitimate concerns over burial places will also have negative repercussions on the government.

Meanwhile, the Shleshmantak controversy is almost a dream come true for the Sangh Parivar's propaganda purposes. For the Hindutva activists it represents the invasion of Christianity into the sacred grounds of Hinduism. It is an incident that can always be evoked as an example of all the negativities that the Hindu right associates with the secular state and the religious minorities' demands. More importantly, it fits perfectly into the Hindutva narrative about how the religious minorities would start disturbing or disrespecting Hinduism in a secular state, thus leading to Hindu outrage. The inconvenient truth for the Hindu right is, however, that when the gravestones first appeared in the forest Nepal was still very much a Hindu Kingdom. The controversy, hence, has nothing to do with secularism itself. Nonetheless, the Hindu right will undoubtedly aim to create fear among the public, and if the government decides to allow for the Christian burials to continue, the Hindutva advocates will interpret this as proof of the alleged anti-Hindu stance of the secular state. Such symbols of future threats might not be as easy to find as historical monuments representing Hindu victimization, however. In India symbols of "Muslim tyranny" are always there for the Sangh Parivar's use, whereas there is no knowing when, or if, another case such as Shleshmantak will arise in Nepal. History may, thus, be easier to exploit as legitimization for the "Hindu vendetta". This leaves the Hindu right of Nepal somewhat disadvantaged in comparison to its southern neighbors.

The victimization narrative is where the differences in the Hindu nationalist experiences of India and Nepal become most apparent: while in India the Hindu right is busy constructing a collective history of Hindu subjugation, in Nepal the recent history is that of glory, of brave Hindu resistance to expansionist outside forces. Nepal, the last remaining bastion of Hindu rule, was the pride of Hindus worldwide, as the propaganda goes. The last Hindu kingdom has, however, now fallen and its purity is becoming defiled as it is “being attacked by enemies, evil doers, sinners, secularists and communists”, as an E-mail circulated by the Sanatan Dharma, Sanskrit and Nepali Center from New York says (“Help Restore Hindu Rashtra Nepal”, 11.8.2007). The Hindu psyche has in the Hindutva advocates’ view only now become humiliated in Nepal and the former glory of the nation tarnished. “This has been going on for a long time in India and now Nepal is being attacked”, the E-mail continues (ibid.). Again, a comparison to India is used as a warning of what might be the future of Nepal, if the Hindus do not rise to protect their country in unison: “Today this holy land needs your help to defend and protect her, from the enemies who wish to crush and grab the soul of the nation”(ibid.). When looking at the propaganda that is being spread about the “enemies” of the Hindu nation, namely the Christians and Muslims, this difference to the Indian narrative becomes all the more apparent: the Nepalese narrative is mainly focusing on supposed threats in the future, on something that *might* now happen as the Hindu-ness of the state is no longer protected.

3.1.2. The Christian Threat

While it is true that in India the Sangh Parivar has largely concentrated its attacks on the Muslim minority, in the past ten years or so the Hindutva groups have started to increasingly target also Christians, for example in the violence that occurred in 2008 in Kandhamal, Orissa or in the burning alive of Western missionaries in the late 1990s. Attacks against Christians have occurred especially in Eastern India where the Adivasis have converted to Christianity. Hence, the Nepalese context where the Christians are singled out as the number one enemies of the Hindu nation is by no means unique. A driving force behind the Hindutva ideology has from the beginning been its fear of

conversions, whether to Islam or Christianity, and this has resulted in the need to reform Hinduism in a way that keeps the lower castes and Adivasis in the Hindu fold. Similarly, the defensive type of Hinduism that the rulers of Nepal brought with them from the plains of India has been characterized by this fear, apparent first in the ban on foreigners' entry into the country and then in the law prohibiting conversions. It is interesting to note that the Malla dynasty, that ruled the valley of Kathmandu before the unification of Nepal, had an entirely different approach to missionaries. The first Capuchin missionaries had come to Nepal in 1715 from Italy, and the kings seemed to have no apprehensions towards their work and were not trying to stop people from changing their religion. In fact, the kings seem to have been particularly ecumenical in comparison to the Shahs and Ranas (Toffin 2006: 223). Under the Gorkhali rule both conversions and proselytizing were punished quite heavily by six and three years of imprisonment respectively, and when the first census of Nepal was conducted in the late 1950s, there were officially less than 30 Christians in the country (Fricke 2008: 35).

The law banning conversions subsequently became a manifestation of the Hindu-ness of the state and, though not implemented since the 1990s, in 2011 the government of Nepal announced it was again planning to impose a ban on proselytizing. This law would, however, only apply to Protestants who are allegedly involved in coercing the Nepalese to change their religion. This underlines how deeply rooted the fears of conversions have become, especially among the educated middle class Hindus. According to Sudhindra Sharma (2002), the Nepalese press was long publishing stories about Christianity that solely concentrated on narratives about poor people being lured to change their religion with promises of free education, medical treatment etc. (ibid. 34). The Hindu right of course makes use of these same arguments and is also quick to point out how the number of Christian converts in the country has been increasing in recent years. Indeed, the estimates have changed quite a lot since the 1950s and today the number is put closer to a million or even two million, depending on who one chooses to believe (Fricke 2008: 35-6). Some sources even argue that eight percent of the Nepalese population is already Christian, while the official census of 2001 puts the

percentage at only 0.5. The census data produced by the government has always been a matter of debate from all sides, but the fact is that the number of Christians has been increasing quite rapidly and it can be expected to be even larger in the 2011 census once it is published. However, when looking at the growing numbers of Christians in the country, it must first of all be taken into account that prior to 1990 Christians were systematically persecuted by the state. Ever since the 90s the fear of imprisonment has no longer forced people to hide their religious identity, so the increase in numbers is also probably a result of the change in the atmosphere. Most of the Nepalese converts are found among the Janajati groups, more specifically those that have continued to practice their animistic religions. Hence, it is the groups that have not been integrated into Hinduism, making up about 20 % of the Nepalese population, that seem to be more attracted to Christianity than the more Hinduized Janajati communities or the lower castes. As Gaborieau (1994) points out, the part of the population that seems to be, in a sense, vulnerable to conversions is, thus, merely a fraction (ibid.68).

The narrative about conversions offered by the Hindutva advocates is designed to instill fear into the Hindus' minds about a rapidly growing Christian population that is soon going to turn the present Hindu majority into a minority. It paints a picture of the Christians as aggressive zealots out to convert the entire population of Nepal into Christianity through bribery and coercion. In the Hindutva advocates' imagination the conversions are explicitly tied to the Christians' alleged global connections and financial assets that are then contrasted to the poverty and "helplessness" of the Nepalese. The missionaries are thought to be specifically targeting poor people from lower castes and ethnic minorities. For example, Vijay Prakash of the WHF and Nepali Dharma Sansad (Nepali Religious Parliament) said that "Christians go to the poorest lower caste people and create fear among them (---) they should not sell religions" (Interview 5). These alleged activities get also linked to NGOs and human rights organizations that are accused of working in collaboration with the missionaries: "If some Christian missionaries get arrested for trying to convert people, these organizations will try to secure them. At the moment NGOs in Nepal are more powerful

than the government.” (Interview 6, Govinda Sah). Western countries and churches are also thought to be backing Christianity’s spread in Nepal: “May be, there [*sic*, they] are in minority in Nepal, but they have support [*sic*] of Big Churches of Western countries and had been provided lot [*sic*] of money and power by international politics. Due to which Christianity is spreading in Nepal. It may take enormous form in far future. We are aware of this.” (E-mail communication, Vijay Prakash, 2.10.2010). Western countries are hence branded agents of Christianity, and their alleged interest in the religious affairs of Nepal is explained through the supposed expansionist drive of the religion: “[They want to] establish one world order which is norms [*sic*] of Christianity. Bible has ordered it’s [*sic*] follower to make all world population [*sic*] believe in Yahoba (father of Jesus). So Western nations would want to interfere in the affairs of Nepal.” (ibid.)

In this way, the conversions happening on the Nepalese soil become part of a much larger global conspiracy of Christianity and the West to wipe out Hinduism, and the small minority suddenly starts to seem extremely threatening and powerful. The global connections are indeed emphasized so much that simply by listening to the Hindutva activists it would start to seem like it is only the foreigners who are engaging in missionary activities in the country. This is of course not true, as Nepalese Christians have themselves also been active in spreading the religion inside the country (for example, Fricke 2008: 38). Nevertheless, in the Hindutva rhetoric the emphasis on the role of foreign missionaries is needed to reinforce the idea of the foreignness of Christianity itself (Zavos 2001: 87-8). In India the Hindu right also links the Christians to colonialism and Western imperialism, making references to the times when missionaries were converting increasing numbers of Indians in order to “civilize” them and to erode Indian resistance to the colonial state. The vilification of Hinduism thus became an important strategy of domination for the colonial forces (ibid. 81). British rule in itself is also seen as Christians’ rule over Hindus, and the VHP has vowed to resist conversions as “valiantly” as the Indians fought colonialism (ibid.). The linking of the present situation with the victimization narrative of the past, thus, continues in

the Indian context. Again, as the Hindu right of Nepal has no such history in its use, it must exclusively concentrate on trying to convince the public of the international links of the Christians of Nepal, and that the conversions might pose a threat to the Hindus “in far future”. What worries the Hindu right even more is the fact that the marginal groups it would like to win over to its own side are now increasingly attracted to Christianity. This, for the Hindutva advocates, represents “de-nationalization” since Christianity is seen as an agent of outside forces and its spread is, thus, seen as a form of neo-colonialism (ibid. 85). A change of religion must then amount to a change of loyalties, in the Hindutva advocates’ imagination. The Hindutva rhetoric has indeed tried to connect Christian conversions to secessionist and separatist movements in India, in particular by citing the example of the Naga insurgency in the North-East where the vast majority of the population has converted to Christianity (Jaffrelot 1996: 197-8). Such arguments were, however, not made by the Nepalese Hindutva advocates. Indeed, the Nepalese Hindutva propaganda concentrates on making the converts seem like victims of outside aggression, thus perpetuating a common paternalistic view of the lower castes and Janajatis where they are denied agency and simply viewed as “recipients” of a foreign religion, as Fricke (2008: 59) puts it.

The conversion pattern is, of course, not as straightforward or black and white as the Hindutva advocates would like the public to believe. First of all, it is extremely difficult to obtain any kind of evidence of forced conversions happening in Nepal, although the Hindutva advocates claim to be aware of many individual cases. When asked to meet these people, it was quickly declared that they had moved out of town or that their contact details could not be obtained. The Christian leaders I interviewed firmly refuted the claims of forced conversions and said that the Hindutva groups are misinterpreting their charity work. MC Matthew, the co-pastor of Birgunj Church, originally from the Indian state of Kerala, also pointed out that “outsiders think the people became Christians because of the money, although they were Christians already before” (Interview 10). This kind of a (perhaps deliberate) misunderstanding could also be at the heart of an example, given by Govinda Sah, of the “manipulation” the Christians

allegedly engage in. He recounted a story of how Christian missionaries had come to his door and tried to “manipulate” him. When asked if he had been offered any money in exchange for conversion, he changed the topic and stated that “I have a friend whose school fees are paid by Christians” (Field notes, 27.3.2011). It then turned out that this friend had been Christian all along and had not converted simply because of promises of financial aid.

Of course, the missionary activities of Christians in Nepal are a fact, and these activities have surely increased in recent years. The Christians do not try to deny this, as spreading their religion’s message is an important part of Christianity: “We are very active in preaching. (---) We are just obeying Jesus’ command”, as Peter Kamaleshwar Singh, the pastor of Birgunj Church, said (Interview 10). The presence of Western missionaries in Nepal is of course also a fact. Many of these missionaries also represent evangelical strands of Christianity that can certainly be quite persuasive in their work, and as Sudhindra Sharma (2002) argues, they can also sometimes be uncompromising and hence anti-pluralist which might indeed lead to confrontations (ibid. 34). Some of these missionaries’ agendas might even be as extreme as the Hindutva advocates claim, and they may indeed be harboring hopes of converting the entire population of Nepal into Christianity. Such fundamentalist Christian projects have in fact been seen in India in late 90s, for example in the form of AD2000, the aim of which was to spread the gospel to every person in the world by the year 2000. This and other similar projects had, however, little influence in India (Bhatt 2001: 198). The fundamentalist Christians’ presence in Nepal is also probably quite small, and it is unlikely that their actions would have any serious consequences. The Sangh Parivar, however, believes that there is a global alliance between the Pope and these fundamentalist organizations (ibid.). The Nepalese Hindu right also repeatedly used this argument. Such claims are most likely made because of the fact that the Pope’s centrality to Catholicism is seen by the Hindu nationalists as proof of the unity of all Christians, which again is supposed to be the source of their alleged strength in comparison to the weak Hindus (Jaffrelot 1996: 196-7). Scattered small fundamentalist organizations would of course not seem as

threatening on their own, and they must, thus, be linked to the supposedly all-powerful Vatican, which indeed was even accused of being behind the declaration of Nepal as secular.

Hence, the fact that the Christians of Nepal can be accused of undermining the Hindu society by “alluring” the ethnic minorities and lower castes, and that they seem to be backed by institutions far more powerful than the poor Hindus, makes them the perfect enemy for the Hindu right of Nepal. The rapid increase in conversions since 1990 seems to be the main reason for singling out the Christian community, aided by the fact that throughout Nepal’s history it has been the prohibition of conversions that has been the main expression of the Hindu-ness of the state. Also the fact that even many moderate Hindus see conversions as a threat to Hindus will undoubtedly contribute to the resonance of the Hindutva rhetoric in Nepal in the future. In comparison, the Muslims of Nepal have not been accused of engaging in proselytizing, thus leading to them being viewed with less paranoia by the Hindutva advocates of Nepal.

3.1.3. The Muslim Threat

The Muslim population of Nepal, constituting the third largest religious group of the country with 4.2 %, is mainly concentrated in the Terai region, having their origins in different parts of Northern India. There are, however, also Muslims inhabiting the Hill area whose ancestors migrated from Kashmir and some even from Tibet (S. Sharma 2004: 108-110). The Muslim population is at least officially considered larger than the Christian population (0.5 %), although these official estimates are heavily contested as already pointed out, and many suggest that the real percentages are much larger - in the Muslims’ case actually somewhere closer to 8-10 % (Siddique 2001: 333). Regardless of what the real number of Muslims in Nepal is, they are still most probably a larger community than the Christians. Hence, it is interesting to note that the Hindu right of Nepal does not see the Muslims as such a large threat to the Hindus as the Christians. Indeed, the Muslims were not mentioned nearly as often in the interviews, and conversions to Christianity were clearly made out to be the main threat to Hinduism,

and thus responsible for disrupting the inter-religious relations of Nepal. As Sudhindra Sharma (2004) points out, the Muslims, unlike the Christians, have always by and large complied with the state's prohibition on conversions (ibid.116). This is undoubtedly the main reason that the Hindutva advocates of Nepal decide to direct most of their attention towards the Christians.

The Muslims are reserved a special place in the Hindutva propaganda of India due to mainly historical reasons. The history Islam in South Asia, which starts from the Afghan and Turk invasions in 11th century and culminates in the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire that ruled in India from the 13th to 16th century and 16th to 18th century respectively, builds the backbone of this propaganda for the Hindu right. The violence that accompanied the erstwhile invasions is often exaggerated and the times of inter-religious harmony, like that of Akbar's rule in the 16th century, are significantly downplayed in order to induce the idea of Muslim tyranny over the Hindus. Another important aspect of this particular view of history is the emphasis it places on an idea of a unified Hindu nation that existed in the past, until the Muslims came and disrupted everything by bringing violence and separatism with them (Nussbaum 2007: 213). Of course, such claims of Hindu unity are highly contested by scholars, as the Hindutva account of history does not take into consideration the societal divisions and tensions that existed in ancient and medieval India, resulting from for example caste, class and gender (ibid. 214). The Partition of British India and the creation of Pakistan in 1947 have also contributed significantly to the stereotypical image of Muslims that the Hindu right often puts forward. As the Muslim population started to increasingly assert its identity and subsequently to demand a separate homeland in the 1930s and 40s, the Hindu nationalists felt increasingly threatened by this minority. The massive communal violence that erupted as a result of the Partition, especially in the divided state of Punjab, left deep marks in the psyches of both newly independent nations, and gave a new international dimension to the formerly domestic conflict (Gaborieau 1985: 8). Ever since the creation of Pakistan, the Muslims that decided to stay on in India have

been viewed with suspicion by the Hindu nationalists who see that they identify themselves more with Pakistan than with India.

These “historical” claims are thus used to reinforce the idea of the inherent violence, intolerance and anti-nationalism of the Muslims in contrast to the supposedly more peaceful Hindus, and to invoke outrage in the unjustly victimized majority community. This historical dimension is again absent in the Nepalese context, of course. The Muslim population of Nepal has from the beginning been relatively small and unassertive, and has thus provided little reason for worry for the Hindu nationalists – except when the community has started to demand its rights (Dastider 2007). The Hindutva organizations of Nepal have not spared the Muslims from violent attacks, provocation and propaganda during such times, as has already been discussed. Despite the fact that the Indian Hindutva rhetoric draws a great deal from one sided views of history, it also bases its propaganda on the alleged global connections of the Muslim population. It periodically accuses the Muslims of supporting Pakistan-based terrorist groups, of aligning with global revivalist movements and of only being loyal to their religious community, rather than to India, as already pointed out. These claims have, of course, been increasingly easy to make in the post-9/11 world and also in the light of Pakistan’s role in sending the *mujahedeen* to Indian administered Kashmir. The Hindutva narrative focuses on emphasizing the role of foreign militants in the escalation of the Kashmir conflict, with the purpose of again externalizing the “threat of Islam” and questioning the loyalty of Indian Muslims (Zavos 2001: 88).

The Hindu right of Nepal also attempts to link the Muslim community to outside forces. Interestingly, however, many interviewees also stated that the Nepalese Muslims themselves are “good” but “outside influence is bad” (Interview 9). This could be interpreted as meaning that the Muslims do not pose a threat to the Nepalese Hindus as long as they remain unassertive and accept their second-class status in the society. As soon as they are seen to be organizing themselves, this is interpreted as “outside influence”, which again must mean expansionism, fundamentalism and terrorism. An increasing number of madrassas being built with foreign financing and the Muslims’

alleged links to the Pakistani ISI or terrorist organizations such as Lashkar-e-Toiba were indeed the main issues that the Hindutva advocates addressed in the interviews with regard to the Muslims. As already mentioned earlier, since the 1990s there has been an increasing turn amongst all religious communities of Nepal towards more literal interpretations of their religion, and the same has of course been true with the Muslims as well. Most Muslims of Nepal are Sunnis of the Hanafi school of law, but there is also a small minority of Shias in the South West of the country (Sijapati 2011: 656). Historically, Sufism and the veneration of saints constitute an important part of the Islamic traditions throughout the Subcontinent, all the way from Pakistan to Bangladesh, and this is also something that is very visible among the Muslims of Nepal (ibid. 657). Sufism tends to be very inclusive and pluralistic in its practices and it also incorporates many elements from Hinduism. According to Sijapati (ibid.), the Muslims in the Hill region are mainly followers of saint oriented strands of Islam, such as Barelwi and, indeed, Sufism. The Terai Muslims, however, are more influenced by reformist strands, such as Deoband, Ahl-e Hadis and Jamaat-i Islami or Salafi schools of thought that are often branded “Wahabi” because of their conservative and literal interpretations of religion.

It is true that most of the madrassas are concentrated in the Terai region, and that the Nepalese Muslims who advocate more conservative views of Islam have in fact often studied abroad, for example in Pakistan or in the Indian city of Lucknow. These Muslims are also the ones who are particularly active in the present identity politics of Nepal. Organizations such as Millat-e-Islamiya Nepal, Islami Sangh Nepal and All Nepal Ittehad Sangh represent these reformist strands of Islam, but they are also very active in charity work and the overall improvement of the condition of the Muslim community (ibid. 658). It is therefore true that the Muslim community of Nepal is influenced by global developments of Islam, and that they are increasingly also traveling to the Middle East to either work or receive education. Nevertheless, such developments can hardly be directly linked to terrorist organizations or the Pakistani ISI. There is, nevertheless, at least one quite radical Muslim organization active in the

Terai, called the Islami Ekta Sangh, that has often clashed with Hindutva groups in the past (Dastider 2007: 164). Largely the Muslims of Nepal have been peaceful, however, and there hasn't been a single incident of Islamist terrorism in the country. In fact, as the previous chapters show, it has been overwhelmingly the Hindutva oriented groups that have engaged in such activities in Nepal ever since secularism. As the Muslims are now increasingly demanding that the new constitution would also take their community into consideration, the Hindutva rhetoric is likely to grow more hostile towards them. At the moment, however, it is clearly the activities of Christians that occupy the Hindu right's attention in Nepal.

3.1.4. Creating a United "Hindudom" in Nepal

Probably the most difficult task ahead for the Sangh Parivar is the unification of all the Hindus of Nepal – or rather, all the religions and ethnic groups it considers Hindus. This would include all the Janajati groups, Buddhists, lower castes and Dalits, and also in theory the Sikhs and Jains, although there are very few of them in Nepal. The most significant aspect of this process is to create a nationalized Hinduism through the homogenization of the religious and cultural diversity of Nepal and evoke national and international "Hindu solidarity" by concentrating on symbols that all Hindus can accept. Again, all this has little to do with the religious dimensions of Hinduism as such, as the mission is explicitly to bring a nationalist flavor into religious identifications (Hansen 1999: 102). One of the main aims of the Hindutva ideology has always been to erase the divisions and differentiations that are abundant in the Hindu society, and considered the reason for its weakness by the Hindutva advocates. To overcome this weakness, the Hindutva forces seek to imitate the Muslims and Christians whose supposed unity is thought to be their greatest strength (Jaffrelot 1996: 347).

The VHP was founded precisely for this task. The organization indeed claims to represent all Hindus, while it simultaneously dictates a code of conduct, a set of practices all the Hindus are to abide by, the purpose of which is of course to unify them (ibid. 348). The WHF, sharing the agenda of the VHP and indeed being almost one and

the same with it, states its aim to be “to create awareness for the protection of cows and eradicate orthodox discriminatory social practices and *anomalies of custom, beliefs and rituals* without infringing the basic principles enumerated in the Holy Scriptures” (worldhindufederation.com, emphasis added). The WHF, like the VHP, clearly wants to be an authority that can prescribe what is considered an anomaly and what standard Hinduism, although standard Hinduism as such can hardly be argued to exist. It is also debatable whether Hinduism can even be thought to construct one single religion, since there is so much variation inside it in the form of local practices, different sects, traditions and castes. It was indeed only in the colonial times that the English term “Hinduism” started to be used mainly for administrative purposes, and it was most probably coined by Christian missionaries in the 19th century (Madan: 1997: 177). Hence, the standardization and unity of Hinduism must be constructed and constantly strived for. One such attempt at promoting “Hindu unity” was the VHP’s *ekatmata yagna* (sacrifice for unity) in 1983. It was a procession of three caravans carrying the water of the Ganges, all traveling from one holy place to another along common pilgrimage routes, utilizing two symbols that all Hindus could venerate: the holy river and *bharat mata* (Mother India). These caravans were joined by 69 others on the way and all met in Nagpur where the headquarters of RSS is (Jaffrelot 1996: 360-1). One of these caravans in fact started off from Kathmandu, having first been blessed by King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya, and headed off for Rameshvaram in Southern India carrying the king’s portrait (McKean 1996: 121). As Chetan Bhatt (2001) points out, the linking of Nepal and South India, two sites that historically represent different religious traditions, was quite significant in that it “was a displacement of their distinct traditions by the symbols of territorial Hindutva” (ibid. 1990).

Since the Hindutva advocates consider themselves the authorities on declaring what is proper Hinduism and what is not, they also consider it their duty to “civilize” and “modernize” all “misguided” groups. This in practice means imposing a Sanskritized Hinduism on all the indigenous groups who may or may not consider themselves Hindu (Hansen 1999: 107). In Nepal Shaktism, or village Hinduism, in which animal

sacrifices and goddess worship play a crucial part, has always been widely practiced, and the religious practices popular among the common people have been inclusive and syncretistic, incorporating folk beliefs and local traditions. According to Sudhindra Sharma (2004), this pluralism has been precisely the factor that has brought ethnic Janajati groups into the fold of Hinduism (ibid.121-2). Thus, it seems that Hindutva's version of Hinduism might not work so well in the Nepalese context, at least among the Janajatis. In fact, it has been precisely the orthodox, state propagated interpretations of Hinduism that have often caused the greatest deal of alienation in them (S. Sharma 2002: 27). The difficulties in attempting to unify all the Nepalese caste and ethnic groups under a single understanding of culture and religion are thus already evident in the history of the country and the recent emergence of identity politics. Unlike in India, the ethnic minorities and Buddhists of Nepal already know what a Hindu majoritarian state is like, and mobilizing them for the cause of Hindutva will be a difficult task. As Prem Bahadur Shakya, the president of a Buddhist organization Nepal Boudha Samaj, said: "So many years of Hindu Kingdom. What did it achieve?" (Interview 12.) It seems, thus, that the Buddhists and most of the Janajatis would see little sense in returning to the situation of the past. This will not stop the Sangh Parivar from trying to convince them otherwise, however.

All the Hindutva leaders I interviewed indeed remembered to emphasize that Buddhists and all Janajatis are also Hindus, and that they can only be protected from becoming victims of Christian missionaries in a Hindu Rashtra. Rhetoric alone is, of course, not enough, and this is where the Hindutva advocates turn into Hindu missionaries. The VHP has indeed been targeting the Adivasis (indigenous people) of India by adopting largely similar tactics to the Christians active in the country. One of its projects has been to establish an organization known as *Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram* (Tribal Development Center) that coordinates social work and conversion activities in the Adivasi heartlands in emulation of the many education institutions and medical facilities started by Christian missionaries (Hansen 1999: 103). Such projects have also been started in Nepal: the HSS, for example, has altogether almost 50 schools in the

country and it runs a *Janajati Kalyan Ashram* in Teku, Kathmandu, where it schools children from the ethnic minorities. The aim of the ashram, according to Govinda Sah, is “to develop the Janajatis by conserving nature, saving their indigenous practices and by bringing them into modern line.” He also added that “All Janajatis see themselves as Hindu and even if not, it doesn’t matter. As long as they are not Christian or Muslim” (Field notes, 27.3.2011). What this clearly implies is that the Janajatis’ self-identification is of no importance to the HSS, because the organization sees them as Hindus anyway. “Saving their indigenous practices” would mean acknowledging their cultural and religious differentiation, so indigenous seems to mean “Hindu” to the HSS. “Bringing them into modern line” on the other hand seems to be understood in terms of eradicating “anomalies of custom, belief and rituals”, as advocated by the WHF, since the HSS also trains the Janajatis in Hindu philosophy – or rather its own interpretation of it. All this seems to construct is exactly the kind of forced “cultural uplift” that Hansen (1999) describes, where the ethnic minorities are turned into “respectable” Hindus, so that they would not face discrimination from the society (ibid.104-6). Such discrimination would, of course, render these groups vulnerable to the Christians. The Sangh Parivar also has a rescue plan for those that have already converted: it regularly conducts re-conversion ceremonies where large numbers of Christians, and sometimes also Muslims, abandon their religion and are taken back into the fold of Hinduism (Bhatt 2001: 198). According to Vijay Prakash of the WHF, such ceremonies have been conducted in Nepal as well (Interview 5.).

While the Indian Sangh Parivar has all these strategies ready for the Nepalese Hindu right’s use for countering conversions, the problem presented by the Buddhists is in a sense unique to Nepal. First of all, the Buddhists constitute the second largest religious group of Nepal with around 10.7 %, while in India they make up only around 0.8% of the population. The Buddhists have received fairly little attention in the Hindutva discourse, although there seems to have been some ambivalence towards them in the past. As already mentioned, V.D. Savarkar was quite hostile towards the religion in the beginning because of its rejection of violence. Today, however, Buddhism is regarded

as a sect of Hinduism, and the VHP has even invited the Dalai Lama to open one of its conferences in 1979 (Jaffrelot 1996: 347). Secondly, the Buddhist population of Nepal is predominantly found among the Janajatis, for example the Newars, Sherpas and other groups whose origin is mainly believed to be in Tibet (Dastider 1995: 53-64). In India, however, most of the Buddhists are converts, mostly of Hindu Dalit origin. According to Leve (2011), many Janajatis of Nepal have increasingly been trying to reclaim their Buddhist roots that they believe to have had before assimilation into Hinduism (ibid. 515). Hence, asserting a Buddhist identity seems to have come to be used as a way to express opposition to the majoritarian Hindu state. Buddhist organizations have, of course, been at the forefront of demanding secularism in Nepal ever since the protests in 1990 and it also seems that the Buddhist community by and large shares these sentiments. According to the survey conducted by International IDEA, 69 % of the Buddhists in 2004 supported secularism. In 2007, however, this percentage had risen to 78 (Hachhethu, Kumar and Sen 2008: 86). Compared to Muslims and Christians this is an opposite development, as the support for Hindu kingdom had in fact increased among these two communities. This is something that can probably be largely put down to the fact that the Buddhists have not been at the receiving end of violent attacks, whereas Muslims and Christians have been targeted. The Buddhists, hence, do not seem to be affected by the fear that the state would not protect them from violence if they increase their demands for their rights.

The Hindutva advocates do not seem to have any concrete plans for the recruitment of the Buddhists, even though on the rhetorical level they are constantly made out to be Hindus. It seems that the Buddhists are a lost cause for the Hindu right in Nepal: Buddhists cannot be seen as enemies of the Hindus because their religion is indigenous to the Subcontinent, and the “cultural uplift” strategies do not seem to suit to their case either. Converting to Buddhism has come to be used as a tactic especially by the Dalits of India, as advocated by Bhimrao Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution and a Dalit leader, because it seems to provide an escape from the caste discrimination of Hinduism. Today it also saves the Dalits from becoming targets of Hindutva wrath,

which they would no doubt have to face if they converted to Christianity or Islam. The Hindu right has attempted to appropriate Amdedkar in its rhetoric and to portray him as an opponent of Islam and Christianity, because he chose to convert to Buddhism instead (Hansen 1999: 226-8). As the Buddhists of Nepal are not converts, such a tactic cannot be applied to them (Bouillier 1997: 97). The Buddhists do not seem to be easily scared by Christian missionary activities either: Prem Bahadur Shaky, for example, did not see the activities of Christians as posing a threat to the Buddhists and he in fact said that “People should be free to convert by themselves” (Interview 12.). The Buddhist leadership (and for the most part the community as well) seems to be united with both Christians and Muslims in their demands for holding onto secularism. The Hindutva activists of Nepal were thus simply forced to claim that the Buddhist leaders who support secularism do not represent the true sentiments of their communities, and that all Buddhists want to live in a Hindu Rashtra (Interview 11.). The problems related to Buddhists are, thus, completely denied by the Nepalese Hindu right. Beyond rhetoric, there seems to be little that the Hindutva groups can do, as the Buddhists cannot be attacked and it is also very difficult to recruit them.

On the whole, the political climate in Nepal may not be ideal for the kind of “Hindu unity”, as imagined by the Hindutva groups. The recent years have brought too many divisions to the fore in the form of language, ethnicity and religion. The Janajatis of Nepal have been particularly active in asserting their cultural, religious and ethnic identities. One of the most significant problems is posed by the fact that all these minorities whose support the Hindutva forces wish to gain have already seen many years of majoritarian Hindu rule, and Buddhism has been used as a way to assert their separate identity and to oppose the Hindu state. Nevertheless, as it is exactly these minority assertions that might lead to moderate Hindus increasingly turning towards Hindutva, the Hindu right of Nepal does not have to worry about the Buddhists and Janajatis so much. Hence, the real hope of the Hindutva forces remains on the one hand in the Madheshis and on the other in those disillusioned by the federalism debate. The Dalits and lower castes, as already mentioned, do not seem to have much to gain from

ethnicity-based federalism, so they form another potential support base for the Hindu right – both in the Terai and in the Hills. These are groups that will most likely be targeted by the Hindutva parties that oppose the formation of states along ethnic lines, such as the RPP. The more India-leaning groups such as the HSS will most likely continue to put their faith in the Madheshis. Nevertheless, the conflict between Paharis and Madheshis will of course hinder the aspirations for a unified Hindu Nepal, but if the Hindu right can use the situation in the Terai to launch a strong movement for a Hindu Rashtra, this division will probably not play such a large role anymore. Rather than the Buddhist or Janajati problem, the federalism debate is, thus, the largest obstacle standing on the way of consolidating an idea of Hindu unity which could translate into a single “Hindu vote”.

III. Conclusion

Ever since the historical relations between the militant Hindu nationalist groups of India and the rulers of Nepal came to an abrupt end in 2006 when Nepal was declared secular, the rhetoric of the Nepalese Hindutva groups has turned more hostile than ever before. The initial reaction to secularism was seen in the form of protests, especially in the Terai region, and in comments that seemed to be veiled threats towards the religious minorities. The Hindutva groups’ argument was, and continues to be, that if Nepal is not a secular country, inter-religious relations will suffer because the minorities’ activities will no longer be controlled by the Hindu state. Because it is believed that it is in the Christians and Muslims’ nature to be intolerant, expansionist and violent, the tolerant and peaceful Hindus’ existence will become threatened in a secular state. Thus, the Hindus cannot be expected to tolerate this and they must retaliate to these perceived threats in order to protect their religion. These verbal threats quickly turned into reality in the form of bomb attacks targeting mosques and churches, carried out by fringe groups demanding a return to a Hindu kingdom.

The second reaction came after 2008 when monarchy was finally abolished in Nepal. The Sangh Parivar realized it needed to mobilize the people of Nepal, as its most important ally in Nepal was finally gone. If the pro-Hindutva forces want to rise to power, they now need

to contest elections. The Hindutva advocates of Nepal, who had been drawing up strategies with their Indian allies, decided to abandon advocating the reinstatement of the Hindu kingdom, realizing that continuing to sideline with an unpopular ruler could hinder their attempts at political mobilization. Instead, they decided to concentrate on simply demanding a Hindu Rashtra, which still has quite a lot of support among people. A Hindu Rashtra is justified by arguing that Hindus, Buddhists and Janajatis can only be secure if they are protected from the invasion and intolerance of Islam and Christianity - something that for the Hindu right seems to manifest itself in the form of conversions. Secularism, as it represents this invasion and a conspiracy of neo-colonial forces, must be resisted above all else, even if this means making some compromises on the ideological level. The strategy of abandoning the former king was, however, not adopted by all, in particular some Pahari Hindutva advocates, mainly found among royalist, Hindu nationalist parties such as the RPP and Shiv Sena Nepal. The groups most closely associated with the Indian Sangh Parivar (mainly the HSS and WHF) seemed to prefer a strategy of political pragmatism over ideological purity.

The third reaction went hand in hand with the second one. As the king was largely abandoned, the Sangh Parivar simultaneously turned towards the Madheshis, trying to turn an anti-Maoist sentiment into a pro-Hindu Rashtra one. As the Madheshi uprising largely attained its goals, a strong Hindu movement might emerge next in the political vacuum of the Terai. The Terai is the area of Nepal where the largest Hindutva influence can be seen, coming from across the border. Also being home to the Muslim minority, this is where the most communal violence in the past has taken place. The Madheshi movement, hence, seems to present the largest potential for the Hindutva forces at the moment, something which can also be seen in the fact that the HSS has adopted a pro-federalism stand. Nevertheless, as the present political chaos might also provide a favorable environment for the royalists, it remains to be seen which form of Hindutva will end up resonating more among the Nepalese.

The Hindutva propaganda that is being spread about the religious minorities chooses the Christians as its main targets. Conversions, seen as being the result of bribery and coercion,

are depicted as the conspiracy of Western, Christian nations. NGOs and international development aid are seen as proof of the global connections of this small minority. Simultaneously, this minority is said to be growing at an alarming rate, soon turning into a majority. The Muslims, a historically unassertive community in Nepal, are not spared either. They are also presented as having connections to international movements and networks, such as Lashkar-e-Toiba or the Pakistani ISI. These claims about the minorities are, however, not as easy to make as in India, where the stereotypes can also be linked to the Hindu victimization narrative. Historical symbols of “Muslim tyranny” such as the Babri Masjid are easy to exploit and use as calls for mobilization, whereas Nepal lacks all such monuments, having been under Hindu rule throughout its history. For this reason, the evidence of these threats and stereotypes must be found in the present, leading to agitations such as the Shleshmantak forest case, representing alleged Christianity’s invasion to the sacred grounds of Hinduism. In addition to stigmatizing the enemy, a unified “Hindudom” must also be created in Nepal. This process includes on the one hand rhetorical tactics where Buddhists and Janajatis are referred to as being Hindus, but on the other hand also practical tactics are used in emulation of the enemies. The Hindutva forces try to counter the threat of conversions by themselves engaging in similar activities.

The current situation in Nepal where the religious and ethnic minorities have challenged the state-propagated nationalism, based on Hinduism, Nepali language and the king, might indeed prove to present a situation where the popularity of the Hindutva ideology will rise. Nevertheless, the unification of all Hindus will be a problem for the Hindu right. The largest obstacle seems to be the Pahari-Madheshi conflict, but even if these two groups are divided on the issue of federalism, Hindu identity seems to be what unites them. Hence, if the religious identity of Hindus is mobilized to feel threatened, these two groups will most likely stand united. On the other hand, if the issue of federalism is not solved, these two strands of Hindutva will continue to drift further apart. The general opinion of the people that seems to be in favor of a Hindu Rashtra might also be turned to the Sangh Parivar’s advantage, especially if the Hindutva groups manage to convince the public that Hinduism is “under siege” like in India in the 1980s. Generally, it seems that every time the Christians

and Muslims have started to demand their rights, the majoritarian Hindu identity has started to feel threatened. This can be seen in the form of increased violence, or the state's apparent unwillingness to protect the minorities' rights. Much of what can be expected to happen in the future has, hence, to do with political developments in Nepal, especially with regard to federalism. As the entrance of the formerly marginalized communities into power happened very quickly, the majority identity's response may take some time to take its concrete shape. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that a strictly Pahari-centered form of Hindutva would manage to mobilize as many people in Nepal as a more Madheshi-focused one.

My hypothesis that the fall of the Hindu Kingdom is causing the Hindutva groups to feel threatened and, thus, to turn more radical, was proven correct. The second hypothesis that the Hindutva groups' increased use of intimidation through violence and propaganda has the potential to harm the inter-religious relations in the country, was, however, only partly proven right. The extremist Hindutva groups, such as the NDA and Ranbir Sena, have not managed to significantly disturb the inter-communal relations through their terrorist attacks. It is only once the masses are mobilized to feel they are threatened by the minorities that the popularity of Hindutva can be expected to rise, thus leading to increased communal clashes. The success of popular mobilization, again, depends on the political climate in the country, which, in fact, seems to closely resemble the time of the Mandal agitation in India. If the Hindu right of Nepal manages to launch a popular movement that diverts the attention of the masses away from ethnic and regional divisions, like the *rath yatra* of L.K. Advani did, Nepal could witness a similar saffron wave as India did in the 1990s. This will, however, require that the Paharis and Madheshis find a common ground – something that can only happen if their attention focuses on the religious minorities as the enemy, rather than each other.

Secularism and the attempt to build a more inclusive state in Nepal have, thus, paradoxically provided a fertile ground for the growth of Hindutva. As the minorities have won more rights, the Hindu majoritarian identity has at the same time started to feel it has become unjustly victimized and humiliated. Imran Ansari, the President of Millat-e-Islamiya Nepal described the situation from the minorities' perspective by saying: "There is

a sense of improvement. For example, many inter-religious platforms have come up. The future looks very good, because now there can be dialogue. Still, at the same time very bad forces are showing their heads” (Interview 8.). Now, as the most inclusive institution in the history of Nepal, the CA, has been dissolved, the future looks perhaps more uncertain than before.

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12. Prem Bahadur Shakya, President of Nepal Boudha Samaj. (29.3.2011). Kathmandu.
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Abstract

Hinduism has been used as a source of legitimacy by the kings of Nepal since this nation was first unified in the 18th century, while Hindu nationalism, also known as Hindutva, crystallized as a political ideology in the 1920s in India, drawing substantially from extreme European nationalisms and socio-religious movements inside Hinduism. Hindutva found its expression in an idea of a mono-cultural Hindu Rashtra (nation) that excludes the followers of religions originating outside of South Asia. While Nepal isolated itself from all outside influences up until the 1950s and continued to exist as a Hindu majoritarian state, India was declared secular after its independence. The rulers of Nepal and the Hindu nationalists of India, however, created a mutually beneficial relationship that protected the monarchy and allowed the Hindutva groups of India to spread their networks to Nepal, thus leading to a steady rapprochement of these two strands of Hindu nationalism, as will be shown in this thesis. Hindutva experienced a tremendous rise to mainstream politics of India in the late 1990s, followed by some of the worst instances of violence against religious minorities after independence. As Nepal was declared a secular state after a ten-year-long Maoist conflict in 2006, Hindutva militancy has started to raise its head in this country where religious violence has been a relatively rare occurrence, coinciding only with periods of increased minority mobilization. Based on fieldwork conducted in Nepal, this thesis studies the reactions of the Hindutva groups to secularism in the country, distinguishing between different tactics that aim to restore the Hindu state. These tactics are then examined in relation to the current political climate in Nepal where minority assertions (ethnic, regional and religious) have challenged the state-propagated nationalism. The central question is, hence, whether the popularity of Hindutva can be expected to rise in Nepal now. Several reactions could be identified in the course of the research: violent attacks, aggressive Hindutva rhetoric and attempts at political mobilization have intensified since secularism. There has been a clear increase in violence against Christians and Muslims after 2006, with attacks carried out by extremist Hindutva groups. At the same time, the Hindu right has tried to mobilize the Nepalese Hindus by abandoning the

extremely unpopular, now dethroned king, and by concentrating on using the Madheshi movement, a popular uprising of the people living on the border of India against the dominating Paharis, to its own ends. Simultaneously the royalists still argue for the reinstatement of Hindu monarchy and oppose the demands for ethnicity-based federal states. Hence, it will be shown that the minority assertions on the one hand present a problem for the Hindutva cause by hindering its project of unifying all Hindus, but at the same time this might create exactly the kind of situation that leads to the increasing popularity of Hindu nationalism, as minority mobilization threatens the constructed majority identity. Looking at the Hindutva rhetoric that has emerged in post-2006 Nepal, a perception of small groups linked to global forces that threaten the Hindu majority can be clearly identified. Hindutva propaganda sees the Christian minority of Nepal as its number one enemy, while the second place is reserved for the Muslims. The Hindu right argues that the re-establishment of a Hindu majoritarian state is the only way to prevent religious conflicts in Nepal, and it sees secularism as a conspiracy of outside forces, out to weaken the Hindus by giving too many rights to the minorities. Since an opposite experience of history leaves the Hindu nationalists of Nepal disadvantaged compared to their Indian counterparts who legitimize their politics of vendetta through an idea of Hindu victimization, the Nepalese Hindu right must create an idea of future threats for its popular mobilizations. It must also attempt to unite the Hindu Madheshis and Paharis against the religious minorities in order to win more support.

Key Words: Nepal / Hindutva / Hindu nationalism / India / Violence / Politics / Inter-religious harmony / Religious minorities

Zusammenfassung

Die Könige Nepals haben die Legitimität ihrer Herrschaft aus dem Hinduismus bezogen, seit sich diese Nation im 18. Jahrhundert vereinigte. Hindunationalismus, oder auch Hindutva, kristallisierte sich als politische Ideologie in den 1920er Jahren in Indien heraus und ließ sich vom extremen europäischen Nationalismus und sozio-religiösen Bewegungen innerhalb des Hinduismus beeinflussen. Hindutva fand seinen Ausdruck in einer Idee von einem monokulturellen Hindu Rashtra (Nation), der die Religionen außerhalb von Südasien ausschließt. Während Nepal sich von äußeren Einflüssen bis zu den 1950er Jahren isolierte und als ein Hindu-mehrheitlicher Staat fortbestand, wurde Indien nach der Unabhängigkeit als säkular erklärt. Wie diese Arbeit zeigt, haben die Herrscher Nepals und die Hindunationalisten Indiens eine gegenseitig nützliche Beziehung kreiert, die die Monarchie beschützte und es den indischen Hindutva Gruppen erlaubte, ihre Netzwerke nach Nepal auszubreiten. Dies erlaubte den beiden Strängen des Hindunationalismus auch, sich stetig anzunähern. Hindutva erlebte in Indien einen enormen Anstieg zur politischen Mitte in den späten 1990er Jahren, was einige der schlimmsten Fälle von Gewalt gegenüber religiösen Minderheiten im unabhängigen Indien als Folge hatte. Als Nepal 2006 nach einem 10-jährigen Maoistischen Konflikt zu einem säkularen Staat erklärt wurde, hat die Hindutva Militanz angefangen, sich zu zeigen. Religiöse Gewalt war bis dahin relativ gering und zeigte sich nur im Zusammenhang mit den zunehmenden Mobilisierungen der Minderheiten. Basierend auf die Feldforschung, die in Nepal durchgeführt wurde, befasst sich diese Diplomarbeit mit den Reaktionen dieser Hindutva Gruppen zu Säkularismus in Nepal und unterscheidet zwischen verschiedenen Taktiken, die die Restoration des Hindu Staates als Ziel haben. Diese Taktiken werden dann in Bezug auf die jetzige politische Stimmung in Nepal untersucht, wo die Versuche der ethnischen, regionalen und religiösen Minderheiten sich durchzusetzen, den vom Staat geförderten Nationalismus infrage stellen. Die zentrale Frage ist daher, ob es zu erwarten ist, dass die Popularität des Hindutva in Nepal steigen wird. Einige Reaktionen konnten im Laufe der Forschung identifiziert werden: Gewaltangriffe, aggressive Hindutva Rhetorik und Versuche nach politischer Mobilisierung haben sich nach dem Säkularismus vermehrt. Es hat einen klaren Anstieg an

Gewalttaten gegen Christen und Muslimen nach 2006 gegeben, welche von den Hindutva Extremisten durchgeführt wurden. Zur gleichen Zeit haben es die Hindu-Rechten versucht, die nepalesischen Hindus zu mobilisieren, indem sie sich von dem extrem unpopulären und mittlerweile enthronten König abwendeten und sich auf die Madheshi Bewegung konzentrierten, welche ein populärer Aufstand der Menschen an der Indischen Grenze gegen den herrschenden Paharis ist. Gleichzeitig sprechen sich die Royalisten immer noch für die Wiederherstellung der Hindu Monarchie aus und lehnen die Forderungen nach einer auf Ethnizität basierenden föderalen Struktur ab. Die Forderungen der Minderheiten können ein Problem für den Hindutva darstellen, indem sie das Einigungsprojekt aller Hindus hindern. Allerdings könnte genau dies gleichzeitig zu einer steigenden Popularität des Hindunationalismus führen, weil sich die konstruierte Identität der Mehrheit bedroht fühlt. Beim Betrachten der Hindutva Rhetorik, die sich nach 2006 in Nepal entwickelte, kann eine Annahme kleiner, global vernetzter Gruppen erkannt werden, die die Hindu Mehrheit bedrohen. Die Hindutva Propaganda sieht die christliche Minderheit Nepals als ihren schlimmsten Feind an, gefolgt von den Muslimen an zweiter Stelle. Die Hindu Rechten behaupten, dass die Wiedereinführung eines Hindu-mehrheitlichen Staates der einzige Weg sei, religiöse Konflikte zu verhindern und sieht Säkularismus als eine Verschwörung von außen an, die die Hindus schwächen soll, indem den Minderheiten zu viele Rechte gegeben werden. Eine verschiedene Auffassung der Geschichte lässt die Hindunationalisten Nepals benachteiligt gegenüber denen in Indien, wo die Idee einer Hindu-Viktimisierung die Rachepolitik begründet. Für ihre populäre Mobilisierung müssen die Hindu Rechten Nepals eine Idee von zukünftigen Bedrohungen erschaffen und die Hindu Madheshis und die Paharis gegen die religiösen Minderheiten vereinigen, um an Unterstützung zu gewinnen.

Schlüsselwörter: Nepal / Hindutva / Hindunationalismus / Indien / Gewalt / Politik / Interreligiöse Harmonie / Religiöse Minderheiten

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