THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY: HINDU ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR STRATEGIES OF MOBILIZATION IN TAMILNADU

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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled, **THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY: HINDU ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR STRATEGIES OF MOBILIZATION IN TAMILNADU**, which is being submitted by **G. SENTHIL KUMAR** for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF PHILOPHY** is his original work and may be placed before the examiner for evaluation. This dissertation has not be submitted for the award of any other degree of this university or of any other University.

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PREFACE

The politics of religious identity views society as constituted of a number of religious communities and sees individuals essentially in these terms. Since the early part of this century, religious identity has become an important element influencing the Indian politics. The late 1980s and early 1990s have witnessed an unprecedented mobilization of the Hindu identity.

Attempts are also made to see the reality of Indian politics in terms of such religious communities. This perspective views politics as an interaction of religious communities and relates political allegiance to the same identity. As a result, political action is designed to further the interests of a particular religious community. It also claims a historical basis and enables past memories and emotions to fill the present, thereby adding legitimacy to the identity. The idea of distinct monolithic religious community is not only used for political mobilization, but has also come to pervade all aspects of life and is visibly manifested in the streets, media, elections, religious and cultural institutions, schools, academic research and intimate conversations.

This idea perceives individuals as having only religious identity and enables them to perceive each other in terms of religious identities. The notion of a religious community, as the primary social unit, prevents the possibility of other kinds of classification and of identities, by emphasizing the religious identity

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alone. This idea finally creates religious community in the image of a family, a nation.

The Hindu organizations, highly representative of this idea, contend that the Hindu community is a "natural" community. It is argued that India (Hindustan, Bharatvarsha, Aryavarta, Jambudwipa) has the most natural boundaries in the world. Further, they argue that the Hindus are the obvious, the original, the natural inhabitants of this land, as the very names Hindus and Hindusthan testify.

This politics of religious identity poses a serious danger to the unity of the nation. To find a solution to this problem, it becomes a necessity to study the structure and the ideology of the Hindu organizations and their mobilization strategies.

The study will focus on the Hindu organizations in Tamilnadu to understand the intricacies of the politics of religious identity. The reason behind choosing Tamilnadu as the area of study is based mainly on two characteristic features of the area. Firstly, Tamilnadu witnessed a powerful movement which problematized the monolithic Hindu identity as constituting multiple relations of power and as a consequence rendered any invocation of a monolithic Hindu identity difficult. Secondly, Tamilnadu is an area where Islam, along with another fairly entrenched faith, Christianity, has been in existence in relative peace for several centuries.

Tamilnadu, which has been considered as a haven of communal peace, has, in recent years witnessed communal cleavages on the basis of religious identities which has manifested itself occasionally in violence. This situation compels us to study the Hindu organizations in Tamilnadu. The Hindu organizations which have been taken for study are the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Hindu Munnani. Their active involvement in political mobilization and the close coordination between them are the reasons for their choice.

The spread in the appeal of politics of religious identity raises certain important questions. Some pertinent ones are: Why the politics of religious identity has become popular? Is it a natural groundswell or a constructed one? and whether it is an attempt to revive the past or is it a creation of a new identity by using traditional idioms?

Most of the studies in this area have focussed on various subjects like communal violence, secularism, individual organizations etc. Hardly any work has focussed on the mobilizational strategies of Hindu organizations. This study attempts to fill this gap by taking up the question of the mobilizational strategies of Hindu organizations in Tamilnadu.

This study aims,

- To understand the nature of religious identities in the Tamil country;

- To analyze the impact of the colonial administration on the religious tradition of the region;

- To examine the structure and ideology of the Hindu organizations in Tamilnadu;

- To study the issues based on which these organizations mobilize;

- To analyze the strategies which they adopt to mobilize the Hindu identity.

The study aims to test the following hypotheses:

- The mobilizational strategies oppose and emulate the other religious communities.

- The activities of Hindu organizations change the nature of Hindu religion.

- The Hindu organizations are primarily concerned with politics and not religion.

- The Hindu organizations are constructing a new Hindu identity.

The study adopts historical-analytical method. The sources of this study are both primary and secondary in nature. Primary sources include interviews, speeches, government documents, Census reports and pamphlets. Books, articles, research and seminar papers constitute secondary sources.

But for the help of a large number of people, this study would not have been possible.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Kiran Saxena for her guidance and constant encouragement.

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CHAPTER - I

THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY :
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The worldwide resurgence of religio-political movements in recent times and the concomitant increase in religious violence have renewed the debate on the role of religion in modern politics. The sweep of these renascent movements and the enormity of the violence accompanying their struggle with the 'secular state' has evoked grim predictions about "the clash of civilizations"[1] and the emergence of a "new Cold War"[2] in the future.

Most of these religio-political movements, being vehemently antithetical to the idea of 'secular nationalism', have begun to pose an ideological challenge to the latter. The initial response of the 'secular state' to dismiss these movements as "residues, vestiges, or throwbacks, not active elements in an emerging and unsettling set of global changes"[3] is fast changing, with what Juergensmeyer has described as "fundaphobia"[4] engulfing them. This panic reaction of the 'secular state' denotes the changing dynamics of the 'battle' waged by the religio-political movements. The 'battle' is no more limited to individual acts of heroism or

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[1]   Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilisations?", *Foreign Affairs*, June 1993. pp. 22-49.
[2]   Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, Delhi, 1994, pp.1-2.
[3]   Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, "Introduction: The Fundamentalism Project - A User's Guide", in Martin E. Marty and R.Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, Chicago, 1991, p. vii.
[4]   Mark Juergensmeyer, "Antifundamentalism", in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, Chicago, 1995, p. 354.

sporadic incidents of terrorism, for, it has in most cases metamorphosed into an ideological struggle.[5] Far from being the handiwork of a few 'fanatics' the contest has begun to draw into its fold more people who consider it as their 'sacred duty' to support those who are waging a 'sacred war'. The *modus operandi* of the religio-political movements has evidently undergone a quantitative and qualitative change, posing the greatest ever threat to the concept of modern nation-state because,

> ....it points to cracks in the walls of an edifice Westerners had thought was secure and ever expanding. This edifice is the nation-state, rooted in ....a differentiation between secular and religious authority that interprets the latter as occupying a realm accessible to individuals through voluntary ascription. Religion, on this understanding, is in principle irrelevant to the general operation of society.[6]

RELIGIO - POLITICAL MOVEMENTS : A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

This portentous rise of religio-political movements and their increasing hold over modern politics has become the most desired, embraced, fought for, debated, feared, maligned and opposed phenomena in the contemporary world. These religio-political movements far from being a homogenous group are disparate movements with some similarities and remarkable differences. These

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[5]　The proponents of many religio-political movements have begun to wage an ideological battle against secularism which Abolhassan Banisadr, one of the leaders of Iranian revolution, has termed as "a kind of religion". Cited in Mark Juergensmeyer, "The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism", *Journal of International Affairs*, Summer 1996, p.11. By viewing secularism as a religion of the West and an import of colonial rule, these movements seek to alter the ideological basis of their nation. Partha Chatterjee views such efforts in post-colonial societies as an attempt to assert the legitimacy of their own traditional values in the public sphere and build a post-colonial national identity based on indigenous culture. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, 1993.

[6]　John Stratton Hawley, "Introduction", in John Stratton Hawley (ed.), *Fundamentalism and Gender*, New York, 1994, p.19.

differences notwithstanding, there is a general tendency in cross-cultural studies, which seek to understand the 'global pattern' of these movements, to analyse and describe them as a compact group with a single terminology.[7] Such an attempt is replete with undesirable problems, because it not only leads to unnecessary terminological obfuscation, but also fails to provide appropriate analytical tools for explaining and understanding the various types of religio-political movements.[8] The most frequently employed universalizing terminology is 'fundamentalism'.

Fundamentalism

There is a tendency prevalent in academic investigations to refer to all the religio-political movements as 'fundamentalist', and the associated phenomenon as 'fundamentalism'. On the other hand, the mass media across the world has, over the past several years, prodigiously employed this label to describe and report on a host of disparate religious and political developments in various parts of the world. Such sweeping characterization[9] of diverse developments as 'fundamentalist' has

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[7]   Some of the important cross-cultural studies which have used a single terminology to describe the different religio-political movements are: Lionel Caplan (ed.) *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, London, 1987.
Hawley (ed.), *Fundamentalism and Gender*, Marty and Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*.
Juergensmeyer, *Religious Nationalism*.

[8]   Despite recognizing the various types of religio-political movements, the cross-cultural studies, lay great stress on the common characteristics of these movements. Whichever terminology they employ to describe a particular type of religio-political movement is superficially imposed on those movements which are significantly different from them with a mere addition of prefixes and suffixes. Hence, fundamentalism becomes "Abrahamic fundamentalism", "fundamentalist like", "nonfundamentalist", and religious nationalism becomes "ethnic religious nationalism", "ideological religious nationalism" and "ethno-ideological religious nationalism".
Juergensmeyer, "The Worldwide Rise", pp. 4-9.
Gabriel A. Almond, Emmanuel Sivan and R. Scott Appleby, "Fundamentalism: Genus and Species," Marty and Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, pp. 416-23.

[9]   Lionel Caplan, "Introduction", in Caplan (ed.), *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, p. 1.

impaired a proper understanding of these developments.

The term 'fundamentalism' came into common usage in the second decade of the current century with the publication of a series of pamphlets called *The Fundamentals*, which appeared between 1910 and 1915, and through a set of conferences of the World's Christian Fundamentals Association in 1919.[10] The term was first used to denote a conservative reaction in American Protestantism (mainly among Baptist and Presbyterian denominations).[11] These conservatives were concerned about the "implications of the theory of evolution for the Christian faith, and about the efforts of some Christian groups to present modernist interpretations of events described in the *Bible*". Reacting to this "modernist threat" these conservatives "insisted on certain fundamentals of faith of which the most crucial were belief in the virgin birth of Jesus, his physical resurrection, and the infallibility of the scripture".[12] These and other beliefs which the conservatives thought were 'fundamentals' of Christianity were stated in *The Fundamentals*.

Originally used to denote particular denominations within Christianity which stressed on the "inerrancy of their scripture, the inadmissibility of its modernist interpretations, and the intolerance of dissent",[13] the term 'fundamentalism' later came to have an extended application. It was used to refer to the growth of militant ultra-orthodox movements in the Jewish and Israeli

[10] George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, New York. 1980. pp. 118-23, 153-64.

[11] Dipankar Gupta, "Between General and Particular 'Others': Some Observations on Fundamentalism", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1993, p. 119.

[12] T.N. Madan, "Fundamentalism", *Seminar*, June 1992, p. 23.

[13] Ibid., p. 24.

public life, in the decades following World War II and the Islamic resurgence of 1979 in Iran and elsewhere in the Islamic world. Even this extended application was in a sense limited, for it was used to refer to the "people of the Book"—the Christians, Jews and Muslims.[14] This extended usage of the term altered its original meaning, because the Jewish and Islamic movements were concerned not only with scripture, but also and perhaps more importantly, with secular power.[15]

Later, the term in its modified form was used indiscreetly to describe all forms of religious expressions, even those which were discernably not scripture-based. The term 'fundamentalism' despite the very specific and narrow circumstances of its initial usage, has by now come to be used as a general, descriptive or naming term, covering a wide range of developments or movements within and across traditions.[16] This broad application of the term has deprived it of its original meaning or for that matter any specific meaning, and it "no longer makes any sense to speak of fundamentalism in the singular."[17]

Though the term 'fundamentalism' originated in a religious context, there are also interesting attempts to employ it as a broad descriptive term not confined to religious movements. James Barr, though he does not make a specific distinction anywhere, employs the term in two different senses. While his study focuses on Protestant fundamentalism per se, he treats it as a particular religious example of a more general class of "self enclosing" fundamentalist ideologies

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[14] Gupta, "Between General and Particular 'Others' ", p. 119.
[15] Madan, "Fundamentalism", p. 24.
[16] Ibid., p. 23.
[17] Ibid.

which include political and other ideologies as well as religious ones.[18] Concurring

with Barr, Ian Lustick mentions that the term implies a belief system "insofar as its

adherents regard its tenets as uncompromisable and direct transcendental

imperatives to political action oriented toward the rapid and comprehensive

reconstruction of society".[19] Lustick, thus, makes it clear that the term need not

denote a religious movement at all, and that it could certainly be applied to many

non-religious revolutionary and reactionary movements.[20] There are others who

view 'fundamentalism' "not as a single, discrete idea, but rather as a continuum of

closed ideologies, which may vary in degree from one extreme where they are

associated with exclusive, ruthless, dogmatic behaviour, to the other where the

ideology is more or less open in its structure, where it is 'wet', liberal, relativistic,

and ecumenical and international in emphasis".[21] Such broad applications of the

term 'fundamentalism' blurs the religious component in it and will leave us bereft

of a terminology to describe and study the religio-political movements as distinct

from other movements.

Another serious problem with 'fundamentalism', as an analytical term, is

its inaccurate application to describe all types of religion-related movements. The

cross-cultural studies are the ones to err the most by employing the term to analyse

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[18] James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, London, 1977, pp. 185, 315.

[19] Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel*, New York, 1988, p.6.

[20] Webber also recognises the possibility of a broad utilisation of the term 'fundamentalisms'. Jonathan Webber, "Rethinking Fundamentalism: The Readjustment of Jewish Society in the Modern World", in Caplan (ed.), *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, p. 95.

[21] Richard Tapper and Nancy Tapper, "Thank God we're Secular!' Aspects of Fundamentalism in a Turkish Town", in Caplan (ed.), *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, p. 51.

various types of religio-political movements. These studies disregard the improperity of employing a single terminology and perversely defend such unsettling terminological obfuscation.

They argue that the term 'fundamentalism' is "here to stay" since it facilitates a "distinction over against cognate but not fully appropriate words" such as "traditionalism", "conservatism", or "orthodoxy" and "orthopraxis".[22] Making a 'concession to the public', they argue that, if the term was to be rejected the public would be bereft of a terminology to make sense of a global phenomena which urgently needs to be understood.[23] According to them, however diverse these religious expressions are, they "demand comparison" even as they "deserve fair separate treatment so that their special integrities will appear in bold relief".[24] They justify disregarding the heterogenity of the religious movements, because,

> simply through tapping this larger universe of militant, revivalist cultural movements, without procrustean anxities, it becomes possible to spell out more precisely the essence of the genus fundamentalism, to determine the dimensions and degree of variation among species in the larger genus, and to uncover varieties erroneously assigned to the genus because of superficial resemblances.[25]

Further, they argue that all words would have a cultural base and will be more appropriate in some contexts than in others.[26] Such a term which has an obvious history in a particular culture offers two advantages: it suggests the "depth of the emotions involved and the weight of history"; and it highlights the "danger

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[22] Marty and Appleby, "Introduction", p. viii.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Almond, Sivan and Appleby, "Fundamentalism", pp. 404-05.
[26] Marty and Appleby, "Introduction", p. viii.

of its own bias".[27] Moreover, it is a term prominent in "popular discussions"[28] and for these studies which seek to communicate across the world "their first audience have settled on this term".[29] Finding that no other term was as "intelligible or serviceable", they argue that, rather than seek an "idiosyncratic and finally precious alternative" it is better to inform the inquiry with the term that is "here to stay" and correct its misuses.[30] This "what's in a name" strategy, they contend, will generate interesting hypotheses.[31] With these justifications adduced in defence of the term 'fundamentalism', the cross-cultural studies resort to promiscuous application of the term to describe all forms of religious expressions, engendering a "pluralty of fundamentalisms".

Marty and Appleby, editors of the multi-volume project on fundamentalism, which is by far the most comprehensive attempt to understand 'fundamentalism', try to justify their 'flexible' use of 'fundamentalism' by first constructing an animated "pure fundamentalism" which imbues the "lesser" and "impure" versions of it. In their view, "pure fundamentalism" comes about when "fundamentalists seek to replace existing structures with a comprehensive system emanating from religious principles and embracing law, polity, society, economy and culture".[32] Since they find that very few movements could meet this comprehensive description, "pure fundamentalism" becomes a pure type, or in

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[27] Hawley, "Introduction", p. 19.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Marty and Appleby, "Introduction", p. viii.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Almond, Sivan and Appleby, "Fundamentalism", p. 405.
[32] Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, "Conclusion: An Interim Report on a Hypothetical Family", in Marty and Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 824.

their own words, "a point of departure".[33] But, in the final analysis, evidences

from various case-studies depart significantly from this construct of "pure

fundamentalism" that the editors are forced to grant a grudging concession to

"violations of type".[34] The various "violations of type" are made to concur with

the pure type by a sophistication of terminology, resulting in a range of modified

fundamentalisms like "diffuse political fundamentalism",[35] "fundamentalist-like

attributes",[36] "situational fundamentalism"[37] and so on. Since, the "violations of

type" do not conform to "pure fundamentalism" the authors of various case-studies

feel compelled to offer their own definitions of 'fundamentalism' to suit their

study. As a result, at one point 'fundamentalism' is simply "an assertion of

identity"[38] and need not necessarily "be religious in the clerical sense but rather a

variant of a secular faith couched in religious language".[39] At other times, it has

common points with "neo-traditionalism" and nationalism, or may function simply

as a sign of distinction thriving on "a selective retrieval, picking out from (one's)

religious tradition, certain elements of high symbolic significance".[40] It may, on

occasions be merely "an impulse".[41] The contrariety of religious expressions thus

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[33] Ibid., p. 836.
[34] Marty and Appleby, "Conclusion", p. 840.
[35] Wei-Ming Tu, "The Search for Roots in Industrial East Asia: The Case of the Confucian Revival", in Marty and Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 745.
[36] Ibid., 742.
[37] Marty and Appleby, "Conclusion", p. 840.
[38] Donald K. Swearer, "Fundamentalistic Movements in Theravada Buddhism", in Marty and Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 648.
[39] Ibid., p. 650.
[40] T.N. Madan, "The Double-edged Sword: Fundamentalism and the Sikh Religious Tradition", in Marty and Appleby (eds.), p. 596.
[41] Pablo A. Deiros, "Protestant Fundamentalism in Latin America", Marty and Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 165.

makes it unviable to retain 'fundamentalism' as a comprehensive analytical term.[42]

Another example of such terminological difficulties is an article by Avishai Margalit on the "ultra-orthodox" community in Israel. Margalit identifies this community as "fundamentalist", and then explains that they are not really "biblical fundamentalists" since such textual fundamentalism is thoroughly eschewed in Jewish thinking. So, he describes them as "talmudic fundamentalists". But, soon he realizes that this phrase too is unsuitable, since the *Talmud*, like the *Bible*, is subject to many differing but legitimate interpretations. Then, he refers to them as "halakhic fundamentalists". Margalit, though he realizes that the term 'fundamentalism' does not explain the situation, desperately holds on to it.[43]

The concluding volume of the project on fundamentalism recognizes that there are movements which "are inspired *less by strictly religious considerations* than the actual fundamentalisms (emphasis mine)" and also some which "have *superficial resemblances* to fundamentalism, but properly *do not belong in the category* (emphasis mine)".[44] Even when the existence of categories of religion-related movements, different from what is variously referred to as "pure fundamentalism", "genuine fundamentalism" or "actual fundamentalism", is recognized, they are considered as violations of type and are inappropriately

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[42]   Even some of the contributors to the volume express their unhappiness in functioning under the aegis of this term.
Winston Davis, "Fundamentalism in Japan: Religious and Political", in Marty and Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 805.
Deiros, "Protestant Fundamentalism in Latin America", p. 145.

[43]   Avishai Margalit, "Israel: The Rise of the Ultra-Orthodox", in *New York Review of Books*, Nov. 9, 1989, p. 38.

[44]   Almond, Sivan and Appleby. "Fundamentalism", pp. 419, 421.

referred to as "fundamentalist like" and "nonfundamentalist" movements (distinct from the original type of "Abrahamic fundamentalism").[45] Such contorted terminologies only point to what these movements *are not* rather than what they really are. The problem lies in the notion which considers the various categories as mere "violations of type" rather than as distinct types in themselves. Treating a category as "fundamentalist like" or "nonfundamentalist" can never advance our understanding of them. Every time a "violation of type" is detected, the immediate response is to neologize the term 'fundamentalism' to tame the violations. In the quest to discover the "essence of the genus of fundamentalism", the "essence" of various categories are quietly ignored, resulting in the failure to ascertain the real "essence" of various categories of religion-related movements, including fundamentalism. The misplaced emphasis on "generic fundamentalism" should be reliquished and the various types have to be appreciated and studied separately. These various types might have few characteritics overlapping in them. But, we should resist the temptation to regard them as "family resemblances",[46] because the "essence" of each type will be different. The cross-cultural studies instead of resorting to arguments like popular usage and "what's in a name" strategy resulting in superficial comparisons, should appreciate the differences between the various types, undertaking 'limited' but viable comparisons of movements falling in the same category. The term 'fundamentalism' can never be an appropriate analytical tool to study all the religion-related movements. The "plurality of

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[45]   Ibid., pp. 416-23.
[46]   Hawley, "Introduction", p. 19.

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fundamentalisms" and the consequent plural neologism requires to be replaced by an effort to comprehend the potential of terms like conservation and communalism to be viable analytical tools. The realization of the heuristic value of these terms depends on our ability to make a clear differentiation between them. This necessitates an avoidance of broad definitions of these terms and identifying the defining characteristic of each of them.

There have been many scholarly efforts to delimit the characteristics of fundamentalism and impart the term a definite meaning. The *Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (1977) suggests that, 'fundamentalism' is the belief that the *Bible* possesses complete infallibility because every word in it is the word of God. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1959) has offered a much broader definition of 'fundamentalism', which it says, is the "strict adherence to traditional orthodox tenets (example, the literal inerrancy of scripture) held to be fundamental to the Christian faith: opposed to liberalism and modernism". The example of "the literal inerrancy of scripture" and the element of opposition to "liberalism and modernism" tend to give the term 'fundamentalism' a greater potential and indicates its greater applicability to issues wider than the inerrancy of *Bible* and to contexts which are not Christian by nature.[47]

Since fundamentalism had its origin in North American Protestantism, there have been attempts to descrbie its characteristics in that particular context. In this context fundamentalism has been described in at least three different ways:

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[47]   Webber, "Rethinking Fundamentalism", p. 96.

primarily, in sociological and political terms as a last-ditch defence of a way of life that was rapidly being superseded; secondly, with reference to its roots in revivalism and pietism; and finally, by its nineteenth century intellectual antecedents in "millenarianism and the Princeton Theology".[48]

A departure from these general descriptions of the fundamentalist movement of the 1920s is provided by George Marsden, who argues that this movement went considerably beyond "millenarian circles". Marsden defines 'fundemantalism' as "militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism". "Militant opposition to modernity" according to him, "was what most clearly set off fundamentalism from a number of closely related traditions, such as evangelicalism, revivalism, pietism, the holiness movement, millenarianism, reformed confessionalism, Baptist traditionalism, and other denominational orthodoxies".[49]

Amercian fundamentalism, then, is a form of militant religion that opposes the modernist, liberal forces unleashed in western society since the Enlightenment. This militancy signals that the oppositional posture is the most defining characteristic of 'fundamentalism'. There are comparative studies which also underscore the significance of reactive character as the key element of

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[48] Hawley, "Introduction", p. 11.
Millenarianism is a belief in Christianity about the ushering in of an ideal society, a reign of eternal justice, after the triumph of the good over evil and immortality over mortality. The "Princeton theology" was represented by Charles Hodge and Benjamin Warfield, who wrote in response to the Darwinian controversy, the "higher criticism" of *Bible*, and the Romantic liberal theories which argued that biblical inspiration resides in the spirit of the *Bible* rather than in the literal meaning of the individual words.
[49] Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, p. 4.

'fundamentalism' as a general phenomenon.

Eric Sharpe identifies a three-phase dialectical process in which 'fundamentalism' arises. This process features firstly, *rejection* (of old ways and ultimate authority), secondly, *adaptation* (of the old authority to the new and hence, the emergence of liberal position), and finally, *reaction* (on the part of those fundamentalists who reject the modernist position and seek to re-establish traditional ultimacies). Thus, in Sharpe's model, 'fundamentalism' is a *reaction* to modernism.[50] Barr also identifies oppositional character as one of the two key features of 'fundamentalism'.[51]

Marty and Appleby use the rubric of militancy to draw together various aspects of 'fundamentalism'. They describe 'fundamentalism' as fighting back (it is reactive); fighting for (it has a vision of social renewal); fighting with (its weapons include "real or presumed parts"); fighting against (it battles an external 'other' and apostates closer to home) and fighting under (it defines itself in relation to God or some other "transcendent reference").[52]

Gabriel Almond and his co-authors conclude that reactivity constitutes "the very essence of fundamentalist movements" which are by definition "militant, mobilized, defensive reactions to modernity".[53]

The reactive character of 'fundamentalism'—its militant opposition to

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[50] Eric J. Sharpe, *Understanding Religion*, London, 1983.
[51] Barr, *Fundamentalism*, p. 208. The other key feature identified by him is exclusivity.
[52] Marty and Appleby, "Introduction", pp. Ix-x.
[53] Almond, Sivan and Appleby, "Fundamentalism", p. 409.

modernism—is an important, but not the only characteristic of 'fundamentalism'.
A number of other traits have been enumerated in recent scholarship. Lionel
Caplan, for example, describes fundamentalists as being committed to the
authority of scripture in some form, desirous of rescuing the whole person from
the "fragmentation" of modern society, suspicious of hisotricism, hopeful of
restoring a pristine morality, and in some cases convinced that they are engaged in
a cosmic struggle between good and evil, quite possibly one that heralds the end of
the world.[54]

Bruce Lawrence identifies 'fundamentalism' as a distinctly modern
phenomenon, despite its historical precursors. It appeals in a direct way to
scripture and is oppositional. It unites a group whose members see themselves as
the holy remnant of an ideological past and as the vanguard of a future yet to be
revealed. Significantly, he finds that 'fundamentalism' generates its own technical
vocabulary with its leaders coming from "secondary-level male elites".[55]

Donald Taylor identifies five main characteristics, namely: the perception
of a challenge to an accepted ultimate authority; the decision that there can be no
compromise with the perceived challenge; reaffirmation of the ultimacy of the
challenged authority; the recognition of standing in opposition to those who
challenge or those who are believed to have compromised; and finally, the use of

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[54] Caplan, "Introduction", pp. 14-20.

[55] Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age*,
San Francisco, 1989, pp. 100-101. The term "secondary-level male elites" refers to groups of
people who are "manipulated" by the institutions of modern society.

political means in order to further their interests.[56]

Gabriel Almond and his co-authors, in their important study, identify nine properties of fundamentalism. They are reactivity to the marginalisation of religion; selectivity; moral manicheanism; absolutism and inerrancy; millenialism and messianism; elect and chosen membership; sharp boundaries; authoritarian organization; and behavioural requirements.[57]

Fundamentalism and Conservatism

Many of these traits which have been identified by these studies as characterizing fundamentalism are not unique to it and are shared by those religious tendencies which one might refer to as conservatism or traditionalism.[58] Failure to appreciate the difference between fundamentalism and conservatism will result in terminological obfuscation, hindering our efforts to understand the various categories of religion-related movements. The key element which differentiates them is reactivity.

The conservatives seek to "conserve what already exists," the fundamentalists on the contrary are "reactionary" and seek to fight for their cherished goals.[59] Heilman and Freidman in their study of a Jewish fundamentalist

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[56] Donald Taylor, "Incipient Fundamentalism: Religion and Politics among Sri Lankan Hindus in Britain," in Caplan (ed.), *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, pp. 143-44.

[57] Almond, Sivan and Appleby, "Fundamentalism", pp. 405-08.

[58] David Martin, "Fundamentalism: An Observational and Definitional *Tour D' Horizon*", *Political Quarterly*, April-June 1990, p. 129.

[59] Achin Vanaik, *Communalism Contested: Religion, Modernity and Secularization*, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 199-200.

movement find that the members of the movement they observed "no longer perceive themselves as reeling under the corrosive effects of secular life. On the contrary, they perceive themselves as *fighting back* and doing so rather successfully (emphasis mine)." [60] It is this tendency to "fight back" which separates the fundamentalist from a conservative.

Conservatism is defensive and inward looking, since in its understanding, solutions to modernist problems lie within religion and the subsequent response is to strengthen the religion. They are essentially "religion-building movements". [61] The fundamentalists, on the other hand, "do not merely detach themselves form certain trends in modern culture; they commit themselves to battle against those trends. They are defined by that opposition and that battle". [62] They are prominently offensive and are not inward-looking because for them solution is not limited to religious sphere and lies in militant opposition to their perceived enemy. While the conservatives are concerned exclusively with religious affairs, the fundamentalists respond in a religious way to a political situation. The conservatives are content to remain "quietists", unlike the fundamentalists, for whom the conquest of the state and the quest for political power ar uppermost. [63]

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[60] Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman, "Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim", in Marty and Appleby (ed.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 139.

[61] Gabriel A. Almond, Emmanuel Sivan and R. Scott Appleby, "Examining the Cases", in Marty and Appelby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, p. 476.
Ahmad writes that a traditional *ulema*, for example, would be content to observe the five pillars of Islam—"profession of faith, prayer, fasting, alms giving, and pilgrimage. Mumtaz Ahmad. "Islamic Fundamentalism in South Asia: Jamaat-I-Islami and Tablighi Jamaat of South Asia", in Marty and Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 463.

[62] Hawley, "Introduction", p. 12.

[63] Nancy T. Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism", in Marty and Appleby

Fundamentalism, hence, is a religio-political movement, whereas, conservatism is merely a religious movement. For instance, the Old Yishur, the earliest Jewish settleers in Israel and the most traditional of them all, do not want to enter the political fray. They in fact do not recognize the Jewish state, nor Zionism, which according to them is a secular ethos. For the Yishur it is God alone, and not the Zionists, who can establish the Holy land of Israel.[64] They are, therefore, quite content to remain political quiestists and live "in diaspora among the Jews".[65]

The traditions that the Haredists, another conservative group, wish to uphold do not involve capturing power. Instead, the Haredists, through orthopraxis, endeavour to keep the Jews from being ensnared into the way of the Gentiles or the *chukos ha goyim*.[66]

The Tablighi Jamaat, formed near Delhi in the 1920s to correct the "lax and Hinduizing practices" of the Islamic population in northern India, is another such conservative movement which sought to deal with these problems by missionary activity. The aim of the movement was to make better Muslims "out of the half-Hindu peasantry" of northern India, and later, to protect them from secular influences. The movement is not activist or political in its aspirations. Its

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(eds.), Fundamentalisms Observed, pp. 7,14.
William D.Dinges and James Hitchcock, "Roman Catholic Traditionalism and Activist Conservativism in the United States", in Marty and Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, pp. 98-99.
[64] Heilman and Friedman, "Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews", p. 222.
[65] Ibid., p. 223.
[66] Ibid., pp. 198-99.

programme has ben limited to the improvement and intensificaiton of Islamic religious practice.[67]

Conservatives and fundamentalists also differ in their respective attitude towards 'change'. The former merely wants to *conserve* what already exists—the tradition. Conversely, the latter, though they exhibit militant opposition to *modernism* and couch their rhetoric in the language of tradition, do not eschew *modernity*.[68] Even while fighting against modernism they adopt the modern technology and "find fault with fellow believers who want to conserve the tradition but are not willing to craft innovative ways of fighting back against the forces of erosion" and argue that "to be 'merely' a conservative or a traditonalist in these threatening times is not enough".[69] While advancing claim to upholding orthodoxy or orthopraxis and for defence and conservation of religious traditions and traditional ways of life from erosion,

> they do so by crafting new methods, formulating new ideologies, and adopting the latest processes and organizational structures. Some of these new methods, structures, ideologies, and processes seem to be in direct violation of the actual historical beliefs, interpretive practices, and moral behaviours of earlier generations—or to be, at the least, a significant departure from these precedents, as well as from the praxis of contemporary conservative or orthodox believers.[70]

Fundamentalism, differing from conservatism is reactive to modernism, adopts modernity and is a religio-political movement. All fundamentalisms are

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[67]   Almond, Sivan and Appleby, "Fundamentalism", p. 421.
[68]   Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism", p. 32.
        John O. Voll, "Fundamentalism in the Sunni Arab World: Egypt and the Sudan", in Marty and Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 353.
        Almond, Sivan and Appleby, "Fundamentalism", p. 405-06.
[69]   Almond, Sivan and Appleby, "Fundamentalism", p. 402.
[70]   Ibid.

religio-political movements, but all religio-political movements are not fundamentalisms. There are other religio-political movements, like communalism, which differ significantly from fundamentalism, but are also reactive in nature. It is erroneous to employ the term 'fundamentalism' to describe all religio-political movements. As a result, it becomes necessary to distinguish between the two major types of religio-political movements, namely, fundamentalism and communalism.

Fundamentalism and Communalism

Reactivity is, as stated above, the defining character of fundamentalism. But, the reactivity factor alone does not qualify a movement to be termed as fundamentalist. While reactivity is a necessary trait, it is not a sufficient one. To enable itself to be termed as fundamentalist, a movement has to be reactive, with a religious content informing this reactivity. A fundamentalist movement "must be concerned first with the erosion of religion and its proper role in society. It must, therefore, be protecting some religious content, some set of traditional cosmological beliefs and associated norms of conduct".[71]

The element of religious reactivity, thus, primarily characterizes a fundamentalist movement and differentiates it from a communal movement, whose primary concern is not religion. The latter movements tend to be those in which ethno-cultural features combine with religion. But nevertheless, they are less

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[71] Ibid., p. 405.

inspired by strictly religious considerations and affirmation of religious tradition

against secularization is at best a secondary theme for them.[72]

The fundamentalists and communalists could be effectively differentiated with regard to the primacy they accord to religious considerations. While the former are comfortable in a religio-cultural enclave, but find themselves *drawn into* politics as a result of their religious beliefs, the latter tend to reverse the process. They reach for religious justifications, tactics, and organizational patterns in order to mount the most effective opposition possible, based on ethnicity, community, and religion. Fundamentalism seeks to *religionize* politics whereas communalism *politicizes* religion.[73]

Communalism, thus, is a religio-political phenomena, much like fundamentalism, but differing in significant manner from the latter. The blanket usage of the term 'fundamentalism' to describe all religio-political movements has denied us of an opportunity to comprehend the phenomenon of communalism and appreciate the heuristic value of the term communalism. The general tendency is to employ the terminology very narrowly to refer to the religio-political movements in India, thus undermining its analytical capabilities. The term is never applied to describe similar religio-political movements in Ireland, Bosnia, and elsewhere in the world. Conversely, the term, in its western usage has a strong positive connotation expressive of communitarian as opposed to individualist longings.[74]

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[72] Ibid., pp. 419, 421.
[73] Juergensmeyer, "The Worldwide Rise", p. 5.
[74] Rasheeduddin Khan, "Communalism and Secularism in Indian Polity: Dimensions and

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The *Oxford English Dictionary*, Volume II (1933 edition) defines the words 'communal' and 'communalism' in the following way:

Communal: "1. Of or belonging to a commune. (b) Of or pertaining to the Paris Commune and its adherents. 2. Of or pertaining to a (or the) community. 3. Of or pertaining to the commonality or body of citizens of a burgh."

Communalism: "The principle of the communal organization of society: a theory of government which advocates the widest extension of local autonomy for each lcoally definable community. Hence Communalist, a supporter of this system or an adherent of the Commune of Paris of 1871.

The *Shorter Oxford Engligh Dictionary*, in its third revised edition of 1959, refers to the peculiar meaning which the word had in India:

Communal: "... 2. Of or pertaining to a (or the) community; *especially, in India*, of any of the racial [sic] or religious communities (emphasis mine)."

Instead of crippling the explanatory potential of the term 'communalism' by dismissing it as the "subcontinental version" of fundamentalism, its defining characteristics should be identified to differentiate it from other religion-related expressions and thereby enhance its heuristic utility.

The term 'communalism' was first employed by British colonialists to describe colonies like India and Malaysia, where substantial religious minorities

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Challenges", in R.C. Dutt (ed.), *Challenges to the Polity: Communialism, Casteism and Economic Changes*, Delhi, 1989, pp. 12-13.

existed alongside a religious majority. The colonialists, interested in justifying

their 'civilizing mission' gave the term a negative connotation of bigotry,

divisiveness and parochialism - anything that was pureile and primitive.[75] The

application of the term was not restricted to religious sphere, instead it was

employed by the British, especially in India, in the social connotation of religious

and 'racial' antagonism.[76]

The Indian nationalists adopted the term, accepted its negative

significations, and did more than anyone else to propogate its use.[77] The nationalist

use of the term 'communalism' was more specific when compared to the

colonialists. The term was employed in their criticism of religious antagonism

fostered by the Hindu and Muslim communialists, which they viewed as

antithetical to nationalism. This specific usage of the term to denote religious

antagonism could be gleaned from the nationalist writings.[78] The term

'communalism' thus, got its meaning from the political discourse of that time.

Hitherto, there have been many attempts to understand the phenomenon

from various angles and define the term 'communalism'. Heehs defines

'communalism' as "conflict between groups distinguished by religious

membership".[79] This definition is too simplistic and problematic, because it

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[75] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Delhi, 1990, p. 6.

[76] Khan, "Communalism and Secularism in Indian Polity", p. 12.

[77] But the nationalists differed from colonialists in one significant manner, because they saw communalism as a colonial phenomenon and not as pre-colonial one which the British inherited.

[78] Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*, pp. 8-9.

[79] Peter Heehs, "Indian Communalism: A Survey of Historical and Social-scientific

reduces 'communalism' merely to denote antagonism between religious groups, devoid of any political element.This understanding reduces 'communal' to being a synonym for the term 'religious' and equates communal conflict and communal consciousness with religious conflict and religious consciousness, denying the term 'communal' of any distinctive value.[80] Such a reductionism gives rise to the notion of "pre-history of communalism"[81] and denies the modernity of communalism.

Many academic investigations have ascertained the modernity of communalism. Bipan Chandra writes: "Communalism was not a remnant of the past—a hangover from the medieval period, a 'language of the past'. It was a *modern ideology* that incorporated some aspects and elements of the *past ideologies and institutions and historical background* to form a new ideological and political discourse or mix." He further, writes,

> ... the notion of religion serving as the basis for the new political process based on popular participation, was something new, though religious distinction and religion as one principle for social grouping had previously existed.... Communalism was a modern phenomenon that arose as a result of British colonial impact and the response of different Indian social classes, strata and groups. Communalism was a modern ideology that used the popular traditional consciousness of Hindus and Muslims forming separate groups for religious, marriage and interdining purposes in its effort to base modern politics of popular sovereignty on a religious identity..... (Communalism) could emerge as politics and as ideology only after a structural break had occurred in the nature of politics, that is, after politics based on the people, politics of popular sovereignty, politics of popular particpation and mobilization, politics based on the creation and mobilization of public opinion had been introduced...[82]

Approaches", *South Asia*, 1997, p. 99.
[80] Vanaik, *Communalism Contested*, p. 194.
[81] C.A. Bayly, "The Pre-History of 'Communalism' ? Religious Conflict in India. 1700-1860", *Modern Asian Studies*, 1985, pp. 177-203.
[82] Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 6-8.

Achin Vanaik argues that communalism has a distinctively negative connotation because of its "pre-established point of reference—the secular ideal", and since the latter itself is a product of modernity, communalism cannot be pre-modern. Moreover, according to him, religious politics in the era of modern mass politics has a qualitatively greater and more dangerous strength than its equivalent in the pre-modern era, thus giving it a distinct modern orientation.[83] Rasheeduddin Khan, by emphasizing the "divisive role" of British imperialism in the transformation of "a latent and inward looking religious cleavage into the most articulate socio-political divisive conflict",[84] points to the modernity of communalism. Gyanendra Pandey even terms communalism as "a form of colonialist knowledge".[85]

This modernity of communalism compels us to desist from erroneous equation of the adjectives 'communal' and 'religious'. Communalism, hence, is a modern phenomenon which cannot be reduced to mere antagonism between religious communities.

Louis Dumont writes that, "the opposition to each other of religious communities is commonly designated as communalism".[86] Gyanendra Pandey similarly points out that, "in its common Indian usage the word 'communalism' refers to a condition of suspicion, fear and hostility between members of different

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[83] Vanaik, Communalism Contested", p. 12.
[84] Khan, "Communalism and Secularism in Indian Polity", p. 12.
[85] Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*, p. 6.
[86] Louis Dumont, "Nationalism and Communalism", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, March 1964, p. 39.

religious communities".[87] These "common" definitions are also perversely reductionist. This mistake is realized and rectified by Dumont when he accepts W.C. Smith's definition of 'communalism' as, "that ideology which emphasizes as the *social, political and economic unit* the group of adherents of each religion, and *emphasizes* the *distinction*, even the antagonism, between such groups (emphases mine)".[88] In similar vein, Bipan Chandra defines communalism as comprising of three basic notions. He writes:

> ... communalism is the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion they have, as a result, common social, political and economic interests. .... the second notion (is) that the social, cultural, economic and political interests (of various religious communities)....are dissimilar and divergent. ... (and) ends up with the notion that the interests of the people following different religions stand juxtaposed to one another and in fact, are, and must be, antagonistic and mutually exclusive and incompatible because of the fact of their following different religions.[89]

These definitions tend to highlight the conflict between groups, and consequently impart the term "communalism" with a 'negative' connotation. Conversely, there have been attempts to give the term a more neutral meaning. Prabha Dixit defines 'communalism' as "a political doctrine which makes use of religio-cultural differences to achieve political ends.[90] It is defined as "consciously shared religious heritage which becomes the dominant form of identity for a given segment of society".[91] Freitag considers 'communalism' to be 'a position in which politicized religious identity claimed primary loyalty".[92] K.N. Panikkar argues

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[87] Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*, p. 6.
[88] Dumont, *"Nationalism and Communalism"*, p. 39.
[89] Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, pp. 1-3.
[90] Prabha Dixit,*Communalism: A Struggle for Power*, New Delhi, 1974, p. 1.
[91] K.W. Jones, "Communalism in the Punjab", *Journal of Asian Studies*, November 1968, p. 39.
[92] Cited in Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*, p.7.

that, "communalism is a stage of consciousness..." which primarily draws upon

certain assumptions of distinct cultural identity for members professing the same

religion.[93]

The 'negative' and neutral definitions, even if they do not reflect the

complexities of 'communalism', indicate its defining character, that is—the

organized reaction of a religious community in response to a real or imagined

threat from *another religious community (or communities)*. Contrary to such

definite understanding of the term 'communalism', there are attempts to impute

the term with a broad meaning. It is defined as "a politcized community

identity",[94] and "exclusive identification with and commitment to one's religious

or social community".[95] It is also employed to refer to "the political assertiveness

of groups" whose membership is comprised of persons who share a common

culture and identity encompassing full range of demographic divisions in them and

are differentiated by wealth, status and power.[96] Such broad definition deprive us

of a specific term to refer to the religio-political movements characterized by inter-

religious strife and empties the term of its distinctive value.

Communalism is a politics of religious identity, for, it envisages a religious

community alone as the base and universe of its action. Religious community

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[93] K.N. Panikkar, "Introduction", in K.N. Panikkar (ed.), *Communalism in India: History, Politics and Culture*, New Delhi, 1989, p. 11.

[94] Sandria Frietag, Collective Action and Community, Delhi, 1990, p. 6.

[95] K.W. Jones cited in J.W. Bjorkman (ed.), *Fundamentalism, Revivalists and Violence in South Asia*, Delhi, 1978, p. 78.

[96] Robert Melson and Howard Wolpe, "Modernization and the Politics of Communalism: A Theoretical Perspective", *The American Political Science Review*, December 1970, p. 1112.

becomes the only relevant and valid category in politics and in state affairs, and for the perception, analysis and reconstruction of the socio-cultural environment. As Dumont succinctly puts it: "communalism supposes the existence of a community .... (and) in the affirmation of the religious community as a political group".[97]

Communalism shares the religio-political character with fundamentalism, but is significantly different from the latter. The difference is in their respective conception of their enemy—the 'other'. These religio-political movements are defined not only by their oppositional stance, but also by their opponents. Hence, it would be more appropriate than not to make a distinction between communalism and fundamentalism on the basis of the 'other' whom they fight against.

The fundamentalists characterized by "moral manicheanism" view the world 'outside' as "contaminated, sinful, doomed" as against their own world which is a "pure, and redeemed 'remnant' ".[98] This worldview compels them to treat all those 'outside' their pure world as 'impure'—the 'other' who should be fought against. In the case of Independent Baptists of Protestant Christianity, the "world of evil" would first include the mainstream denominational authorities who have compromised with the secular world, and then the secular world itself. For the Shiite Muslims, the sinful would include first the secularized Shiite Muslims, then the Sunni Muslims, and then the various "infidel Satans great and small". The enemy of the fundamentalists include all these who are outside their influence and

[97] Dumont, "Nationalism and Communalism", p. 47.

[98] Almond, Sivan and Appleby, "Fundamentalism", p. 406.

not merely another religious community.[99] The fundamentalists conceive the battle as one of Us vs the Rest, where the 'Rest' does not indicate a particular enemy of theirs but a "general other".[100]

The communalists, on the other hand, have a "particular other",[101] a religious community (or communities) which they arraign for all their problems. Their enemy is much more specific, and the battle is one of Us vs Them. For instance, in India, the Hindu and Muslim 'communalists consider each other as their "particular other". For the Buddhists of Sri Lanka the "particular other" is the Hindus of the island.

The significance of this distinction in the conception of the 'other' is that it would help us to avoid analytical conflation of the terms 'communalism' and 'fundamentalism'. The distinction cannot be dismissed as unimportant, because the conception of 'other' goes a long way in shaping the movement, and in most cases the society within which it functions.

The articulation against a "general other" by the fundamentalists means a lot more than being "universally quarrelsome". It signifies a commitment to fashion a comprehensive social order on the basis of a unique religiosity by uniting all the diacritica which are at its disposal. The fundamentalists, hence, propound a comprehensive "grammar of existence", where all the aspects of secular life are

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[99] Dipankar Gupta, "Communalism and Fundamentalism: Some Notes on the Nature of Ethnic Politics in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 1991, p. 579.
[100] Gupta, "Between General and Particular 'Others' ", p. 133.
[101] Ibid.

imbued with religious sanction. The formulation of this distinct grammar itself is dependent on a comprehensive distancing and alienation from "general other". In other words, it does not derive its meaning from the alternative rules of composition, or grammar of the "general other".[102]

The communalists, unlike the fundamentalists, are dependent on the "particular other" for their very existence, and it is only by conversing with their "particular other" that they themselves became comprehensible. They do not spell out a comprehensive "grammar" for the society, which will establish *the order*. Instead, from an assortment of diacritica, depending upon the context, they discriminatingly choose a few and highlight them to establish their difference from the "particular other".[103] The difference in programme and behaviour of the fundamentalists and communalists can, thus, be attributed to their respective conception of the 'other'.

The term 'communalism' is a viable analytical tool to study the religio-political movements where the opposed 'other' is another religious community. The phenomenon of communalism is not an Indian essentialism. The term 'communalism' can be employed to study other similar instances like Catholic-Protestant conflict in northern Ireland or Canada or Belgium, or Buddhist Sinhala-Hindu Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka, or Christian-Muslim conflict in Lebanon, Bosnia and so on. But, the term should not be equated with ethnic religious

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[102] Gupta, "Communalism and Fundamentalism", p. 579.
[103] Ibid., pp. 579, 581.

nationalism. While all ethnic religious nationalisms are essentially communal, all the communal movements are not ethnic religious nationalisms. There are intances of communal movements which do not exhibit nationalist aspirations, like the Muslim League in India before 1940 and after independence, the neo-Pentacostals in Guatemala and so on. Communalism is a broader term than ethnic religious nationalism, and is inclusive of the latter. The ethnic religious nationalism is based on domination and/or exclusion of the 'other' religious community (or communities). Ethnic religious nationalism is the extreme manifestation of communalism. Very few communal movements 'mature' to become ethnic religious nationalism, whose communalism is couched in nationalist language and where the religious community itself is imagined as the nation. Religious community, both the 'self' and the 'other' form the basis of communalism and its 'mature' incarnation, ethnic religious nationalism.

IDENTITY : THE VARIOUS APPROACHES

More often than not, multicultural societies are arena for various identity assertion movements. The contemporary increase in such movements, based on a variety of primordial sentiments like language, religion, caste etc., antithetical to and provoking antagonisms within a large number of existent modern states has highlighted the importance of these movements.

The modern desire for identity does not imply that all identities are modern inventions, which every one suddenly wants to possess. Historically, human

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beings have always had different identities. The modern difficulty with identities results from the changes in identities, or more particularly due to the manner in which identities are created and shaped in the modern times.[104]

Identity is a definition which transforms a mere biological individual into a human person. Identities are labels, names, and categories through which persons address each other and themselves. They emerge from, and are sustained by, the cultural meanings of social relationships which results from interaction.[105] Identity operates at two levels - the individual and the collective. While collective identities are composed of individual members, they are not reducible to an aggregate of individuals sharing a particular element of identity. Similarly, a description of the collective identity does not lead to an explanation of the probable actions of the individual members, instead, it would imply the kinds of contexts and constraints within which they operate. Human beings possess a wide range of possible collective identities with which they can simultaneously affiliate themselves, moving with relative ease from one to the other, as circumstances demand. Of these multiple identities, there are the specifically cultural types of collective identities,[106] examples of which include caste groups, language communities, religious denominations, and nations, which exert a special power on individuals. These cultural identities vary in their intensity and all cultural segments do not have the same degree of collective solidarity. While some of them

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[104] Ray F. Baumeister, *Identity:Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self,* New York. 1986, p. 4.
[105] Andrew J. Weigert, J. Smith Teitge and Dennio W. Teitge, *Society and Identity,* Cambridge, 1986, p. 31.
[106] Collective cultural identities can also be referred to as ethnic identities, where the latter term implies ascriptive identities like religion, language and caste.

are particularly susceptible to erosion under changing circumstances there are others which are held with extraordinary fervour.[107] Hence, even though individuals have a range of cultural identities all of them are not synchronously prominent.

The collective cultural identities are embodied in, and are constantly reinforced by, basic cultural elements like symbols, values, memories, myths, traditions, and the artefacts that express them. Symbols such as flags, emblems, express a sense of difference and distinctiveness of the community. Values of collective courage, honour, wisdom, compassion, and justice confer a sense of mission and dignity on the community. Memories of past sacrifices, of victories and defeats, of ancient deeds of heroism express a sense of continuity with previous generations. Myths of origins, liberation, the golden age, and chosenness link the 'shared' past to a sense of collective destiny. While, traditions, which includes customs, law codes, genealogies and rituals impart a sense of stability and rootedness to the community. The most important dimensions of identity, thus embodied are:

1. a sense of stability, and rootedness, of the particular cultural unit of population;
2. a sense of difference, of distinctiveness and separateness, of that cultural unit;
3. a sense of continuity with previous generations of the cultural unit, through memories, myths, and traditions;
4. a sense of destiny and mission, of shared hopes and aspirations, of that culture-community.[108]

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[107] Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*, London, 1976, p. 44.
[108] Anthony D. Smith, "The Formation of National Identities", in Harris (ed.), *Identity : Essays Based on Herbert Spencer Lectures (Oxford: University of Oxford, 1987), p. 49.*

The collective cultural identities, hence, create a feeling of "consciousness of kind" which binds together those who have it so strongly that it overrides all differences arising out of economic conflicts or social gradations. At the same time it severs them from those who are not of their kind, generating an atmosphere of conflict between two different communities.

In explaining such conflict situations, as Martin writes, the word 'identity' has come to be understood in a distinct way: "because of a particular history that they supposedly share, some people are considered to belong to *one solid, immutable human entity,* and consequently to be bound to act and react as a group whenever they feel ill-treated or threatened (emphasis mine)".[109] As a tool for describing political conflicts the word has come to connote homogeneity and performance. Inherent in such an understanding is the Primordialist perception that identities are "primordial", "natural", "given", and consequently not variable and static.

Primordialist Approach

This approach argues that individuals throughout their life time carry attachments derived from place of birth, kinship relationships, language religion and social practice which are "natural".[110] "These natural attachments" being "spiritual" in character provide individuals a basis for an easy affinity with others

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[109] Denis - Constant Martin, "The Choices of Identity", Paper Prepared for the *Conference on Ethnicity, Identity and Nationalism in South Africa : Comparative Perspectives,* Grahamstown, 20-24 April 1993, p. 1.

[110] Malcolm Yapp, "Language, Religion and Political Identity : A General Framework", in David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (eds.), *Political Identity in South Asia,* London, 1979, p. 2.

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who share the same attachments.

The Primordialist approach explains identity from a cultural and psychological deterministic point of view. It emphasizes "the emotional force of long lived identity symbols and other cultural traits which give meaning to group experience and meet basic psychological needs to belong to an enduring distinctive group in a dynamic society".[111] The Primordialists argue that identities are "given" and are not "chosen". For them identities proceed from the cultural "givens" of the past. The identity symbols which the group has cultivated and developed over a long period of time are transmitted from one generation to the next. Individuals share the identity symbols of their group and are at the same time emotionally attached to those symbols which are their cultural past and which give meaning to their current experiences. The Primordialists emphasize on certain attachments in the cultural sphere as part of personality formation and development, and their persistence throughout an individual's life time.[112] They argue that a "natural" sense of peoplehood forms the essence of identity. Harold R. Issacs writes that a person,

> acquires the history and origins of the group into which he is born. The group's culture-past automatically endows him among other things, with his nationality or other conditions of national, regional, or tribal affiliations, his language, religion and value system - the inherited cluster of mores, ethics, aesthetics, and the attributes that come out of the geography or topography of his birth place itself, all shaping the outlook and way of life upon which the new individual

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[111] Gary B. Cohen, "Ethnic Persistence and Change : Concepts and Models for Historical Research", *Social Science Quarterly,* December 1984, p. 1033.

[112] Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution : Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States", in Clifford Greertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa,* New York, 1967, p. 128.

enters from his first day.[113]

Clifford Geertz has advanced, perhaps, the most sophisticated presentation of the 'Primordialist perspective', when he writes:

> By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the "givens" - or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed "givens" - of social existence : immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices, These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbour, one's fellow believer, *ipso facto;* as a result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the *very tie itself.* The general strength of such primoridial bonds, and the types of them that are important, differ from person to person, from society to society, and from time to time. But for virtually every person, in every society, at almost all times, some attachments seem to flow more from a *sense of natural - some would pay spiritual - affinity than from social interaction* (emphases mine).[114]

The Primordialists argue that identities are "a gift of God",[115] and that the "assumed givens" which constitute a person's identity are powerful enough to sustain themselves and keep themselves alive in the consciousness of individual members of a group. Identity is viewed as "significantly autonomous from the forces and relations of production" and is accorded "greater substance, consistency and autonomous causal power".[116] The emergence and continuity of identity, it is argued, transcends individual perception and is independent of the environment within which it functions. For them identities are fixed and are not variable since

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[113] Harold R. Issacs, "Basic Group Identity : The Idols of the Tribe", in Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (eds.), *Ethnicity : Theory and Experience,* Cambridge, 1978, p. 32.

[114] Greetz, "The Integrative Revolution", pp. 109-10.

[115] Yapp, "Language, Religion and Political Identity", p.2.

[116] Teodor Shanin, "Ethnicity in the Soviet Union : Analytical Perception and Political Strategies", *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 1989, pp. 413,415.

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the society insists on its inalienable ascription from cradle to grave. Some of them even argue that such attachments are biological and genetic in nature.[117]

The Primordialist proposition that people develop in their childhood and youth attachments that have deep emotive significance, which remain with them either consciously or unconsciously and influence their identity formation in the adulthood is significant. But, their position that identities are "natural", "given" and hence not variable is inherent with lot of difficulties. Many people in multilingual societies take to more than one language, dialect or code, and also change their language and get educated in a language different from their mother tongue. There are also people who do not attach any emotional significance to their language. Religious identity also gets changed with conversions and there are atheists without any emotional attachment to their primordial "given". Religious identities are also altered by various reform movements, by creating internal differentiation within a religious community.

The Primordialist approach, which treats identities as static, fails to explain why certain identities and symbols come to the fore at a particular time in history. It cannot explain the aggravation, intensification or decline of any particular identity and the various identity conflicts. While this approach can report on the actions of the actions involved in such a conflict and on the conflict itself, it cannot explain why only certain actions and events are taking place.

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[117] Pierre L. Van den Berghe, "Race and Ethnicity : A Sociobiological Look", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, October, 1978, pp. 59-60.

These difficulties do not make the Primordialist approach entirely irrelevant, because, as it points out, the very existence of primordial attachments creates objective differences between people and signifies the potential for mobilization of identities. The existence of primordial attachments is a necessary condition for the mobilization of identities. But, it is not a sufficient condition, because, all potential attachments do not get mobilized and all identities are not mobilized to the same extent at a given point of time. The intensity of mobilization is not dependent merely on the presence of primordial attachments. The persistence of such primordial attachments only means that groups can be mobilized on the basis of specific appeals and not others. Hence, the mobilization of identities is dependent on factors other than the primordial attachments.

Circumstantialist Approach

This approach argues that identity mobilization "is not simply the inevitable result of primordial differences" and explains the emergence, continuity and transformation of identity as "situationally determined".[118] It emphasizes on a causal link between socio-economic and political environment and the emergence and sustenance of identities. Identity is considered to be essentially fluid depending upon how the boundaries of a particular group are drawn in a specific context, and hence, the precise content of identity is defined in relation to distinct external stimuli. Hence, identity is dependent on the environment within which it

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[118] Joane Nagel and Susan Olzak, "Ethnic Mobilisation in New and Old States : An Extension of the Competition Model", *Social Problems*, December 1982, p.129.

functions and is itself a dependent variable rather than a fixed or "given" disposition. Identity is considered to be the effect of the particular environment, where the process of social change and the structural conditions of society provide a favourable atmosphere for the mobilization of identities, and not vice-versa. To quote Fredrik Barth, "....ethnic categories provide an organisational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural systems".[119]

Those scholars who propound a Circumstantialist approach to the study of identity mobilization identify different factors which influence it. Some of them argue that in large multicultural societies, modernization and industrialization tend to proceed unevenly and often benefit some groups more than others, resulting in objective inequality and mobilization of the disadvantaged groups.[120]

It is also argued that it is not objective inequality which precipitates identity mobilization, but a feeling of frustration or relative deprivation (subjective inequality) defined as "the balance between the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled and the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining, given the social means available to them". This argument leads to the conclusion that "those groups which experience the highest levels of relative deprivation may be expected to be most

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[119] Fredrik Barth, "Introduction", in Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Group and Boundaries*, Boston, 1969, p.14.

[120] Robert H. Bates, "Ethnic Competition and Modernization in Contemporary Africa", *Comparative Political Studies*, January 1974, pp. 457-84.
Anthony D. Smith. *Theories of Nationalism*, New York, 1971, pp. 116-18, 132.
Ernest Gellner. *Thought and Change*, Chicago, 1964, pp. 166-72.

nationalistic".[121]

The mere existence of objective or subjective inequality between different groups does not by itself spur the mobilization of identities. Moreover, identity mobilization is not confined to disadvantaged groups and there are many instances of dominant group mobilization, as is the case with mobilization of Hindus in India.

The Circumstantialist approach also recognizes the critical role played by state policies and other institutional mechanisms in influencing a group's capacity or desire to survive as a separate entity, its self-definition and its ultimate goals. The state can adopt policies ranging from the most extreme forms of repression, including genocide and deportation to assimilation in the schools, or through integration or co-operation of group leaders, to prevent maintenance of separate identities and to undercut the potential basis for identity mobilization. Alternatively, the state can, by establishing political structures such as federalism or by conceding to different groups the right to preserve and protect their culture, adopt a policy of cultural pluralism which will bear a direct influence on the nature of various attempts at identity mobilization. The state might also indirectly influence the development of identities by adopting particular policies for resource distribution. Even though such structural conditions influence identity mobilization to a great extent, they fail, on their own, to convert the potential created into a

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[121] Chang - do Hah and Jeffrey Martin, "Toward a Synthesis of Conflict and Integration Theories of Nationalism", *World Politics*, April 1975, pp. 372-74, 380.

movement for identity mobilization. They are strong necessary conditions, but are not sufficient ones.

Instrumentalist Approach

The Instrumentalists refute the primordial nature of identities and accord primacy to human choices / decisions rather than to circumstances in explaining identity mobilization. Attempts at mobilization of identities are viewed as elite competition. This perspective emphasizes the uses to which cultural symbols are put by elites who seek instrumental advantage for themselves or the groups which they claim to represent. Even while acknowledging the potential created by various structural conditions, this perspective credits the elites for realization of the potential into an actual attempt at identity mobilization. Paul Brass writes:

> ......it is not inequality as such or relative deprivation or status discrepancies that are the critical precipitants of nationalism in ethnic groups, but the relative distribution of ethnic groups in the competition for valued resources and opportunities and in the division of labour in societies undergoing social mobilisation, industrialisation, and bureaucratisation. The potential for ethnic nationalism exists when there is a system of ethnic stratification in which one ethnic group is dominant over another, but it is not usually realized until some members from one ethnic group attempt to move into the economic niches occupied by the rival ethnic groups.[122]

Hence, identity mobilization is viewed as a process created in the dynamics of elite competition within the boundaries determined by socio-economic and political realities. Identity formation is viewed as the outcome of mobilization and manipulation of group identity by the elites who employ the cultural elements of

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[122] Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* , p. 47.

the group as political resource in their competition for political power and economic advantage.[123]

The extreme instrumentalist perspective considers identity mobilization to be a matter of rational choice. Identity is viewed as a resource which the individual actors may employ more or less profitably in different situations. Mobilization of a particular identity is explained to be a result of the rational choice by human actors from the various available options. Profit-maximization is considered to be the motivator behind the various identity choices. Fredrik Barth argues that individuals choose to leave their identity and take up another identity when it suits them better.[124] Hence, symbols of identity are consciously earned by the individuals or group after a rational cost-benefit calculation. Identities are therefore "flexible, adaptable, and capable of taking different forms and meanings depending on the situation and perceptions of advantage".[125]

This perspective tends to transform all choices, including cultural ones, into economic choices. It also regards cultural forms, values, and practices of distinct groups as unimportant. The Instrumentalist approach, in general, considers cultural forms and practices to be absolutely malleable, where the instrumental agency can freely make decisions without any constraints. Such a viewpoint is flawed, because the agency is constrained by the beliefs and values which exist within the groups

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[123] Urmila Phadnis, *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia*, New Delhi. 1990, p. 16.
[124] Fredrik Barth, "Introduction", in Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Boston, 1969, p. 14.
[125] Sammy Smooha, "Ethnic Groups", in Adam Kuper and Jessica Kuper (eds.), *The Social Science Encyclopaedia*, London, 1985, p. 268.

and which limit the kind of appeals which can be made.

None of the above approaches can in isolation help us to understand the phenomenon of identity mobilization. While the Primordialist approach emphasizes the "natural", and hence, the inevitable nature of primordial attachments, ignoring the structural conditions, the Circumstantialist approach stresses the structural environment and neglects the importance of primordial attachments and human choices. The Instrumentalist approach while spelling out the significance of human agency and its instrumental role ignores the importance of primordial attachments. Any effort to explain identity mobilization should effectively incorporate elements of all the three approaches. The primordial attachments of a group will suggest what appeals and symbols will be effective and what will not be, and may also provide traditional avenues for the mobilization and organization of the group in new directions. The structural conditions like unequal development, social exploitation, elite competition are important in offering the scope for identity mobilization. Both the primordial attachments and structural conditions are undoubtedly strong necessary causes, in the absence of which there can be no identity mobilization, but they are not the sufficient causes. These necessary causes offer the potential for identity mobilization. But, to convert these potentialities into reality, human choices are required. Human choices are the sufficient causes since they convert the human material and material resources into actual movements. Such human choices, more often than not, affect the self-definition of the group and its boundaries in the process of identity mobilization.

Identities are mobilized when such human choices aimed at creating a "community of complementary habits" are communicated to a large group of persons.[126] The sufficient conditions for identity mobilization, as Deutsch posits in his theory of social communication, are the availability of a socially mobilized section within a group and effective social communication within the group. Identity mobilization is hence dependent on the accuracy, volume, complexity and effective transmission of the messages aimed at storage, recollection, transmission, recombination and reapplication of memories, symbols, values and habits of the group. Identities are not "natural" and inevitable, instead they are constructed by human choices.

IDENTITY NARRATIVES

Identity formation is an act of *imagination* based on an idea. The use of common language or practice of common religion do not necessarily and automatically lead to the formation of a collective identity (based on language, religion etc.).In the world today, neither those who have English as their first language nor those who practice Islam or Christianity constitute a single coherent group. The formation of a distinct collective identity presupposes an act of collective imagination by the specific group; which is to imagine itself as an actual entity. It requires every member to conceive him/her self as a member of this group. Hence, all identities "larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact

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[126] Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication : An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*, Cambridge, 1969, p. 96.

(and perhaps even these) are imagined"; because the members of such identity groups "never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion".[127]

Benedict Anderson argues that the particular system of communication characterizing societies with popular literacy allows the membership of the "imagined community" to be extended far beyond the bounds of the knowable or face-to-face community of societies characterized by oral communications. He demonstrates such an extension in his description of the "mass ceremony" of reading the daily newspaper through which the reader, " in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull", concerns his/her self with a field of events and conceives through that concern to be like "thousands (or millions) of others (fellow readers) of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion".[128]

Anderson suggests that it is the presence of the text as a commodity which "precipitates" the construction of an imagined entity. Also implicit in his description is the recognition that the newspaper provides a ground on which the readers can constitute their own subjectivities through identification with scenarios set out in the text. The reader of the newspaper, or for that matter any other narrative-bearing medium, may (or may not) recognize him/her self in a subject position produced within the narrative. By projecting that constituted

[127] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1991, p. 6.
[128] Ibid., pp. 22-36.

subjectivity on to others, who are also believed to have engaged that text, the reader imagines a collectivity of persons positioned like (or unlike) him/her self in relation to the concerns that the texts set out . But, a collectivity cannot be realized by merely imagining a simultaneity of thousands (or millions) of others who are reading the same text at the same time; because, the act of reading a text does not automatically interpellate the reader within the subject positions proferred in the text.

A collective identity is constituted only when one discovers a set of concerns which he/she recognizes as his/her own within a text. Through such an identification with the position set out in a discourse, the reader is carried out of isolation of individual experience into the collective phenomenon articulated by the text. Hence, more than the text as a commodity and the simultaneity of its consumption, the content of the text which contains the narrative, enabling the reader to identify him/her self with the text and through that to imagine a collective identity, is the most significant. The narrative content in the text plays a key role in fixing the identity of its readers. Identity, hence, is a discursive production.[129]

Every identity narrative has two parts- a story and a discourse. The story is the content, or chain of events in the narrative. The discourse on the other hand is like a "plot"- how the reader becomes aware of what happened; i.e., the order of

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[129] Glenn Bowman, "'A Country of Words': Conceiving the Palestinian Nation from the Position of Exile, in. Creig Calhoun (ed.), *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 140.1.

appearance of the events. While the story is the *what* in a narrative, the discourse is the *how*.[130] The narrative borrows from history as well as from fiction and treats the reader as a character in a plot. The reader as a character is not separable from his/her own life experiences; but, the plot allows for a reorganization of the events which provide the ground for the experiences of the reader. Eventually, it is the identity of the plot that grants the character his/her identity. Identity is not shaped simply by the past, but by the present, incorporating selected pieces from the past into the present.[131] The narratives do not stop with recollecting the events or actions and their consequences in the past, they seek to interpret these events or actions retroactively. Narrative identity, being fictitious and real by nature, leaves room for variations on the past (by which a plot can always be revised) and also for initiatives in the future..

The group thus defined is just, at the beginning, a latent collectivity whose boundaries are drawn from one criterium or one set of criteria, and which seen from under the angle of other criteria could appear extremely heterogenous. To become a community, its members need to acquire the feeling that they share "something" that makes them distinct from other groups in society and that it also makes irrelevant other traits which could link them to those other groups. This feeling of belonging together is very often spurred by the perception of a common threat or of an injustice, orchestrated more often than not by a narrative.

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[130] Madan Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, Edinburgh, 1996,p. 17.
[131] Calvin Goldscheider, "Population, Ethnicity and Nation Building : Themes, Issues and Guidelines", in Calvin Goldscheider (ed.), *Population, Ethnicity and Nation-Building*, Colorado, 1995, p. 8.

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The narrative is one of the complete mediums of expression which enables the reader to comprehend his/her "likeness" with others, and thereby imagine the sameness and uniqueness of the specific group. The narrative not only establishes the "likeness" of the readers, but also their "unlikeness". Hence it establishes the identity of the "self" and the "other". One's identity cannot be defined in isolation, by simple description of the "self".[132] The best possible way to circumscribe on identity is by contrasting it against an 'other'. Consequently, an identity gets its meaning from what it is not, from the 'others'. As a result, a collective identity needs the existence of an 'other' to become aware of its own existence.

An imaginary representation of the 'other' is present in the organization and culture of all societies. The collective identities, built in contrast to the image of the 'other', are a way of variably specifying the possible relations with 'like others' and are expressed in narratives giving value and meaning to these relations. Hence, the imperative presence of the 'other' is evident in language mechanisms like the identity narratives.

Identity narratives being a medium of communication of the idea of collective "strategic syncretism",[133] a process by which elements taken from those

[132] Martin, "The Choices of Identity", pp. 2-5.
Aletta J. Norval. "Social Ambiguity and the Crisis of Apartheid", in Ernesto Lacklav, (ed.), The Making of Political Identities, Cambridge,1987, pp. 115-24. Norval writes:.... all identity is constituted through an *externalization* of the other via the drawing of political frontiers......the process of identity formation cannot be thought merely in terms of an elaboration of a set of features characteristic of a particular identity.....an enumeration of positive characteristics will not suffice in individuating an identity, or in delineating its essence. In order to achieve that an additional element is needed; namely, the positing of an 'other' which is constituted as opposed to the identity in the process of construction"
[133] Christophe Jaffrelot, "Hindu Nationalism: Strategic Syncretism in Ideology Building", *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 1993, pp. 517-24.

who are constructed to be a threat, i.e., the 'other' are integrated into the 'self'; the "invention of tradition",[134] implying legitimation of changes by rewriting the past; intention of redressing or reversing a balance of power considered to be detrimental to the interests of a 'group' mobilization of the 'group' by imparting a consciousness of itself and of the situation it endures.

The identity narrative, being a weapon in the struggle for power in conflict situations becomes an instrument for constructing an "imagined community"; and once it has been "imagined", for mobilizing this particular community in a situation of power struggle.[135] These narratives frequently acquire an ideological dimension and seeks to legitimize the devalourization of the 'other' and hostility towards it. More often than not, by combining the figure of the 'other' as a threat and the ambition to affect the balance of power, the identity narrative is used to mobilize *against* rather than *for*.

Effective mobilization of this nature requires more than an "imagined community". It necessitates the existence of a political organization which would mobilize the specific group with a particular narrative. This political organization takes upon itself the function of producing the narrative and becomes its exponents, thereby placing itself in the position of 'speaker' for the community. This organization answers a call to preach the 'gospel' of identity by announcing that there is a 'group' deeply rooted in history, gifted with qualities unfound in

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[134] Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (ed.), *Invention of Tradition, Cambridge, 1988.*
[135] Martin, "The Choices of Identity", p. 10.

other groups and that this history and gifts of the 'group' must be defended and asserted. At times it even does not hesitate to demand that these history and gifts should prevail upon others.[136] The fact that such an organization constructs and mobilizes a 'group' does not imply that the organization can manipulate identities freely. Instead, for their appeals to be effective, the organization should choose a suitable symbol and idea from a range of alternatives.[137]

The effectiveness of the proclamation of an identity depends on its ability to counter the fuzzy feelings in the minds of the people and define their identity for them. It must make explicit what is rather largely implicit and endeavour to move people by touching what is strongly ingrained in their affectivity. As a result, identity narratives are full of elements of glory and persecution, i.e. pride and fear.[138]

Identity narratives must pick up what is most strongly felt at one particular time, in a particular situation where a particular balance of power obtains. The production of a narrative organized around one set of feelings should essentially make other feelings disappear or render them irrelevant. It implies a selection among the events or actions which constitute the global experience of a group. It requires the repression of what is potentially divisive and the amalgamation of what can wake up a group consciousness.

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[136] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[137] Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, pp. 73-5.

[138] Emotional elements like pride and shame play a significant role in identity formation. For a detailed exposition on this point see Thomas J. Scheff, "Emotions and Identity : A theory of Ethnic Nationalism" , in Calhoun, *Soical Theory and the Politics of Identity*, pp. 190-2.

The ability of the narrative to have an impact on people depends on its capacity to effectively articulate on three elements – past, space and culture. Identity narratives should provide the group with strong roots in the past. It must be shown to have existed as a group for a long time and to have played a gallant role in history. History, liberating amnesia and imagination together contribute to choosing what is to be remembered, and how and what is to be forgotten. In this process a form of subjective, reconstructed violence plays a central role. Identity narratives give particular weightage (sometimes glorifying, but more frequently horrifying) to collective memories of traumatic events. Space appears in the narratives as a place where the group was able to sustain itself and reproduce itself, and has been doing so for long. The identity narrative may transform a space into a group's exclusive turf, where they ought to be the masters and where their way of doing things should not tolerate any difference or competition. These narratives make a selection of pre-existing cultural traits and transform them into emblems of identity. The selected traits carry a strong affective load and when reformulated in the narrative tend to increase their affective potential so as to give primacy over other traits.[139]

Identity narratives, thus, transform the perceptions of the past and the present. It channels political emotions in order to fuel efforts to modify a balance of power and effects changes in the organization of human groups and creates new ones

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[139] Martin, "The Choices of Identity", p. 14-17.

CHAPTER – II

RELIGION AND BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE IN TAMILNADU

The effective articulation of the politics of religious identity rests on the existence of religious boundaries, the invisible lines distancing a religion and its affiliates from another. It demands the intercalation of diacritical minutae which would hypersymbolically separate one religious community from another. Naturally, religious communities and their boundaries constitute the basal matrix of identity narratives developed by the proponents of religious identity.

More often than not, these narratives expressing fears of lurking threat to their religion and its adherents are replete with references to antagonism between religious communities, impossibility of co-existence of different religious communities, uncooperative and demonic nature of other religions and their foreignness, etc. Such characterizations of religious communities and the relations between them, which arise in the context of modern politics, are transposed with remarkable ease to the distant past and are invariably made eternal. Here, religious identities are unproblematically assumed to be natural, and the religious communities become primordial, static and immutable acquiring an admirable antiquity. Religious 'past', 'tradition' and 'heritage' come to occupy a central position in such efforts to mobilize identities based on religion.

The significant position which religious communities occupy in the narratives on religious identity compels us to have a preliminary understanding of how religions and communities based on them viewed and interacted with each other in Tamilnadu in the past. Hence, I intend to study the religious history of Tamilnadu in this chapter. But, before proceeding any further, it needs to be acknowledged that the religious history of Tamilnadu is a complex and vast area of study. It becomes imperative to delimit our concern, so as not to lose the focus of our study, by posing certain questions, the attempt to answer which would help us to understand the nature of religious communities in Tamilnadu: What was the nature of religious culture? Did the coming of new religions mean a break in the religious culture? What was the nature of religious conversions? Did conversions result in hardening of religious boundaries? What was the plane of interaction between different religious communities? And, how dominant was the religious identity in Tamil society? In the following attempt at answering this set of questions, the religion which has come to be termed as Hinduism and which forms the basis of Hindu identity mobilized by the Hindu organisations, would for obvious reasons remain our central point of reference.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part look at the early religious tradition in the Tamil country. The second and third parts trace the syncretic effects in the religious culture of the region with the advent of Islam and Christianity. The final part analyses the impact of the colonial intervention and its definition of the Hindu identity.

EARLY RELIGIOUS TRADITION IN TAMIL COUNTRY

The earliest extant description of religion in Tamil country comes from the corpus of literature known to us as the Sangam works.[1] *Tolkappiyam* mentions the gods, *Seyon* (Murukan), *Mayon* (Mal or Vishnu), *Vendan* (Indra) and *Varunan* (Varuna) and assigns them respectively to the different physio-cultural zones of *Kurinji* (hilly region), *Mullai* (forest land), *Marudam* (fertile land) and *Neydal* (coastal land). Other Sangam works mention Korravai as the deity associated with the *Palai* (desert land). The importance of each of the deities, who were essentially connected with particular regions at least in the early period, seems to have changed with time. Because, in the works assigned to the Third Sangam, the Three-eyed One (Siva), *Murukan*, *Mayon* and *Valiyon* (Balarama) figure prominently. These Sangam works also mention of a universalized *Kadavul* (transcendental god).[2] There was a further change in the later period as evinced by the epic *Silappadikaram*, when Indra assumed the supreme position and *Murukan*, Siva and Vishnu continued to be prominent at the expense of Balarama. Besides these gods there are also reference to others such as *Mudiyavan* or *Mamudu*

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[1] The Sangam literature consists of two groups, *Ettuthogai* (eight anthologies) : *Narrinai, Kurundogai, Aingurunuru, Padirrupattu, Paripadal, Kalittogai, Ahananuru and Purananuru;* and *Pattupattu* (ten idylls): *Tirumurugarruppadai, Sirupanarruppadai, Perumpanarruppadai, Mullaippattu, Maduraikkanchi, Nedunalvadai, Kurinchippattu, Pattinappalai, Porunararruppadai* and *Malaipadukadam.* According to later works, there were three Sangams. The above works belong to the third Sangam. Works belonging to the first two, except *Tolkappiyam*, of the Second Sangam, are lost. The dates of these works, a matter of debate, can be couple of centuries before and after Christ. It is generally acknowledged that these works preceded the epics and the bakthi literature.

[2] X.S. Thani Nayagam, *Tamil Culture and Civilization: Readings - The Classical Period,* Bombay, 1970, pp. 182-4.
P.N. Chopra, T.K. Ravindran and N. Subrahmanian, *History of South India. vol. I: Ancient Period* , New Delhi, 1979, pp. 230-1.

Mudalavan (Brahma), *Kamavel* (Kama), *Kalan* (Yama), *Tirumagal* or *Ilakkumi* (Lakshmi) and the worship of Sun and Moon. There are also instances of temples attributed to various deities. The Sangam works also mention of the Vedic sacrifices performed by various kings.[3]

The origin of some of these gods is a matter of controversy.[4] But, it is very clear that there was a free admixture of the religious ideas of the Tamil and Sanskritic culture. The attributes of various gods described in the Sangam works show the influence of the Vedic religion. The resultant Tamil religious tradition was complex and multi-layered, where the indigenous and northern elements merged with each other.[5] This interaction and the rise and decline in the prominence of particular deities surely point to the great amount of fluidity which was characteristic of the early religious culture in the Tamil country. There are no references to any particular religion like Hinduism nor even to Saivism or Vaishnavism, during this period. What was in place was an amorphous religious culture with many cults devoted to particular deities.

The fluid nature of religious tradition was further enhanced by the simultaneous prevalence of various other forms of worship, of which the most prominent was ancestor worship. Among the Tamils, the practice of erecting memorial stones (*nadukal*) and hero-stones (*Virakkal*) was in vogue during the

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[3]   K.K. Pillay, *Social History of the Tamils*, Pt. I, pp. 489, 505-16.
[4]   Ibid., pp. 493-7.
      K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *Development of Religion in South India*, Bombay, 1963, p.21.
[5]   Pillay, *Social History of the Tamils*, pp. 490-510; David Dean Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition*, New Jersey, 1980, p.4.

Sangam period. *Tolkappiyam* speaks of six successive stages in the erection of the hero-stones: selection of suitable stone; choosing the auspicious time for the carving of image; inscribing the name and achievements; bathing the stone in sacred water; erection of the stone at the chosen site; and finally, worshipping the sanctified stone as a deity. The elaborate description of erection, decoration and worship of hero-stones in the Sangam literature and the extensive burial practices which were prevalent among the early Tamils point to the importance of ancestor worship in this early period .[6] "They go to show that the cult of the dead had a greater vogue than the divine cults. These form part of the basal strata of 'Lessor' traditions of the land over which the 'Greater' tradition of the cult of Vedic and brahminical gods impinged".[7] In the Sangam age apart from the worship of spirits of anscestors, there was also belief in the ghosts which were believed to be harmful and were dreaded. To ward off the menace of these spirits people worshipped gods and goddesses. There are also references to tree worship. Trees like banyan, *Vembu, Kadambu, Vilvam* and *Konrai* were considered sacred, for certain gods were believed to reside within and near these trees.[8] The religious culture depicted by the Sangam classics and the epics, *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai* is essentially pluralistic. It was a combination of naturalistic, animistic and totemistic features with 'high' religion based on well-defined deities, It was a religious culture where the worship of primitive godlings with offerings of

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[6] Pillay, *Social History of the Tamils*, pp. 475-77.

S. Sundararajan, *Ancient Tamil Country : Its Social and Economic Structure*, New Delhi, 1991, p. 101.

[8] Pillay, *Social History of the Tamils*, pp. 477-82, 539.

blood and toddy went on side by side with the performance of elaborate Vedic sacrifices. This religious fluidity and pluralism were further enriched by the arrival of two new religions from the north.

RISE AND DECLINE OF JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

Jainism and Buddhism, with their characteristic opposition to sacrificial religion and widely different from the prevalent animism, seem to have entered the Tamil country during the Sangam period by about second century B.C. Both these religions seem to have been widely prevalent in the Tamil country till seventh century A.D. There are no references to them in the Sangam classics. But, the names of few Sangam poets like Ilam-Bodiyar and Sangavarunar indicate that they were Buddhists. In the later works, *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*, there are plenty of references to wondering Jaina ascetics called Savakar and Buddhist Bikhshus.[9] In fact, both these works are attributed to and expound the principles of Buddhism and Jainism respectively.

These religions seem to have received popular support from very early times. A Brahmi inscription at Kalugumalai (third century B.C.) records the fact that caves were excavated for a relic-chamber at the instance of a "glorious chief Sri Yaksha". Another inscription says that Yakshasiti, the daughter of a citizen of Velladi caused a cave to be cut for the benefit of the Bhikshus. The Tamil

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[9]   S.K. Ramachandra Rao, *Jainism in South India*, 1970, pp. 58-9; R. Vanaja , " *Buddhism in Tamilnad*", in A. Aiyappan and P. R. Srinivasan (eds.), *Story of Buddhism with Special Reference to South India*, Madras, 1960, pp. 52-4.

country, the evidences show was dotted with numerous Jaina *pallichandam* and *nikkandapalli* and the Buddhist *Ceiya palli* (Chaitya caves). Important cities like Puhar, Madurai and Kanchi and their surrounding areas had numerous religious and educational establishments of these religions.[10] The spread of these religions in Tamil country was fostered by royal patronage of the kings of Chera, Chola, Pandya and Pallava dynasties. The *Kalabhras*, who ruled before Pallavas, were followers of these religions and there are numerous references to their acts of patronage in Jaina and Buddhist works.[11] Huan-Tsang, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who visited the Tamil country by about A.D. 640 says that in the Chola Kingdom there were "several tens of Deva temples, and numerous Digambaras". In the Pallava country, he says, there were one hundred monasteries and 10,000 brethren. In the *Malakuta* or Pandya territory he found remains of many old monasteries and only a small number of brethren.[12] Both Jains and Buddhists have contributed immensely to the growth of Tamil literature and numerous works like *Nilakesi, Valaiyapati, Kundalakesi, Chutamani, and Jivaka Chintamani*, other than the two epics *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai* and some of the didactic works like *Naladiyar* and *Palamoli Nanuru* are attributed to them. These works are expositions on the tenets of both these religions.

The above survey of these religions, extremely brief though, undoubtedly

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[10] C. Minakshi, *Administration and Social Life Under the Pallavas*, Madras, 1977, pp. 244-60. T.G. Kalghotgi, "Jainism in South India", in Nayak and Gopal (eds.), *South Indian Studies*, Mysore, 1990, pp. 504-17, and R. Vasanta, "Buddhism in South India", in ibid., pp.491-503.

[11] Pillay, *Social History of the Tamils*, pp. 521.2; Sundararajan, *Ancient Tamil Country*, pp. 99, 232 - .3.

[12] Vanaja, "Buddhism in Tamilnad", pp. 55; S. Rajalakshmi, "Saivism and Bhakthi Movement", in V.C. Sasivalli (ed.), *Religion and Philosophy*, Madras, 1994, pp. 29-30.

points out that both Jainism and Buddhism were widespread in the Tamil country and enriched its religious tradition. The growth and predominance of these religions were cut short by the rise of devotional bakthi in the region by about seventh century A.D. But this was not before these two religions had influenced the prevalent religious culture in many ways. While Jainism seems to have been routed immediately due to persecution following the rise of Saiva bakthi, Buddhism continued to be in the Tamil country till as late as sixteenth century A.D.

Till the rise of the bakthi movement there seems to have been no religious persecution in the region, with all religions existing side by side. The Sangam works mentions that *Mal* and *Sev-vel (Murukan)* were worshipped together. In the major cities like Kanchi, Madurai and Puhar people professing different religions seem to have lived together without any rancour. *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai* give evidence of many religions thriving in the same city. Thus, in *Silappadikaram* we see a Brahmin woman Malati worshipping many gods :

> The temple of Holy Tree; of Iravartham;
> Baladeva's niche; the temple of the Sun God;
> Of the presiding deity of the town;
> Of Muruga; of Indra's thunderbolt; of Iyanar;
> Of the Jain Supreme; of the temple of the Moon God.[13]

This verse is explicit on the pluralism, which characterized the religious culture of the period. In *Manimekalai*, there is a vivid description of the ten different religious systems which co-existed in the Chera capital, Vanchi, they

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[13] Prema Nandakumar, "Religious Movements in South India", in Nayak and Gopal (eds.), *South Indian Studies*, p. 535.

were: *Pramana Vada, Saiva Vada, Brahma Vada, Narayaniya* or *Vaishnava Vada,*

Veda Vada. The system of *Ajivikas,* Jainism, *Sankya, Vaiseshika* and *Bhuta Vada,*

other than Buddhism. The same work also mentions that the kings asked all

preachers of virtue belonging to various religions to ascend the public hall of

debate and preach their respective doctrines to the people. [14] All this point to the

great amount of religious toleration and pluralism which was prevalent before the

advent of devotional bakthi.

The proponents of Saiva bakthi were in the forefront of the opposition to

Jainism and Buddhism. The hymns of Appar and Sambandhar clearly show their

dislike for Jainism . Both of them are respectively said to have converted Pallava

Mahendravarman and Kun Pandyan from Jainism to Saivism. The new converts

are said to have destroyed the monastery of Tiruppapuliyur and impaled 8,000

Jains on stakes, respectively. Jainism, it seems, was even outlawed and taxed by

the later Pallava rulers. Sambandar and Manickavasagar are said to have indulged

in disputations with the Buddhists, defeating them. The hymns of Vaishnava

bakthi saints, Tirumangai, Tiruppan, Tirumazhisai and Tondaradipodi are full of

invectives against the Jains. Tirumangai Alvar is even said to have stolen a solid

golden image of Buddha from a monastery in Nagapattinam for the renovation of

Vishnu temple at Srirangam. Large number of temples belonging to Jainism and

Buddhism were destroyed and converted into Saiva and Vaishnava temples. [15]

[14] M.S.Ramaswami Ayyangar and B.Seshagiri Rao, *Studies in South Indian Jainism,* Madras, 1922,p.48; Pillay, *Social History of the Tamils,* pp.523-4.

[15] Ayyangar and Rao, *Studies in South Indian Jainism,* pp. 67-71; K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India,* Madras, 1976, pp. 424-7; Pillay, *Social History of the Tamils,* pp. 524-7.

RISE OF BAKTHI

The decline of Jainism and Buddhism and the rise of Saiva and Vaishnava devotional bakthi marks the dawn of a new epoch in the religious history of the Tamil country. The bakthi propounded by the Nayanmars and Alvars was whole-hearted devotion and emotional surrender to the chosen god, Siva or Vishnu. The rise of bakthi as a religious mode changed the religious culture considerably. Parties of devotees under the leadership of one bakthi saint or the other traversed the country many times, singing, dancing and debating all though their way. Devotional bakthi resulted in the construction of temples devoted to Siva and Vishnu. These temples which were small structures to begin with, in the Pallava period, became huge complexes housing the presiding deity in the main shrine and numerous other subordinate deities in the sub-shrines with large *gopurams* and huge compound walls. [16] The great spurt in the temple building activity was due to the philosophy of bakthi. The Saiva and Vaishnava bakthi asked the devotees to "live not in some future heaven but *here*, in the present movement, through a recognition of the divine within him and within the world in which he lives".[17] The devotional bakthi safely dispensed with heaven altogether, since it believed that the shrine was superior to the world of gods. It in fact brought down heaven to the earth by establishing shrines for Siva and Vishnu which were called *puloka civalokam* and *puloka vaikuntam* at places like Tiruvorriyur, Tiruvitaimarutur, Sri rangam etc. All shrines were supposed to provide the devotee with both material

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[16] Sastri, *Development of Religion in South India*, p. 111.
[17] Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths*, p. 21.

reward (*bhukthi*) and release (*mukti*). Bakthi replaced the world-renouncing asceticism with the mukti which was attainable in the earth itself by a pilgrimage to the shrine of the god. The shrine was the heaven on earth, because the god resided on that spot. The shrine was a place with manifest power; it was an "ideal with a ritual ordering of the universe, unlike the disorderly world of nature"; it was outside of and opposed to the sway of time and the corruption that time brings about"; it symbolized an "unlimited, unchanging absolute" and was "a microcosm of the whole creation".[18] The shrine thus occupied the central place in the devotional bakthi. And every sacred site was identified as the center or navel of the universe. The god was believed to be rooted to the particular sacred site and every god came to be associated closely with the locale through the mythology. All this led to a remarkable localization of the universal gods Siva and Vishnu. Hence, temples dedicated to gods, essentially localized, were established mainly in the river basins of Kaveri, Vaigai, Tambraparni and Palar. These temples were established with the royal support of the Cholas, Pandyas and Pallavas who ruled the areas concurrent with these river basins. The temples became indispensable to the structures of authority in the Tamil country. This was due to the common perception that temples were repositories of divine power without controlling which the rulers cannot claim sovereignty over the people. In a sense the ruler shared his sovereignty with the deities.[19] The rulers even eager to expand and strengthen their sovereign power undertook large scale activities of temple

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[18] Ibid., pp. 19-28.
[19] Burton Stein, " Introduction", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1977, p. 7.

construction. Such temples "linked towns and their rural hinterlands; religious groupings (sampradayas) lodged in temples incorporated new peoples within the context of the devotional religion, offering new conceptions of deity which assimilated different levels and kinds of religious experiences and affiliations".[20] The rise of temple-centered Saiva and Vaishnava bakthi spread and strengthened Saivism and Vaishnavism in the Tamil country. These religions assimilated several cults like those of Saptamatrika and Jyeshta. There was also entry of new cults into the region like that of the elephant-god (Vinayagar) during the Pallava period. The period of six centuries from 600 to 1200 A.D., which marks the rise of bakthi religion, is also notable for the intense religious rivalry, as noted above. Many religious sects like Kapalikas, Kalamukhas, Pasupatas, etc., as also the Kaumaras, the Sastas etc., were severely persecuted during this time. There was also intense rivalry between Saivism and Vaishnavism. Ramanuja, the Vaishnava Acharya was persecuted by Kulottunga II, the Chola ruler, who in also said to have destroyed a Vishnu shrine in Chidambaram.

The Bakthi age marked a proliferation of temples, multiplicity of deities, canonization of the Saiva and Vaishnava sacred works and the growth of agamic literature. It also led to the expansion, in the river valleys, of a religious tradition which revolved around the temples and the Agamas. This religious development, important though, was not the defining element for the whole of Tamil country. Along with these gods existed a great number of other divinities who, even if

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[20] Burton Stein, "Temples in Tamil Country, 1300-1750 A.D.", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1977,p.11.

considerably different from the 'pure' gods and goddesses of Saivism and Vaishnavism, shared the same religious landscape in the region and later even gained entry, to some extent, into the 'pure' religions.

LOCAL DIVINITIES AND VILLAGE DEITIES

From the early times Tamils believed the world to be peopled by a multitude of spirits, good and bad, who were the cause of all unusual events, especially of diseases and disasters. The object of their religion was to propitiate these innumerable spirits. These divinities, who were (and still are) key figures in the religion of the region are a group of beings who may be described as deities of blood and power. These were divinities who partook of all the passions and uncontained generative forces which coloured everyday human experience, and could therefore be appealed to in times of specific ills and afflictions. Most of these power deities were neither wholly beneficent nor malevolent; they were in essence ambivalent. At the same time, each village seems to have been under the protection of some one spirit, who was its guardian deity. These power divinities known as *gramadevatas* (village deities) were deities of the village in more than one sense.

The first sense in which it is true is that the *gramadevata* is a manifestly *local* phenomenon. Each of them functions primarily within a distinct locality of relatively small size, and their presence and power are concentrated within local bounds. Moreover, the character of that presence and the uses of that power are

shaped by the 'existential' realities of the life of a local community. "Thus it is

'qualitatively' as well as 'quantitatively', 'morally' as well as 'geographically',

that a village deity is a deity of the village".[21]

The village deities differ widely from the gods of so-called 'pure' or 'high'

religion. They "symbolize only the facts of village life",[22] whereas the latter are

the outcome of philosophic reflection on the universe as a whole, and are

acknowledged as universal gods. These village deities were predominantly females

and unlike the latter are worshipped with animal sacrifice and are by rule

ambivalent. These *gramadevatas* though spread all over the region, do not show

any uniformity. Instead, they were symbols of pluralism, with each one differing

from the other, in one way or the other, as vividly described by Whitehead:

> Some of the shrines... are fairly large buildings, ornamented with grotesque
> figures, almost rivaling in size and architectural features the local temples of
> Siva and Vishnu. The shrines of Ayenar are distinguished by figures of horses
> great and small, on which he is supposed to ride round the village every night
> to chase away the evil spirits. But the majority of the shrines are mean little
> brick buildings of various shapes and sizes, often no more than four or five feet
> high, with a rough figure of the deity inside, carved in bas-relief on a small
> stone. In many villages the shrine is simply a rough stone platform under a
> tree, with stones or iron spears stuck on it to represent the deity. Often a large
> rough stone with no carving on it is stuck up in a field or under a tree, and
> serves for shrine and image alike. The boundary-stone of the village lands is
> very commonly regarded as a habitation of a local deity, and might be called
> a shrine or symbol with equal property.[23]

He further describes the symbols which represented these deities:

> The images or symbols, by which the village deities are represented, are
> almost as diverse as their names. In some of the more primitive villages there

[21] Richard L. Brubaker, *The Ambivalent Mistress: A Study of South Indian Village Goddesses and their Religious Meaning*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1978, p. 43.

[22] Henry Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India*, Calcutta, 1921, p. 17.

[23] Ibid.,p. 17.

is no permanent image or symbol of the deity at all; but a clay figure of the goddess is made by the potter; or the goldsmith, for each festival and then cast away beyond the boundaries of the village when the festival is ended. In the villages other deity is represented simply by stone pillar standing in a field, or on a stone platform under a tree, or in a small enclosure surrounded by a stone wall. Often the stones, which represent the different deities, are simply small conical stones not more than five or six inches high, blackened with the anointing oil (elsewhere) a slab of stone has the figure of woman roughly carved upon it, sometimes with four, six, or eight arms, holding various implements in her hands, sometimes with only two arms, and sometimes with none at all.[24]

Though this description was made at the beginning of this century, there is no reason why the same cannot apply to the earlier centuries. These divinities of blood and power can be divided into two main categories. The first of these are the goddesses or *ammans*, who are divine power activated . These *ammans*, including *Mariyamman*, the bringer of smallpox and fever, were ambivalent deities involved with epidemic disease and depended upon for village welfare and protection.[25] They were endowed with enormous power which can be both destructive and beneficent. So, she had to be propitiated with animal sacrifices. The characters and functions of *ammans* varied considerably from each other and as a group from those goddesses worshipped in the 'pure' religion. The village goddesses are marked by ambivalence, female independence and involvement with pollution as different from the latter who where characterized by benevolence,. wifeliness and purity.[26]

The second group of beings who belong to this category of blood and power divinities are the masculine figures such as: *Aiyanar*, the warrior horseman;

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[24] Ibid., p. 36

[25] Ibid., pp. 31-33.

[26] Ibid., pp. 30-31; Brubaker. *The Ambivalent Mistress*, pp. 14-17.

Muni (*Munisveran* or *Muniaiyar*): *Karuppan*, the club-bearing hero; *Madurai Viran* ; and *Madan* or *Sudalaimadan*, often visualized as a pig-faced giant or a mustachioed sword-waving military man. While the first making these have an independent existence, others were the subordinate guardians of the *ammans*.[27]

Apart from these two main groups there were also many lesser 'demonic' beings including the army of invisible supernatural warriors (*virans*) who attended deities like *Aiyanar* and *Muni*, and the violent and destructive spirits known as *pay-picacus* who fed on human blood and on the violent passions of their living victims. These were men and women, boys and girls, who had died a violent or untimely death, or who had been notorious for their power or even their crimes during their life time. Thus, the religious culture of Tamil country was rich with different types of divinities and modes of worship. But, all these divinities both 'pure' and 'impure' shared the same religious landscape. This trend which seems to have lasted for long was disturbed by the influx of groups from the peripheral areas of Tamil country and from the north of it with the establishment of the warrior kingdoms of Nayaks and Poligars. These groups either alien to or at most distantly related to the 'pure' religion of the river valleys of Tamil country started to push into the wet zones, resulting in them receiving new religious traditions and symbols from the valleys and leaving their own marks on those areas. This influx of groups like Maravars, Kallars and other unsettled or semi-nomadic martial groups of the Tamil country and the northern peasant warrior groups like Kammas

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[27]   Whitehead, The Village Gods, pp. 18, 25-6, 33.

and Reddis meant that the religious culture was fluid and there was nothing finished or static about it. [28]

The migrating warriors, cultivators and artisans carried their power divinities along with them into the new regions. Often a particular deity would be taken up by a local notable and have a temple built in its honour. Such a deity would acquire large and wide-ranging constituency of worshippers extending far beyond the limits of any one locality. While some shrines housed divinities who received worship from entire localities, many villages also contained the shrines of *Kulateivam* or kin group tutelaries whose worship usually transcended the boundaries of the individual village. Hence, many of the immigrant groups did not adopt the high religion. Instead, there was a corporate veneration of tutelary deities, usually one of the blood-taking power divinities or 'demonic' human characters who were revered as idealized representations of the group's lifestyle. The Kallars worshipped *Karuppan*; Maravas had *Madan* or *Sudalaimadan*; Pallis, the goddess *Draupadiamman* (or her male counterpart *Kuttandavan*); Telugu - speaking Kammas, the fierce goddess *Yellamma*; Komatis, the virgin goddess *Kannika Parameswari*; Morsu Vellalas, *Timraiswami*; Bandi Vellalas, *Chandesvara*, and *Malaiyandi* Vellalas worshipping *Kaliyamma*.[29] The peasant society of Tamil country was divided into many units like household, patrilineage (*pangali*) and clan (*Kulam*). Each of these units had its own *Kulatheivam*, usually a

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[28] Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700- 1900*, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 22-27.

[29] Ibid., pp. 39-56l; Stein, "Temples in Tamil Country", pp. 35-6.

goddess who protected the ancestral domain and whose place would be a place of power and pilgrimage for the group even if its members had migrated for outsided its original homeland.

The influx of these new groups triggered a dramatic expansion of the goddess worship in Tamil country, a trend beginning in the fourteenth century lasted right upto the eighteenth century. The Nayaka and Poligar chiefs selected *ammans* as the chief deities of new or newly patronised cult centres. Female tutelaries - *gramadevatas* or *kulatheivams* were built up in power and status and came to be identified closely with the gods of the temples in the river valleys. The same rulers also patronised the great temples at Kanchi, Sri rangam and Chidambaram which increased their rank and power, and also built new temples and encouraged brahmins to settle in new areas.[30] This greatly enhanced the fluidity of the religious culture and there were no clear boundaries between holy places which were sacred to the 'Sanskritic' gods and those which were commanded by blood-taking power divinities. The main change that was taking place at this time was neither suppression of one tradition in favour of another, nor an attempt to 'purify' or Sanskritize the worship of *ammans* and other power divinities. Instead, the two were coming to interact and there was assimilation taking place.[31] *Karuppan*, the tutelary deity of Kallars came to be identified with *Alagar* (Vishnu)[32] and many *amman* shrines began to orientate themselves within a

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[30] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 56-8.
[31] Whitehead, *The Village Gods*, pp. 113-38.
[32] Denis Hudson, "Siva, Minakshi, Visnu", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1977, pp. 112-13.

wider sacred network which had come to be defined as the domain or sacred kingdom of one of the 'high' gods, for example, the fierce *amman Gangamma* became the consort of 'pure' *Venkatachalapati* in Tirupati.[33] Many of the male power divinities came to be worshipped as associates that is as sons, brothers or activated manifestations of the 'high' gods.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century most of the population of the Tamil dry zones regarded the fierce *amman peys, pattavans* and male divinities as beings who embodied divine force at its most active and dangerous form. For these worshippers there were few hand and fast boundaries between the blood-taking 'demonic' beings and the remote 'Sanskritic' gods and goddesses. The warrior groups, of Tamil country continued to combine their new- found 'Sanskritic' rites with the worship of fierce blood-taking warrior deities. Most of the Tamils maintained multiplex sectarian affiliations, seldom shifting altogether from one to another, but more often adding new ones to their affiliational connections through time. The affiliations of a number of peasant groups ranged from varieties of domestic worship to occasional relations with the primary sacred centres of Tamil country. But this does not suggest of local and supralocal hierarchies of religious affiliation. The people seem to have freely followed the different systems making the religious culture pluralistic and fluid.

The religious tradition of Tamil country, which we now term as Hinduism, was neither stultified nor monolithic. Even though there was a broad trend towards

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[33] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings,* p. 46.

the temple-centered religion, there were no clear-cut boundaries between 'Sanskritic' temple worship, the bakthi cult tradition, and those of *peys, pattavans* and blood taking *ammans*. All these forms of faith and worship came to overlap and invigorate one another. The result was not a progressive standardising of religious life and a trend towards textual 'orthodoxy', but a process of mutual stimulation. All areas of religious life were enriched and revitalised by this process of exchange. It was this fluid and dynamic religious culture that the two proselytizing religions of Islam and Christianity came to meet in the Tamil country. This interaction resulted in a great syncretic religious culture in the region.

ADVENT OF ISLAM IN TAMIL COUNTRY

Islam was introduced into the Tamil country by Arab traders who carried on a flourishing trade with this region for long. With increase in trade the number of Arab traders in the Coromandel coast increased and they began to contract marriage alliances with locals. The local rulers eager to expand their international trading network permitted conversions.[34] But, the most significant factor in the spread of Islam in Tamil country was the influence of Sufis, the Muslim mystics whose activities were very important in the expansion of Islam to different parts of the World. Most of the Sufis were persons of deep devotion who were disgusted by the vulgar display of wealth and degeneration of morals following the

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[34]   J.B.P.More, "Tamil Muslims and Non-Brahmin Atheists, 1925-1940", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1993,p. 85; Kenneth Mcpherson, "The Social Background and Politics of the Muslims of Tamil Nadu, 1901-1937", p.831.

establishment of the Islamic empire. These mystics, wanting to have nothing to do with the state, laid great emphasis on love as the bond between god and the individual soul. Relatively free from prescriptive or doctrinal formalities, the Sufis played many different roles in society. These Sufis were able to maintain a continuity in the religious life of the masses by acting as healers, exorcists and ritualists, in which capacity their functions overlapped considerably with those of local non-Muslim holy men. This element of continuity was the most crucial in the early expansion of Islam in Tamil country.[35]

By the twelfth or thirteenth century, the Coromandel port towns like Pulicat, Kilakkarai and Kayal had substantial population who were recognised by the wider society as permanent professing Muslims, but not isolated. This early Muslim community was divided into the elite *Maraikkayar*, with claims of descent from Arabs and following 'pure' Islam, and the local converts of labouring class called *labbais*, discriminated by the former as 'mere converts' with corrupt practices and low social standing.[36]

This early Muslim community and the towns and shrines which they established made the religious culture of the region fluid. In Tamil country permanent or institutional religious affiliation developed rather slowly, and the Sufi *dargah* or shrine became a place at which people of any origin might seek contact with the saint's *barakat* (miraculous power). All who approached the

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[35] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 74-5
[36] Frank S.Fanselow, "Muslim Society in Tamil Nadu (India): An Historical Perspective", *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, January 1989, pp. 265-70, 273-76.

shrine automatically received some sort of contact, however indirectly, with formally professing Muslims and with the doctrines and religious vocabulary of Islam. Some of worshippers might have themselves entered into a formal tie of discipleship with the saint and through this link they or their descendants might have declared themselves to be members of the *Umma*, the universal community of all Muslim believers. Such adhesions were neither full-fledged conversions, keeping in mind the religious practices of these saints, nor were they inevitable or irreversible. At any given moment a locality would have contained individuals and families who could be located at many different points along the religious spectrum. In addition to the committed professing, Muslims and those who were identifiable as 'Hindus' there were even large numbers who fell into the great class of persons possessing mixed and overlapping religious identities.

It was this type of Islam which spread into the Tamil hinterland with the development of trade and production networks and establishment of many 'Muslim' towns along the trade routes, as early as thirteenth or fourteenth century [37] This led to an increase in the population of hinterland Labbais who, new 'convert' Muslims though, developed elaborate schemes of ceremonial precedence like those in Hindu temple festivals. There was an increase in the Muslim population of the region with the influx of warrior groups called Navaiyats, Pattanis and Ravuttars from the north by about seventeenth century. There was a further influx of Muslim migrants-traders, artisans, mercenaries and religious

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[37] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*. pp. 86-90.

persons with the establishment of the Walajah rule in Arcot by A.D.1744. [38]

Hence, while the Tamil country did not have any sustained experience of Muslim conquest before eighteenth century, except for the short-lived Sultanate at Madurai in A.D. 1334,[39] the region did contain substantial numbers of people who identified themselves as Muslims and who wished to associate themselves with traditions of Muslim military and political ascendancy.

The religious system which grew out of these waves of immigrations and cross-cutting ties and devotional traditions was exceptionally varied and dynamic. Every new influx added something to the existing religious culture. Religious affiliation and identity was still highly fluid. By the beginning of the eighteenth century Tamil country contained a large population of professing Muslims and many active religious foundations which functioned as centres of formal Muslim teaching and devotion. The region by now had a great number of mosques, *madrasas*, mainstream Sufi *Khanaqahs* (teaching hospices) and other learned foundations. [40] But more importantly, there was also a profusion of Muslim cult centres and holy places ranging from tiny wayside shrines to rich and famous *dargahs* (tomb shrines) attracting a continual flow of pilgrims and devotes for centuries, these so-called 'folk' centres have been the focus of Muslim faith and worship in Tamil country. It was this 'folk' culture which being more prevalent and contributing to the expansion of Islam, encountered the local religions of

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[38] Fanselow, "Muslim Society in Tamil Nadu", pp. 270-73, 277-83.
[39] S.A.Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *South India and Her Muhammadan Invaders*, New Delhi, 1970.
[40] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 77,81.

Tamil country, and deserves the focus of our analysis.

In the Tamil country the *dargah* has for long been revered as a place of power. It is a repository of the *pir*'s (saint's) miraculous *barakat*, a sources of miraculous cures and boons and a resort of pilgrims and itinerant holy men *(faqirs)*. The *pir* often known as *baba, wali* or *antavar* (lord), may originate as a learned man belonging to one of the established Sufi orders or *tariqas*. They might also be unaffiliated or non-*tariqa* Sufis, usually referred to as *Qalandars*, or more loosely as *faqirs*, including among them a large number of itinerant praise singers, amulet-sellers and diviners, settled anchorites who achieved renown by their power to perform miracles and the naked *mazdhubs*, who lived beyond the boundaries of settled human society and often identified with transvestism, drug-taking and with many other forms of extreme or anti-social behaviour.[41] In Tamil country all these varied Sufis became the focus for pilgrimage, veneration and a source of miraculous healing *barakat*. Though they had overturned every 'orthodox' Islamic propriety, the *faqirs* and the *qalandars* were essentially part of a single continuum which linked all Muslim mystics and which formed a bridge between the tradition which we now associate with formal theistic Hinduism and those which are seen as being part of a separate Muslim culture. Their power to attract devotees and disciples made them one of the most dynamic elements in the Tamil religious culture.

The Sufi tradition was in all probability introduced into Tamil country by

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[41]   Ibid., pp. 75-76.

the early Arab Muslim traders and navigators as early as eighth century. It's spread was initially aided by the *Maraikkayar* and was encouraged even by all the Muslim groups of the region who took pride in the tradition of Islamic 'high' culture.[42] Each of the *Sufi* shrines generated its own individual history and cult tradition. Every *pir* was perceived as capable of taking many different roles and identities for his devotees: the same saint may appear simultaneously as 'orthodox' *alim*, warrior avenger and magical healer- intercessor.

Instead of relating the devotee to the various stages of Muslim history and pre-history, the cult traditions of these saints focused on motifs and episodes which invested the region's *pirs* with attributes of Hindu divine power. Many of these cult figures were undoubtedly related to the Hindu religious landscape (i.e., to a terrain containing shrines, deities and temples which would now be described as Hindu). Each of these religious sites - *dargahs*, great temples, shrines of lesser blood-taking power deities-were perceived as forming part of a localised sacred landscape with each of the individual sites taking on enhanced power and prestige from its bonds and legendary interactions with the others. These links, reaching across religious boundaries were achieved through the tales of marriages and kinship ties between gods and goddesses, the claims of discipleship uniting groups of interrelated Sufis, and the intermingling of motifs and pilgrimage programmes which identified individual *pirs* with the 'high' gods and power divinities of a particular region. Within these webs of devotion and cult affiliation, what counted

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[42]   Ibid., pp. 77, 104-5.

was the power of the gods and cult figures, and the supernatural links which united them. In this trend formal boundaries of sect and religious affiliation were of relatively minor importance.

Though most of these cult traditions are based on the *pirs*, there are some based on other personalities like biblical figures, kings and warriors from the more accessible historical past, persons associated with the earliest phase of formal Muslim community-building, and the *tulukkar* warriors and conquerors from north India.[43] Some of these cults are closely associated with 'Hindu' holy places, for example, at Ramesvaram there is a grave in which Cain is said to have buried Abel and himself was buried later and is a place of pilgrimage for Muslims. At Silambar, near Chidambaram, there is a temple of *Murukan* which came to be known as the site of the throne of prophet Sulaiman (the biblical Solomon). The tradition of *Sikandar*, the precursor king, was extremely strong in Tamil country and came to be widely identified with the martial deity *Murukan (Skanda)*.[44] To the large number of Hindus and Muslims who frequented the crag at Tirupparankunram, it was known both a Skandamalai and as Sikandarmalai (*Skanda's* or *Sikandar's* mount).[45] *Sikandar's* shrines featured terracotta images in the shape of mounted warriors which closely resemble the cult images of the horseman deity *Aiyanar*. *Pirs* like Hazarat Hamid Shah Awliya and Hazarat Nathar Wali have been closely identified with the holy 'Hindu' temples at Kanchipuram

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[43] Ibid., pp. 106-15.

[44] Ibid., pp. 107-9.

[45] Among the Ravuttar Muslims of Madurai district there was a strong tradition of worship at *Murukan* shrines in Palani and Sivagiri; See *Madurai Gazetteer*, 1905, Vol. I, p. 307.

and Tiruchirappali. [46] Other than sharing the religious landscape, there are many aspects of Tamil divinity with which the *pir* has been assimilated. In some cases this assimilation may take the form of positive congruence of attributes which the *pir* is seen to hold in common with one of the deities, as described above. At other times it may take place as an apparent conflict in which the *pir* conquers the non-Muslim deity by outclassing its powers. All this assimilation and interaction was possible because there were features of Tamil religion which made it particularly easy for the devotees to bridge the gap between the Tamil deity and the Tamil Muslim cult saint. Those who were able to make this great leap included worshippers who would now be classed as formally professing Muslims.

In the Tamil country the Muslim cult texts depict the saint and his power in terms which were unmistakably derived from the traditions of the Tamil 'high' gods and the fierce blood-taking deities of the region. This was possible because the Muslim cult saint had always been a figure who could leap the boundaries between 'Hindu' and 'non-Hindu', 'Islamic' and 'unIslamic' religions. He has always been a figure who moved in a sacred landscape which was familiar to almost anyone in the Tamil country. There are many *tazkiras* (biographies) and legends about these cult saints. These essentially expressed the ideas of the followers of these saints the way they perceived themselves and those belonging to other faiths. These texts are reliable proof on how the followers of these saints perceived the religious boundaries between themselves and others.

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[46] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 11-12, 116-23.

Many of the *tazkira* literatures contain a large body of clearly identifiable Saivite imagery. These Saivite themes are very explicit in accounts of the miraculous exploits which the *pir* performs in the course of his travels through the wilderness. While he undergoes the heroic quest, the *pir* is a figure of the forest and inhibits the same domain as the 'demonic' spirits and marauders who lie beyond the margins of the settled social order. In Saivism this world of dangerous uncontained forces is the resort of the divine at its most awesome and terrifying .[47]

The Tamil *pir* has often been revered within an explicitly Saivite sacred landscape. In the texts and oral traditions the *pir* contends with savage forest marauders. He sheds his grace over suppliant Sakti deities and on Lord Siva's sacred bull Nandi. He acquires the power of esoteric knowledge in the wilderness, which is the place to which the seeker must go in his quest for esoteric saving knowledge in formal theistic Saivism. The *pir* comes forth as an austere and awesome avenger with power to bring down terror and destruction on those who oppose him. He more often than not equips himself with the symbols and emblems of the Saivite tradition.

In the *tazkira* of Hazarat Nathar Wali, the Trichy saint, Saivite motifs like lions, deer and milk occur prominently. [48] The lion motif has an important place in the Saivite tradition, where it occurs as the vehicle of warrior goddess Durga. Several *pirs* of Tamil country are described precisely as lion-mounted figures. The

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[47] Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths*, p. 26.

[48] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 120-123.

nineteenth century *pir* Hazarat Shaikh Pirullah Hadi Sher Sarvar is described by his devotees as a saint who comes riding on a lion. This *pir's dargah* at Dongri near Salem is known locally as 'Sanyasi Gundu'-*sanyasi* being a term distinctly used to refer to 'Hindu' ascetics and holy men. In his *tazkiras*, Sultan Saiyid Baba Fakiruddin Hussain Sistani appears as a demonic lion-mounted warrior-hero brandishing a live serpent in place of a whip. The Nagore *pir*, Shahul Hamid Naguri is another saint who rides a lion. These lion-riding saints were all perceived as figures of terror, as destroyers and conquerors as well as bringers of peace and comfort, this image confirms well with the Saivite warrior goddesses.

In the *tazkiras* of the *qalandar* saint *Kat Bava* ('forest father') there is a striking use of Saivite imagery. In one of the central incidents of the saint's career, he saves seven maiden who have become lost in the wilderness and are attacked by dacoits. The female figures can be identified with the Saivite *Saptamatrikas*, who appear in temple iconography and *stalapuranas* throughout the Tamil country. Some versions of the legend even say that the maidens were of Brahmin birth, thus making the 'Hindu' identity of the characters absolutely explicit. [49] This incident has a striking resemblance to the miraculous deeds of another saint. The *pir* in question is the Kanchi saint Hamid Shah Awliya, who is said to have freed Kanchi temple's great processional chariot (*ter*) which had been mysteriously immobilized at the start of the town's great annual *utsavam* festival. This is an example of the way in which many Muslim saints were portrayed as

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[49]   Ibid., pp. 123-24.

sponsors or protectors of Hindu holy places.

According to the *tazkiras*, the Kanchipuram *dargah* even allowed the local temple authorities to show their gratitude for the saint's patronage by allocating him a share of the temple's sanctified *prasatam* offerings. This is described in the texts as a mark of favour and respect and certainly not as an impertinence from local 'kaffirs'.[50] In the legends of both these *pirs*, tokens of 'Hindu' divinity are cited as actual components of the Muslim saint's power and prestige . The Kanchi *pir* is all the more imposing through being associated with a great 'Hindu' ceremonial event and in order to make the point, the festival and its sacred regalia are left in their original 'Hindu' state instead of being replaced or formally 'Islamised' by the saint. In Kat Bava's *tazkiras*, the seven maidens retain their original identity and are not converted to Islam like the penitent brigands in the story. Instead, they are portrayed as grateful suppliants who place themselves under the saint's protection and then go on their way. Even though these maidens are part of the 'Hindu' pantheons they are brought into the Muslim *antavar's* sacred network.

A common convention in the Tamil *tazkira* literature is to place the Sufi within a religious landscape combining 'Hindu' and Muslim terms of reference. The biographers of the Nagore saint state that Shahul Hamid's birthplace

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[50]   Ibid., pp. 111-12.

at Manikpur is to be considered an especially auspicious site because it is located near the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, which assumes an important position in the Hindu religious landscape. The *tazkiras* of many saints incorporate Hindu as well as Muslim pilgrimage places during their epic travels. For example, the Nagore *pir* on his way to his *Khanaqah* visits Ramesvaram, Kanyakumari and Tenkasi.[51]

Another common reference to Saivite tradition is the appearance, in many biographical texts, of the sacred bull *Nandi,* the divine vehicle and attendant of Lord Siva. In the Nagore *tazkiras*, the disciples of the *pir* slaughter and eat the divine bull, and the saint then displays his miraculous powers by bringing the digested fragments back to life. In this incident the *pir* uses his intercessory power on behalf of the Hindu divinity. This motif of killing and resuscitation of *Nandi* occurs repeatedly in the *tazkira* literatures of the region.[52]

There are many other Saivite divinities who figure in the foundation accounts of the regions *dargahs*. The *Murukan* tradition has tended to overlap with the cult traditions of many Tamil *pirs* and this conjecture has been particularly common in the Madurai and Trichy areas. The region's Hindu groups (or those worshippers who would now be identified as formally professing Hindus) have also tended to see a strong connection between Murukan and the world of Tamil Muslim devotion. The link is reflected in many *stalapurana* myths. For example,

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[51]   Ibid., pp. 124-5.
[52]   Ibid., pp. 125-8.

at Manjavayal in Thanjavur district, there is an old tradition which states that Lord *Murukan* of Palani originally manifested himself at the site of the local temple in response to an appeal made by a Muslim worshipper.[53]

Some Muslim worshippers even addressed their *pirs* in the name of Siva. For example, a devotee of the Karaikal saint Mastan Sahib was found wearing an amulet containing the inscription, *OM- Nama Siva r.u. Mastan Sahibu avergal padame tunai* (OM/ Lord Siva / I seek for) help at the very feet of Lord Mastan Sahib).[54]

The Vaishnavite concept of divinity has also helped to shape the motifs and institutions of Tamil *pir* cults. In Nathar Wali's *tazkiras* the saint is helped in his preparation for prayer by an enormous twelve-headed cobra, which can be easily identified with the great serpent emblem of god Vishnu. The text refers specifically to the 'mountain of Trichy', which is a place of pilgrimage for Muslims and Hindus. Amongst the many sacred sites on the mountain there are two indentations identified with Vishnu and Nathar Wali's career respectively. There two are clearly part of the same local devotional tradition and this overlapping of the two legends comes through unmistakably in the *tazkira*. The serpent motif occurs frequently in the Sufi biographies. Bahar-I-Azam Jahi employs an equally vivid reference to the Vaishnavite tradition, when the Trichy pir Shah Alimullah Qadiriya is described as a figure lying in a deep sleep while a

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[53] Ibid., p. 128.
[54] Ibid., p. 130.

great cobra spreads its hood above his head. At Sri rangam, a couple of miles from Trichy, Vishnu in depicted in the same manner, whereby the cobra's multiple heads and outstreched hood shelter the god as he lies sleeping on the serpent's coil. The narrative of the Trichy *pir* is clearly derived from the myth of sleeping Vishnu. Again the text declares that the saint is a being of transcendent majesty. So long as he remains in his potentially active from in his *Khanaqah*, the saint may take on the qualities of the divine Vishnu. This is a transformation which casually sidesteps the formal conflict between polytheistic 'high' Hinduism and the radical monotheism of textual Islam.[55]

There is also an instance of a Muslim figure associated with .Vaishnava tradition, in the cult of *Kallalagar* (Vishnu) near Madurai. In the legend, which is enacted annually, Alagar failing to attend the marriage of his sister (Minakshi) with Siva angrily turns to a hamlet where he spends the night with his Muslim consort *Tulukka Nacciyar*.[56]

In Tamil country the Muslim *pir* has often been perceived in terms which correspond almost exactly to those which characterize the region's power divinities and in particular the blood-taking Tamil *gramadevatas*.In almost every *tazkira* the *pir* is portrayed as a figure of terror whose powers are as awesome, as destructive and as capricious as those of the Tamil goddesses. The idea which identifies the Muslim *antavar* with affliction and disease corresponds precisely to

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[55]   Ibid., pp. 130-32.
[56]   .Hudson, "Siva, Minaksi, Visnu," pp. 108-9.

the beliefs which inspired and imparted coherence to the tradition of Tamil goddess worship. Like the myths and legends of the Tamil *ammans*, accounts of the lives of the *pirs* are rich in images of bloody supernatural warfare. These struggles are presented as contests between divine order and the demonic forces which threaten,to break their bounds and overwhelm the ordered and stable cosmos.For instance, the Trichy *pir* Nathar Wali slays the demon *Tiriasuran*, but in a striking similarity with the foundation stories of the regions Poligar chiefdoms, into his new centre of power. The power of the saint here is termed as 'Sakti, the terrible activated force of the Hindu goddess, and not as *barakat*.[57]

The *dargahs* of Tamil country have for long functioned as healing centres. The *tazkiras* often portray the *pir's barakat* as a universal balm endowed with the power to soothe distress and banish pain and disease. The Tamil *pirs* shared the ambivalent character of the *ammans*, both bringers and healers of diseases, personifying cooling and healing on the one hand, and of pain, heat and fiery supernatural anger on the other.[58] Thus, the Karaikal *pir* Kulumai Sahib, according to tradition, mounts a horse and rides out to drive away cholera when it threatens the locality.[59]

Other than sharing of motifs, there were many ways in which the religious boundaries overlapped. Sacred elements like miracle-trees and water tank, representing the uncontained world of chaos and power in the Tamil religion,

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[57] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 137-7.
[58] Brubaker, *Ambivalent Mistresses*.
[59] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 148-9.

figured in the *dargahs* of *pirs*.[60]

The Mohurram festival of Shia Muslims witnessed considerable overlapping of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' elements. Fire-walking ceremonies, characteristic of the *amman* shrine festivals, formed part of Mohurram festival of mourning and penitence.[61]

In many of the shrine towns like Kanchi and Trichy, the Muslim cults and Tamil divinities, sharing the same religious landscape began to co-ordinate the timing of some of their annual festival celebrations. They even shared the same elephants and other 'kingly' accoutrements.[62] The annual festival of Sufi centres known as *Kanturi*, marking the death anniversary of the *pir*, featured parading of ceremonial chariots and cult objects as well as ecstatic dancing, singing and fire-walking, and buffalo and cock sacrifices which were just like those staged at the shrines of power divinities. The central act of the *Kanturi* has been a set of rituals known as the *Santanakkuttam* or Sandalwood paste anointing.

In the Muslim *Kanturi* festival of Tamil country, the anointment of the saint's tomb with sandalwood paste has for long been perceived as an act which cools and contains the fearful punitive force of the *pir*. This is precisely the same as the practice of applying sandal to soothe and damp down the destructive Sakti of the Tamil *ammans*. Throughout the Tamil country these beliefs came to be held

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[60] Ibid., pp. 137-39; Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths*, p. 26.

[61] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, p. 142.

[62] Ibid., p. 163.

by formally professing Muslims as well as those who would now be classed as Hindus. One indication of this is the participation of both Hindus and Muslims (or those who came to be so identified later) in the enactment of *Santanakuttam*. By the beginning of the eighteenth century the leading roles in the sandal anointment rituals of many shrines were being shared between elite Muslim *pirzada* lineages and representatives of important local 'Hindu' caste groups and communities.[63] This was a rite, which transcended formal religious boundaries. The pirzadas and nawabs who saw themselves as upholders of the highest traditions of Islam found no conflict between their commitment to Muslim 'high' culture and their enthusiastic participation in the *Kanturi* with its basis in a broad and inclusive religious culture of the Tamil country.[64]

The rulers of Tamil region also supported various cults and traditions not mindful of any religious boundaries. Even in the early stages of Walahjah rule, the nawabs were able to go far beyond the limits of a specifically Muslim form of 'kingly' piety. Despite their commitment to Islamic statecraft, the nawabs revered and patronised the region's great Hindu holy places. The Thanjavur Marathas established themselves as the most prominent princely benefactors of Nagore *dargah*. Raja Pratab Singh is credited with building of a minar and making the largest ever donation to the shrine. The Udaiyarpalayam Poligars, though benefactors of Sri Varadaraja of Kanchi, incorporated Deccani Muslim symbols into their rituals of kingship. The Kallar rulers of Pudukkottai, for all their

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[63]   Ibid., pp. 143-46.
[64]   Ibid., p. 235.

recruitment of *gurus* and building of temples, also patronized the *Kat Bava* cult.

The Kallars and Maravas of southern Tamil country also patronized the cult of

Yusuf Khan, who came to be closely identified with goddess Minaksi of Madurai.

The Hindu patrons of this cult had an important position in the rituals associated

with it. The Kallars with their notion of strength and vitality which involved meat-

eating were against the notions of purity and pollution of the 'high' Hinduism.

This enabled them to easily identify within Khan Sahib- a warrior, a taker of life

and a meat-eater. [65]

There are also instances of Muslim figures becoming a part of the Tamil

religion. The village goddess *Draupadi* had a Muslim as one of her two guardians.

Muttal Revuttan is thus found in the temples of *Draupadi amman* with a paunch,

mustache, turban, beard and sword. He has fez-wearing attendants who offer him

bottled liquor or potted toddy and is surrounded by a "flying" horse.[66]

The entry of Islam into the Tamil society did not result in drawing of

definite religious boundaries. Instead, the interaction of the two religions resulted

in greater fluidity and pluralism of the religious culture. There were no hard

boundaries between the 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' religious traditions.

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[65] Ibid., 165- 68, 182,190-213.

[66] Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadi*, vol. I, Chicago, 1988, pp. 101-27. Hiltebeitel also mentions that there were other examples where a Muslim personage was part of the *amman* shrines in Tamil regions.

ADVENT OF CHRISTIANTY IN TAMIL COUNTRY

Christianity in Tamil country had an attractive and legendary early career.
It is stated that St.Thomas, the Apostle, came to the region and Marco Polo, the
Venetian traveller, mentions St. Thomas becoming a martyr in the Mount (near
Madras). Even from the days of Cosmos, the Alexandrian merchant, we hear of
Christian communities in these parts. Nevertheless, considerable influence of
Christianity as a religious form started only with the arrival of the Portuguese in
the fifteenth century.

The Paravas, a maritime community of the Coromandel coast, were the
first to 'convert' to Christianity. In A.D.1532 a delegation of seventy Paravas
presented themselves at the Portuguese stronghold in Cochin and appealed for
protection against pirate attacks.[67] The Portuguese, eager to recruit a new client
community, sent a group of Padroado[68] clerics to the Tamil country, who within
months reportedly 'baptized' over 20,000 Paravas from at least thirty villages.
According to contemporary Jesuit records, the coastal regions of Malabar and
Tamil country contained some 45,000 'baptized' Roman Catholics at the end of
the sixteenth century, mostly Paravas, Mukkuvas and other low-ranking fishing
and labouring people. It was from these groups that Tamils in inland localities

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[67] Robert Eric Frykenberg, "The Impact of Conversion and Social Reforms upon Society in
South India During the Late Company Period: Questions Concerning Hindu-Christian
Encounters, With Special Reference to Tinnevelly", In C.H.Philips and M.D. Wainwright
(eds.), *Indian Society and the Beginnings of Modernization c. 1830 - 1850*, London, 1976, p.
189.

[68] Padradao is a term used to refer to Portugese state - backed church system.

acquired their earliest exposure to Christian ideas and observances. The Parava traders who came to the hinterland brought with them their Christianity centered on saint cults, and it was to this type of religion that the new 'converts' were exposed.[69] In that case, what was the meaning of 'conversion' among these new adherents to Christainity?

The Christian missionaries from the sixteenth century were 'baptising' large number of people as 'Christians'. Such 'conversions' were not of the nature of wiping out the existing conception of the supernatural and introducing people to a new, standardised system of faith and worship. The early expansion of Christianity was mainly due to the spread of Christian cults and not due to the 'baptism' and preaching of the missionaries.[70] So the nature of Christianity established in the Tamil country was much different from that of the missionaries'. It is likely that these ceremonies of 'baptism' involved people who had already been in contact with touring Christian gurus or autonomous cult shrines. In many cases the missionaries' mass 'conversion' rites may have been the only occasion on which the new adherents actually came into contact with the European church hierarchy. Once they had undergone such a rite the 'converts' would tend to carry on as devotees of the independent gurus and their cult shrines. As a result, few of these devotees underwent any sort of formal 'conversion' to Christianity, and most of the devotees who were drawn to the new Christian saint cults were entirely

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[69] The saint cults widely prevalent among the Paravas were devoted to their tutelary Saint Francis Xavier (1506-52) and to St. James.

[70] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 380-4.

independent of European missionaries. The Christianity which was established in the Tamil country was also non-colonial (and non-imperial, as well as pre-imperial).[71]

The nineteenth century Protestant and Catholic missionaries operating in the Tamil hinterland did claim the credit for converting large masses to Christianity. Such claims notwithstanding, what really occurred was something similar to the gradual dissemination of the Sufi cult traditions in the region. There was a long period during which small groups of devotees formed around charismatic individuals and cult shrines, acquiring only a very limited appreciation of the textual or doctrinal side of Christianity. A pattern of shifting and evanescent affiliation was the norm. Those who attached themselves to these teachers and holy men did not necessarily become members of a formally constituted church under European ecclesiastical authority.[72] In the early period of hinterland devotional activity, knowledge of Christian motifs and symbols was transmitted along indigenous networks of trade and pilgrimage. This was the way in which the St Francis Xavier cult was transmitted to new devotees in the Tamil hinterland. The first missionaries to penetrate the area found that there were already shrines to St Francis in a number of inland localities, long before the establishment of the first formal missionary bases in the region. Although they rarely acknowledged the importance of these early cult centres, when the missionary organisations began to

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[71] Frykenberg. "The Impact of Conversion and Social Reform", pp. 191.

[72] The missionaries were treated as *Parangi Kulam* (western clan), who were defiled by their eating of beef and other unclean practices. So there was no possibility of the formation of a corporate identity inclusive of the missionaries and the 'converts'.

sponsor campaigns of 'mass conversion' in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they were certainly not operating in an untouched 'pagan' society. Christian symbols and cult saints had already become a well-established part of the region's religious culture by this time. Christianity, thus established, was a variant of broader patterns of Tamil worship, self-conscious of separateness but wholly, assimilated into the world of the *pir*, the *pattavan* and the indigenous power divinity. Given the importance of these cults, they were slowly incorporated and institutionalised by the foreign missionary organisations by the eighteenth century.[73] In Tamil country, Christianity and its community of followers can be understood by analysing these cult traditions, which were the essence of the 'Christianity' practised by the masses-whether they drew strong boundaries around themselves or were freely interacting with other religions neglecting these boundaries.

At an early point, the St Thomas tradition at Mylapore seems to have merged with two existing local religious traditions, the cult of one or more Muslim *pirs* and the worship of the Hindu deity, *Murukan*. The apostle in this tradition is shown as a wounded peacock. This bird is the vehicle of *Murukan* and is linked with the themes of salvation and resurrection. The grave site of the saint was even tended by a Muslim, who claimed to have been cured by the saint.[74]

In the cult of St Francis Xavier, in addition to the Christian notions of

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[73] David Mosse, "Catholic Saints and the Hindu Village Pantheon in Rural Tamil Nadu, India", *Man*, June 1994, p. 304.
[74] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 260. 263-5.

sainthood there were motifs closely associated with the Hindu and Muslim traditions like the teeming fish, the sprouting blossoms and the miraculously delivered infants.[75] The saint was revered as a fierce healer and disease-bringer and had much in common with the *pirs* and warrior *pattavan* figures of the Tamil country.

From the early period of missionary activity, many European priests were readily absorbed into the region's local pantheons of power divinities and martial hero figures. Outstanding missionaries like Robert de Nobili (1577-1656) were accepted as new but recognizable gurus. Like other gurus they were equipped with their own brand of esoteric teaching, in the case of de Nobili it was the *Vedapustakam*, the Gospel or Christian 'veda-book'. This secret knowledge endowed the priest with access to supernatural powers, and specifically to violent and demonic powers and energies. Thus in a number of local legends these early hinterland missionaries actually summon up demonic beings to engage in cosmic warfare for them. The Jesuits of Madurai were also closely associated with *Nandi*, the important Saivite divinity.[76] The cult of John de Britto (1647-93), the missionary who was executed by the Maravas, came to be associated with healing of diseases and had practices of exorcism. The Saivite motif of blood also occurs prominently in the saint's cult who became the patron of Maravas.[77]

Another famous cult figure is St James, who is the embattled guardian of

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[75] Ibid., pp. 329-30.
[76] Ibid., p. 393.
[77] Ibid., pp. 399-405.

the village territory and prosperity. Like the Hindu god *Aiyanar*, with whom he is paired, St James is known and represented as the divine warrior (*porviran*) riding on a horse trampling his enemies underfoot. *Muniaiyar*, the subordinate village deity came to be associated with the cult of St James. The annual festival of this saint is conducted in a manner exactly resembling the festivals of Tamil *ammans*. Many of the conceptions and motfs of these power divinities like wilderness, *Kotimaram*, *ter* (ceremonial vehicles) are also incorporated into this cult. In worshipping or fulfilling of vows at the shrines of male saints, cocks and goats were sacrificed.[78]

The most typical of the Christian cult leaders were Tamil devotees who operated very much in the tradition of the Hindu *guru*. These were men who had achieved their own individualistic interweaving of Hindu, Christian and even Muslim affiliations and observances. Such people tended to have little or no interest in formal sectarian and religious divisions.[79]

Two virgin cults of Tamil country which were very popular, the Tuticorin Virgin cult and *Velankanni* cult showed great overlappings with the Hindu conceptions of divinity. The Tuticorin cult has a great Golden Car (*Pon ter*), much in common with *Utsavam* festival of *Murukan* temple at Tiruccentur and Hindu festival of *Navarattiri*. Its annual festivals has the ceremonial flag hoisting (*kotterram*) and processional flags with Saivite and Vaishnavite sacred symbols

[78] Mosse, "Catholic Saints and the Hindu Village Pantheon", pp. 311, 317-20.
[79] For a description of the activities of such itinerant cult leaders, see Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 384-5. and Mosse, "Catholic Saints and the Hindu Village Pantheon", p. 308.

like, cobra, boar, bull, a figure of *Garuda* and peacock.[80] The goddess of

Velankanni is a warrior-conqueror, very much like the Hindu goddesses and has

foundation accounts with a rich admixture of Hindu and Christian motifs.[81]

Two foreign Christian missionaries, Robert de Nobili and

C.J.Beschi (1680-1764) evolved a syncretic culture in the Tamil country. De

Nobili exchanged his priestly garb for the robe of a Brahman sanyasi, adopted the

sanyasi's rigorous lifestyle and dietary customs. He identified himself as 'Roman

Sanyasi'. He took the name *Tattuvabodhakar*, 'the teacher of reality' and aimed to

reach an accommodation between the Hindu and Christian scriptural traditions.[82]

Beschi (*Viramamunivar*) also modeled himself on a Hindu guru, adopting their

customs and costumes. [83] Missionaries, by eighteenth century, started rendering

their patronage to many Christian cults like that of St Francis. Such an act helped

to confirm many of the religious and cultural traditions which the 'converts' held

in common with Tamil Hindus and Muslims. Jesuit missionaries even devised

elaborate *ter* (sacred car) processions in their permanent mission bases with an

intention to minimize divisions between the converts and 'heathens'.[84] The

converts were professing a religion which was considerably different from the

scripture-based formal Christianity preached by the missionaries.

The Paravas, Christians though, worshipped the spirit of a mythical king

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[80] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*. pp. 343-5

[81] Ibid., pp. 367-8.

[82] A. Sauliere (revised and re-edited S. Rajamanickam), *His Star in the East*, Anand, 1995, pp. 65-68, 111-12.

[83] Frykenberg, "The Impact of Conversion and Social Reform", pp. 191-2.

[84] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, p. 394.

named *Mannan Devan Parei*. At sites like this, Paravas shared with Nadars and other non-Christians in the worship of *pey* spirits, *ammans* and other 'demonic' deities. The Paravas, in their caste histories and oral traditions, related themselves and their rituals to the great Hindu temples of southern Tamil country like those of the virgin-goddesses of *Kanniyakumari* and *Minakshi* at Madurai. In their everyday worship the Paravas still identified themselves with the broad sacred landscape of the Tamil country and their conversion to Christianity never prevented them from sharing in the region's wider religious culture. The Paravas retained their old customs and connection with Hindu temples and ritualists; they even shared sacred objects used during temple utsavams with the Hindus; retain their earlier marriage customs and also maintained a special class of client ritualists , the hereditary shark-charmers called *Kadalkattis*.[85] The Paravas did not consider these un-Christian (or at least non-Christian) practices to be incompatible with their Christian affiliation.[86] The Nadar converts continued to venerate charismatic individuals such as *Sandai Nadati* for long.

There were several instances of group cults by Christians to Hindu deities. Thus one lineage of Christian Nadars offered the goddess Kali an annual cult at which members cooked *ponkal* rice and sacrificed hen. Many Christians did not cease to recognize certain village deities, even if only to protect themselves from

[85]   Ibid., pp. 332-6, 345-6, 358.

[86]   The Paravas continued to maintain *Pudams* (truncated mud or brick obelisks), for demonic spirits and divinities. The missionaries complained, on this account that the Paravas had 'reverted' back to thier old 'pagan' religion. Abbe Dubois, a French missionary who made extensive tours in the Tamil country at the beginning of the nineteenth century estimates that the missions had lost two-thirds of their adherents in the course of eight years, and the remainder were Christians only in name.

malevolent attackes of harmful spirits. There were numerous exorcism cults at the shrines of saints, or involving charismatic individuals which drew large crowds of Hindus and Christians. One of the most renowned centres of exorcism in the nineteenth century was the shrine of John de Britto at Oriyur. Similar exorcist practices were "Prevalent in the shrines of other saints such as *Vannatur Cinnapar* (Forest St Paul) and *Vannatu Antoniyar* (Forest St Anthony)".[87]

The Poligars of southern Tamil country, who perceived Christian shrines, symbols and personalities as repositories of power, provided their patronage and played a crucial role in 'indigenising' Christianity. By the 1690s the Setupatis of Ramnad had established themselves as patrons of the miracle-working banyan tree shrine of St James at Suranam. A Kallar chief is said to prayed to Jesus before a battle in A.D. 1660. In 1680s a Kallar chief of Pudukkottai is said to have developed a marked respect for Christianity. The Marava ruler of Ramnad, Cetupati Katta Tever, built a shrine for de Britto at Oriyur in the 1730s. Kallar chiefs and Marava rulers of Sokampatti and Talaivankottai gave their patronage and protection to Christian missionaries.[88] These Poligar chiefs, whom we now think of as Hindu rulers thus created the context for Christian devotional activity in the Tamil country.

There are also instances where Christian officers of English East India Company entered the local pantheon. One such officer's grave site was

[87]   Mosse, " Catholic Saints and the Hindu Village Pantheon", pp. 307, 320-23.
[88]   Ibid., p. 309; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 395-7, 401.

regarded as a powerful holy place. Since he was a *firangi* (European), a consumer of alcohol and tobacco, offerings of brandy and cheroots were made to him. Another officer, Captain Rumley who was sent to suppress the Kallars, was deified by the latter and revered as *Rumley Swamy* (Lord Rumley).[89]

Hence, Christian and Hindu worship came to share many of the same forms, rites and concepts. The dynamics of Christian worship came to reflect the society around it. Both Islam and Christianity which entered the Tamil country interacted vigorously with the local religious culture, resulting in frequent crossing at religious boundaries which the formal strands of these religions detested. In practice the two religions were capable of being radically reshaped to suit the needs of a society which revered pantheons of fierce goddesses and warrior heroes. By the eighteenth century, the shift from a broadly based Muslim tradition to an integrated Muslim community was still far from being complete amongst the groups who had come to participate in the region's *pir* cults and devotional networks. On the other hand, caste groups like Kallars and Maravas, who have now come to be understood as Hindus, were actively practising and propagating the cults of Muslim and Christian saints. Conventional distinctions between 'popular' and 'scriptural' forms of religion had little relevance in the religious culture of the region.

The Tamil country was, during this period, anything but a bastion of 'Hindu' orthodoxy. What still mattered most were forms of worship which

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[89]   Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 395-7, 401.

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confronted the power of fierce blood-taking goddesses and other divine bearers of healing and destruction. It is also true that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the religion which is now called Hinduism was developing as a complex but historically intelligible interplay of 'pure' Saivite and Vaishnavite worship with the cults and rituals of the supposedly 'impure' or 'demonic' power divinities.

The religious culture was essentially characterized by pluralism and fluidity. At no time in the immediate pre-colonial period was there a clear and unambiguous process at work by which boundaries between different religious groups were being irrevocably hardened. There were no fixed or 'traditional' religious identities in the Tamil country. Significant differences in identity did exist, but they were not 'mature' enough to harden the religious boundaries. It was only with the establishment of the colonial rule that a drastic change in this fluid religious culture came about.

Religious communities like 'Hindus', 'Muslims' and 'Christians', were yet to become ethnographic realities in the Tamil country. The adherents of these religions did not form a homogenous group. They were divided among themselves on number of other basis, like caste, language, social standing etc. The 'Hindu' community was explicitly divided by a dual classification of many of its constituent groups into *Valangai* (Right Hand) and *Idangai* (Left Hand) castes.[90] This division was also seen among the converts to Islam and Christianity. There

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[90] Arjun Appadurai, " Right and Left Hand Castes in South India", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1974, pp. 216-59.

were numerous other terms of reference like the various *Jatis*, Saiva and Vaishnava; and among the latter,[91] *Thenkalai* (southern school) and *Vadakalai* (northern school). The 'Muslims' were variously divided into Maraikkayar, Labbais, Rauttan, Pattani etc.[92] There was also a very strong division between the Tamil-speaking and Urdu-speaking Muslims.[93] The 'Christians' had a strong division on the basis of caste. There were serious caste disturbances among the Christians, which led some of the adherents to even change their religious affiliation.[94] Hence, religion was far from being the only reference point in the Tamil society there were number of other basis on which a community could be formed and collective identity articulated. In effect there was a great deal of fuzziness in the Tamil society. Sudipto Kaviraj says that these earlier communities in which people saw themselves as living were fuzzy in several ways. He writes:

> Apparently, it would never occur to them to ask how many of them there were- of the same caste, or Vaisnavas, or Saivas - in the world. A different form of this fuzziness could be a relative lack of clarity of where one's community, or even one's region ended and another equally demarcated one began. On being asked to name his community (*samaj*) such a person could take, depending on the context, the name of his village, neighbourhood, his caste, his religious denominations. Thus earlier communities tend to be fuzzy in two ways. First, they have fuzzy boundaries, because some of the most significant collective identities are not territorially based. Religion, caste, endogamous groups are all based on mainly non-territorial principles. Indeed, there would be a sense that the 'region', the world that is near is set within a world that is large, faraway, vast and limitless, but both the nearness and the vastness would be fuzzy in the same sense. People would be hard put and indeed could not be bothered to tell where the near ended and the far began. Secondly, part of this fuzziness of social mapping would arise because those communities unlike modern ones are not enumerated. The most significant implication of this is

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[91] Arjun Appadurai. *Worship and Conflict Under Colonial Rule : A South Indian Case*. New Delhi. 1983.

[92] Fanselow, " Muslim Society in Tamil Nadu". pp. 264-95.

[93] McPherson. "The Social Background and Politics", pp. 382-402. Mattison Mines. "Social Stratification Among the Muslim Tamils in Tamil Nadu, South India", in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.), *Caste and Social Statification among the Muslims in India*, Delhi, 1973, pp. 61-72.

[94] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings* , pp. 317-18, 349-50, 370-1, 410-14.

the following : they did not see historical processes as things which could be bent to our collective will if people acted concertedly on a large enough scale. Since they did not ask how many of them there were in the world, they could not consider what, if all of them gave their action some unity. could they wreak upon the world. They were thus incapable of a type of large action which have great potential for doing harm as well as good. Living in an unmapped and unenumerated world may have allowed them to live ordinarily in non-aggressive proximity.[95]

These communities were also fuzzy in one more sense:

Rarely, if ever, people would belong to a community which could claim to represent or exhaust all the layers of their complex selfhood. Individuals on suitable occasions could describe themselves as Vaisnavas, Bengalis or more likely Rarhis, Kayasthas, villagers and so on; and clearly although all these could on appropriate occasions be called their *samaj* their boundaries would not coincide. The complex sum of these identities, now anachronistically termed his self would be fuzzy.[96]

The sense of community being multiple and layered in the earlier societies, no single community was able to make demands of preemptive belonging. Such a pre-modern society was a "decentered totality held together precisely by its internal distancing, the back-to-back spacing of groups, dispersal and countervailing power" making it a "circle of circles of caste and regional communities".[97] Hence, the identities were essentially fuzzy, until the colonial rule intervened to break the fuzziness and make the society 'intelligible'.[98]

[95] Sudipto Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India", *Occasional Paper on History and Society*, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 24-25.

[96] Sudipto Kaviraj, "On the Construction of Colonial Power: Structure. Discourse. Hegemony", p. 63.

[97] Ibid., pp. 21-3,31.

[98] Sudipto Kaviraj, "Religon, Politics and Modernity", in Upendra Baxi and Bhikhu Parekh (eds.), *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India*, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 304-06.

COLONIAL MEDIATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF A 'HINDU' IDENTITY

The British, as representatives and inheritors of European Enlightenment, were 'rationalists' who attempted to live in a world that was wholly, unsurpassably, classified, enumerated-a world securely distributed into tables. All this was part of the colonial programme of bringing the world under control by precise cognition, turning every little piece of information into social technology. The British, new to India and its bewildering diversity and complexity, tried to make sense of an unfamiliar society in terms of the "familiar conventions through which rationalist modernist Europe had learnt to map its social space".[99]

The necessity to understand India grew with the expanding administration. There were efforts from the growing army of administrators to gain knowledge about the Indian society. The basic premise of the official construction of Indian social structure was derived essentially from the Orientalist discourse. The early missionary writings of Charles Grant, Claudius Buchanan, John Shore, William Carey and William Ward had made a fundamental observation that it was religion that determined *all* social formations in India. The Orientalist school further expanded this theme and established the image of an Indian society differentiated on the basis of religion. Their scriptural approach led them to conceptualize society according to the prescriptions of the classical texts. They agreed that

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[99] Kaviraj, "On the Construction of Colonial Power ", p. 25.

pristine forms had not been followed as was evident from their observations and also reflected in the latter day versions of those ancient texts. There was however, a tendency to safely discard the later variations and construct a picture of an ideal Indian society. The outcome was the building of an image of a static society that did not move either in space or in time, a society permanently divided into two main religious communities, the Hindus and the Muslims.[100]

The British also imported into India the idea of competition between relative equals which had come to characterize an increasingly democratic Europe.[101] Their idea of 'fair' administration was being 'fair' to the different competing sections, who in their view constituted the Indian society. The British identified these sections on the basis of caste and religion, which according to the Orientalist view, as described above, constituted the 'intelligible' components of India. Hence, religion along with caste became the fixed categories through which the colonial administration viewed the native society.

The colonial administration introduced into the Indian society the rationalist logic of enumeration with census and mapping. These tools intended for better control and governance gave birth to unintended consequences. They fundamentally altered the logic of community identities which were evidently

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[100] For a detailed description of the process by which the Orientalist knowledge was constructed. see P.J.Marshall (ed.), *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1970.

[101] Daniel Gold, "Organized Hinduisms: From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation", in Marty and Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, p.536.

fuzzy.[102] Members of social groups were counted in definite heads with a great amount of finality, which broke the fuzziness and gave rise to relative deliberateness with which people can choose their identities and can decide who they were.[103]

The census operations performed a greater role than merely confining themselves to taking body counts and quantifying a 'community'. They had to encounter numerous problems because the 'communities' which they understood as fixed categories were fuzzy and undefined. So they took upon themselves the task of defining a community, for the purpose of inclusion and exclusion of individuals . By attempting to define the undefined, they started defining *new* communities and gradually began to affect the Indian social situation rather than reflect it. Commenting on the role of census in a society characterized by fuzziness, Kenneth Jones writes:

> The census existed not merely as a passive recorder of data but as a catalyst for change as it both described and altered its environment. The act of describing meant providing order to that which was described and at the same time stimulating forces which would alter that order. A decade later (in case of a decinnial census) the new modified world would be delineated by the next census which would itself generate further change. This created a cyclical effect, as the census fed back into itself, becoming in the process a crucial point of interaction between the British - Indian government and its subjects....
>
> Any census carried with it seeds of ambiguity. A census normally is seen as a passive instrument, designed to gather descriptive data.... This view of the census is most correct when that which it counts exists in a clearly defined state, but relatively little life is clearly defined or placed in pre-determined categories. Those who would take a census then are first faced with the task of creating categories, listing that which will be counted and then defining those categories.... Categories necessitate definition and definitions impose order....

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[102] Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, "Construction of Social Categories: The Role of the Colonial Census", in K.S. Singh (ed.), *Ethnicity, Caste and People*, pp. 26-35.

[103] Kaviraj, "Religion, Politics and Modernity", p. 304.

from its very begining a census acts to reshape the world it will examine. Once the categories are chosen and the definition fixed, counting can begin and here again something new emerges. The definitions created by the census give numerical weight so that defining is not merely a matter of providing labels but also adding statistical content to a category. Individuals find themselves firmly fixed as members in various groups of a particular dimension and substance. Thus the census imposes order and order of a statistical nature. In time the creation of a new ordering of society by the census will act to reshape that which the census sought to merely describe.[104]

The Indian census from the very beginning had an ethnological character and used religion as one of the fundamental categories of enumeration. The census sought to give a concrete numerical shape to each religious community by discussing the size of these groups, their percentage to the whole population, relative or absolute decline and geographic distribution, indicating their majority or minority status in each region and the relative material and social condition of each religious community.[105] This attempt to provide reliable data on religions proved difficult, particularly with regard to 'Hindus' and 'Hinduism'. Counting depended on definition, and in the case of Hinduism, the search for a satisfactory definition caused continuing problems.[106]

The census reports of Madras Presidency show continuous attempts to define Hinduism.[107] The census operations began with the first general census in 1871. This census divided the 'Hindu' religionists into four classes - Saivites, Vaishnavites, Lingayats and Other Hindus (persons whose religious faith was

[104] Kenneth W. Jones, "Religious Identity and the Indian Census", in N.G.Barrier (ed.), *Census in British India: New Perspectives*, Delhi, 1984, pp. 73-5.
[105] Bandyopadhyay, "Construction of Social Categories", pp. 24-30.
[106] Regarding the problems. see, Jones, "Religious Identity and the Indian Census", pp. 79-80.
[107] In the following analysis the census reports are dealt with in the chronological order in order to grasp the successive attempts at defining religions and drawing of religious boundaries in the various decennial census.

undefined in the returns). The category "Other Hindus" included a number of hill

tribes "of whom no information as to religious profession was obtainable".[108]

Hence, there was an arbitrary classification of anyone with an undefined religious

practice as 'Hindu'. This census tends to describe Hinduism as a religion based on

the Vedas and considers "aboriginal" rites and customs as a modifying influence

on the former.[109]

In the next decennial census in 1881, Lewis McIver makes a comment on

the usage of the term 'Hindu'. He writes:

> A good deal might be said as to the propriety of the use of the word 'Hindu' as
> a religious classification.... Regarded as a definition of Religion, or even of
> Race, it is more liberal than accurate. From the point of view of Race it groups
> together such widely distinct peoples as true Aryan Brahmans and the few
> Kshatriyas...., with the Vellalas and Kallars of the South, the Nairs of the West
> and the aboriginal tribes of the Southern Hill sides. As a religious
> classification, it lumps the purest surviving forms of Vedic belief with the
> demon worshippers of Tinnevelly and South Canara. On the other hand, if it
> conveys no very distinct idea of a Race limitation or a Religious group, it
> serves fairly as a Socio-Political classification, since *it treats as a whole the
> people who recognize caste, and who are governed by one form or other of
> Hindu Law* (emphasis mine).[110]

Here, the word 'Hindu' does not come as a religious category, but as a

socio-political one. This is different from the previous census, where it was a

religious category. Recognition of caste and 'Hindu' law[111] come as the defining

criteria for the term 'Hindu' devoid of any religious content.[112]

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[108] Madras, *Census Report 1871*, p. 90.

[109] Ibid., pp. 923.

[110] Madras, *Census Report 1881*, p. 34.

[111] The 1881 Census Report also mentions that the Mappila Muslims of the Malabar coast were
following Hindu law.

[112] In the same year, i.e., 1881 the Punjab census employed a different definition of the term
'Hindu'. "Every native who was unable to define his creed, or who described it by any other
name than that of some recognized religion or of a sect of some such religion, was held to be

The next Madras census in 1891 differed significantly from the previous attempts. It gave a definition for Animism and Hinduism, which were reported as closely allied. Animism was defined as "the belief which holds the souls of the dead to be the gods of the living".[113] The Report rejected the term "aboriginal" and replaced it with Animism. Thus, the tribal people who were considered as "Hindus" in 1871 had come to be "Animists" in 1891. The 1891 census defined "Hindu" as a person who "worships any of the recognized gods of the Hindu pantheon".[114] It also mentions that the "real religion" of the vast majority of "Hindus" was based on the worship of village deities with nominal allegiance to any of the orthodox gods. Inspite of recognizing the futility of making a clear distinction between Hinduism and Animism, the 1891 census retains the clear cut division. Hence, this report imported a new definition to the term "Hindu" and defined a new religion by the name of "Animism".

The distinction between "Hinduism" and Animism is again discussed in the 1901 Madras census by W.Francis. He gives a new definition for the term 'Animism' making it much broader than the 1891 definition. He writes:

> The essentials of an animistic creed are not easy to accurately define, but may be roughly described as consisting in belief in the existence, and reverence to the powers, of souls and spirits, whether those of definite persons who were once among the living or the vague entities which primitive man locates in unusual natural objects, such as a tree of exceptional size, a curiously-shaped rock, a waterfall or a precipitous hill, or the still more indefinite influences to which, for want of any other explanation, he attributes the apparently causeless misfortunes which befall him and his fellows.[115]

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and classed as a Hindu". Cited in Jones, "Religious Identitiy and the Indian Census", p. 92.
[113] Madras, *Census Report 1891*, p. 54.,
[114] Ibid., p. 56.
[115] Madras, *Census Report 1901*, pp. 328-9.

In the census enumeration, any person belonging to a forest or hill tribe and who was neither a Hindu, a Muslim nor a Christian was identified as an "Animist". This census report following that of 1891 recognizes the artificiality of making a distinction between "Hinduism" and "Animism". W. Francis writes in the report:

".......the distinction between a Hindu and an Animist is often a shadowy affair, and that the gulf which separates the Animists from the lowest classes of Hindus is scarcely as broad as that which divides these latter from the Brahmans".[116]

This explicitly shows that the religious culture was far from being clearly defined by fixed boundaries. But the census operations continued to retain their invented categories to analyze the society. The same report also mentions the artificiality of the term 'Hindu':

> ...... the religion which, for want of a better name, is known as Hinduism is in reality..... a congeries of beliefs in which the orthodox ideas and ritual of Vedas and Puranas take a gradually decreasing share until their influence vanishes altogether, and which differ so much among one another that they might almost be classed as distinct creeds.[117]

The census of 1911 makes it very explicit that the term "Hindu", as a religious category, is a creation of the colonial administration. J.Chartres Molony writes in the report:

> It is well to remember that the strict connotation of the word Hinduism is racial and social rather than theological. European convention has applied the general terms to the theology of those Indians who do not profess adherence to some other definitely named faith, or on absolute denial of all religious faiths ..... for the ordinary Indian, when asked for his faith, is wont to specify his sect (Vaishnavite, Saivite, Smarta, etc.), or possibly his caste - answers which the enumerator as a rule, though not invariably, subsumes under the general head Hindu.[118]

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[116] Ibid., p. 41.
[117] Ibid., p. 40.
[118] Madras, *Census Report 1911*, p. 48.

This report again brings about a change in the meaning of the word "Hinduism", which it says is not theological, a position taken by the 1881 Madras census, and different from the theological definition imparted by the 1891 Madras census.

The 1911 Census Report also gives instances of fuzzy boundaries between the Hindus and Muslims. It says:

> .... there can be no doubt that certain compromises now exist in Madras between Muhammadanism and Hinduism. Propitiation of disease-godlings, worship of patron saints and local deities, veneration of relics, practisings of the black art, divinations of the future, Hindu ceremonies at birth and marriage.... abound throughout the Presidency.[119]

Molony gives further evidence of fuzzy boundaries when he mentions that "the Hindus assist the Muhammadans in carrying their God Allah in procession" at Nagore.[120] Despite noticing such fuzziness of religious boundaries, the British census efforts continued to view the Indian society as composed of numerous well defined religious communities.

The next decennial Madras census in 1921 also gives clear evidences of the problems involved in defining the "Hindu" and "Hinduism". G.T. Boag writes in the report of 1921 census:

> .....it must be admitted that the statistics collected are not satisfactory. The chief hindrance to the obtaining of accurate returns is the fact that the *terms used to classify the religious are unfamiliar to the people of the country, and do not really suggest what is meant in common parlance by religion . No Indian is familiar with the term "Hindu" as applied to his religion.* If asked what his religion is, he usually replies with the name of the sect (e.g., Saivite), to which he belongs. *Many attempts have been made to define the term*

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[119] Ibid., p. 54.
[120] Ibid., p. 55.

"Hindu", but none has been successful, and only within the last few months a
select committee of the Legislative Assembly has given up the attempt to find
an adequate definition. For the word "Hindu" implies not only certain religious
beliefs but also a certain nationality and almost necessarily a certain social
organization ..... The question what it is which all those who are labelled as
"Hindu" have in common and which those who are not Hindus are without,
admits of no easy or complete answer (emphases mine).[121]

The report thus makes explicit the falsity of the term "Hindu" and the

"sincere" efforts made by the British to define it. The term "Hindu" is imported

with a very broad meaning by making it a religious belief in addition to being a

social organization. This is in marked difference with the 1911 census, where

"Hindu" had no theological connotation. More importantly, the term "Hindu" also

comes to denote a nationality in the 1921 Census Report. This census also, despite

the fears it expressed, defines "Hindu" religion as a series of ceremonies

undertaken in order to avert harm from, or to secure benefits for himself and his

belongings".[122] The report itself makes clear reference to the impropriety of the

census operations when it accepts that "whether a man is returned as a Hindu or an

Animist depends less upon his religious beliefs and observances than upon the

enumerators' whims", and further that "the line dividing the Hindu from the

Animist is not capable of strict definition and that it varies from one census to

another".[123]

The Madras census of 1931 again redefined the "Hindu". The Brahmas and

Arya Samajis, who in the previous attempts at enumeration were considered as

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[121] Madras, *Census Report 1921*, p. 57.
[122] Ibid., pp.57-8.
[123] Ibid., pp.58.

practising different religions, were "brought within the term Hindu".[124] The

various census operations have always found it difficult to differentiate between

the "Hindu" and the "Animist". This resulted in great variations in statistics. In the

1901 Census Report there was a 35.7 per cent increase in the population of

"Animist", whereas in 1931 report there was a decrease in the same category by 40

per cent. Commenting on this problem M.W.M.Yeatts writes in the 1931 report :

> There can be no doubt however, that many enumerators, in the grip of
> *preconceptions* and unable to realize the *refinements* implied by the
> instructions and the use of a tribal name for a creed, put down Hindu for
> everything that could not be brought under specific accepted categories
> (emphases mine).[125]

If this problem implies anything, it is the fuzziness of religious boundaries. The

British were trying to create new categories which the native enumerators found

difficult to understand, because it did not reflect the religious condition, but was

creating a new one. The 1931 report also makes a reference to Hindus worshipping

a Christian and Mohammad. Despite witnessing fuzziness of religious boundaries,

the British, through census operations, imposed their fixed categories on the

society and created new religious identities. The colonial body counts created "not

only types and classes .... but also homogeneous bodies (within categories),

because number, by its nature, flattens idiosyncrasies and creates boundaries

around these homogenous bodies, since it performatively limits their extent".[126]

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[124] Madras, *Census Report 1931*, p.317.

[125] Ibid., pp.318.

[126] Arjun Appadurai, "Number in the Colonial Imagination", in Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, Philadelphia, 1993, p. 333.

In the final analysis, it is very clear that from the very beginning, religion was a fundamental category for organizing data and for attempting to understand the local society. More importantly, the census reports provided a new conceptualization of religion as a community, an aggregate of individuals united by a formal definition and given characteristics based on qualified data. Religions became communities mapped, counted and, above, all *compared* with other religious communities. In this manner the census created a new way of thinking about religion. This new conceptualization would in turn flow from the census reports back to literate Indians who were initially seen as mere subjects of these reports.

The British also introduced a new 'representative' political system through successive constitutional reforms. This political system rested on the data supplied by the census as well as on a mentality derived in part from it. Hence, what had initially begun as concepts in the minds of British officials became categories in the census reports. These categories, in turn, were defined, elaborated and given statistical substance over the decades, finally to emerge as social and cultural divisions fixed permanently in the constitutional structure of British India. More significantly, these categories were also well fixed in the minds of educated Indians.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century educated Indians became increasingly aware of the census. They began to look for an official view of their own world, a view which supported many of their hopes and fears. This new sense

of religious community, along with the nascent consciousness of numbers distinct from one another, led to efforts at consolidation of the individual religious communities as defined by the colonial census. The announcement of the separate electorate for the Muslims in 1909 further drew a line between them and the Hindus and Christians. All this led to an increasing consciousness of the religious identities among the political actors at least in the urban areas of Tamil region. The further hardening of religious identity in the Tamil society was checked by the intervention of the Self-respect and Dravidian Movements. These movements on the one hand problematized the Hindu identity as constituting multiple relations of power and as a consequence rendered any invocation of a monolithic Hindu identity difficult.[127] Identities were articulated by these movements on the basis of caste and language.[128] Moreover, they were in close cooperation with the Muslims and Christians and rendered the Hindu identity meaningless.[129] The Tamil society, hence, did not witness an effective consolidation of Hindu identity, until recent times, when the rising mobilization by Hindu organizations created a new situation.

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[127] S. Anandhi, *Contending Identities: Dalits and Secular Politics in Madras Slums*, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 22-25.

[128] M.S.S., Pandian, "Towards National-Popular: Notes on Self-Respecters Tamil", *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 1996, pp. 3323-29.

[129] J.B.P.More, "Tamil Muslims and non-Brahmin Atheists, 1925-1940", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1993, pp. 83-103.

CHAPTER - III

HINDU ORGANIZATIONS IN TAMILNADU:

STRUCTURE AND IDEOLOGY

The definition of Hindu identity is of utmost importance for the Hindu organizations. As described in the previous chapter the Hindu identity was fuzzy and undefined. In this context, the first major attempt to define the Hindu identity was made by Savarkar, whose definition was accepted and formed the basis of activities of the Hindu organizations. Hence, it is essential to understand Savarkar's definition of 'Hindu' before proceeding to study the structure and ideology of the Hindu organisations.

HINDUTVA : IDENTIFYING THE 'HINDU'

Who is a Hindu? Despite efforts made by the colonialists and early nationalists, for different reasons though, thiss intriguing question remained unanswered. The nationalists, who had by then began to organize themselves against the colonial rule, were trying to define the basis of their nation. It was in this context that the word 'Hindu' began to acquire prominence in the nationalist discourse. The word 'Hindu' was used in numerous ways to refer to various entities. It had at least two distinct meanings; firstly, it referred to "whoever lives in Hindustan, what ever his colour or caste" and secondly, to the people belonging

to 'Hindu' religion as distinct from the Muslims, Christians etc.[1] But, even when people were referred to as Hindus, Muslims, Christians etc., according to their religion, it was always not clear who was included, and who was excluded from the category.

The need for defining the 'Hindu' gained new urgency with the increasingly felt necessity for organizing and unifying the "Hindu Nation" in the 1920s. The context for this was provided by the emergence of countrywide mass political organizations and agitations. It was also propelled by "what was perceived as a quite new and threatening level of Muslim organization, preparedness and militancy" and a powerful Sikh movement which sought to reform gurudwaras through community control. Commenting on this situation, Gyanendra Pandey writes:

> In any event, at the turn of the 20th century, there was still much uncertainty about the collectivity called Hindu community, and many different meanings still attached to the term 'Hindu'. One question, in particular, had by then been posed sharply. That was whether Buddhists and Jains, Sikhs, members of different Bhakti sects such as the Kabirpanthis and Vallabhacharyas, and also of course the untouchable and 'tribal' groups and castes who literally lived on the physical/geographical fringes of settled Hindu society, whether all of these groups were to be included among the Hindus or not. It was precisely this question of who was a Hindu that Savarkar set out to resolve once and for all as he would have it, in his book *Hindutva*.[2]

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the former head of a secret society which was scheming against the British rule and the future president of the Hindu Mahasabha

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[1] Gyanendra Pandey, "Hindus and Others : The Militant Hindu Construction", *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 1991, p. 2999.

[2] Ibid.

(1937-42) wrote *Essentials of Hindutva* which was first published in 1923 at Nagpur. Faced with the multiplicity of 'Hinduisms' existing during his own and earlier times, Savarkar in his work, sought to develop a criterion for the definition of a 'Hindu' . His agenda was to locate a unity which had existed from time immemorial and which could both stand out clearly against the recognized heterogeneity of Indian civilization, while accommodating the many pluralities which existed. Savarkar's definition of a 'Hindu' and his effort to identify a unified Hindu culture was an attempt to project an easily comprehensible Hindu identity capable of becoming a rallying point for cultural assertiveness and political action. With this in his mind, Savarkar defines a 'Hindu' as one who,

> .....looks upon the land that extends from Sindhu to Sindhu - from the Indus to the seas as the land of his forefathers - his Fatherland (*Pitribhu*), who inherits the blood of that race whose first discernible source could be traced to the Vedic Saptasindhus and which on its onward march, assimilating much that was incorporated and ennobling, much that was assimilated, has come to be known as the Hindu people, who has inherited the claims as his own the culture of that race as expressed chiefly in their common classical language, Sanskrit, and represented by common history, a common literature, art and architecture, law and jurisprudence, rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacraments, fairs and festivals; and who above all,. addresses this land, this Sindhusthan as his holy land (*Punyabhu*) as the land of his prophets and seers, of his godmen and gurus, the land of piety and pilgrimage. These are the essentials of Hindutva- a common nation (Rashtra), a common race (Jati), and a common civilization (Sanskriti).[3]

The Hindu identity, as outlined above by Savarkar is essentially based on three factors territoriality, blood and culture. It is the cognitive recognition of these three factors as the defining elements of one's identity which constitutes Hindutva.

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[3]   V.D. Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, Bombay, 1986, pp. 115-16.

As the definition of 'Hindu' by Savarkar suggests, "Hindutva" may not be primarily regarded as a religious term. In fact, religion does not figure as a criterion for identifying a 'Hindu'. But, at the same time, religion is also not totally excluded from Savarkar's definition of "Hindutva". Religion comes as an essential part of the "Hindutva", for it embraces nearly the whole of what is called as culture by Savarkar, and influences the inclusion and exclusion of people as 'Hindus'. Bailey tends to suggest the same when he writes:

> .....Savarkar tries to locate his message in the general construction of a distinct view of Hindu culture, a broader concept than religion alone, but that this evokes on the margins strong associations with Hinduism as some kind of entity different from the other religions which exist on Indian soil. Above all, Savarkar is resorting to tradition as a concept which is broader than but inclusive of religion.[4]

Hence, religion is very much a part of the cultural criteria talked about by Savarkar and, as the following analysis will show, it becomes instrumental in excluding Muslims and Christians from the category of 'Hindu'.

The notion of territory was at the heart of Savarkar's ideological construct. For him the territory of India cannot be dissociated from Hindu culture and the Hindu people. He regarded Hindus as pre-eminently the descendants of the "intrepid Aryans (who) made it (the subcontinent) their home and lighted their first sacrificial fire on the bank of the (river) Indus".[5] Savarkar considers this river to be the western border of the Hindu nation. He writes:

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[4] Greg Bailey, "Whither the BJP?: A Political Movement or just a Group of Religious Revivalists?", *South Asia*, vol. 17, 1994, p.121.

[5] Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, pp. 4 - 5.

Sindhu in Sanskrit does not only mean the Indus but also the sea - which girdles the southern peninsula - so that this one word Sindhu points out almost all frontiers of the land at a single stroke.... and so the epithet Sindhustan calls up the image of our whole Motherland : the land that is between Sindhu and Sindhu - from the Indus to the sea.[6]

For Savarkar a 'Hindu' was therefore an inhabitant of the zone between the rivers, the seas and the Himalayas. He regarded this territorial unity as the reason why the first Aryans developed the sense of unity of a people and even a "sense of nationality". Thus, territoriality is one of the factors of a Hindu, but for Savarkar it was not as important as the factor of blood which unites all Hindus. He writes:

> The Hindus are not merely the citizens of the Indian State because they are united not only by the bonds of the love they bear to a common motherland but also by the bonds of a common blood. They are not only a nation but race-Jati. The word Jati, derived from the root Jan, to produce, means a brotherhood, a race determined by a common origin, possessing a common blood. All Hindus claim to have in their veins the blood of the mighty race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic fathers.[7]

Territory, as Savarkar argues, by itself does not define the Hindu people; instead, the common origin (blood) is what unites them and enables them to be called as "Hindus". Commenting on Savarkar's concept of "common blood" Jaffrelot writes that Savarkar "rejects any form of nation state based on an abstract social contract and thereby comprising individualized citizens dwelling within country's administrative frontiers ..... (but instead) emphasis the ethnic and racial

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[6] Ibid., p. 32.
[7] Ibid., pp. 84 - 85

substance of the Hindu nation".[8] This concept of "common blood" is significant

for the other religious communities like Muslims and Christians. Savarkar

regarded vast majority of them as "Hindus" by race; because, of the "common

blood" which the local converts had in their veins. Savarkar suggests that they

could be 'reintegrated' into Hindu society. He even invited the descendants of the

invaders from Central Asia to become assimilated in the same way as their

predecessors, the Huns and the Sakas. But this "common blood" alone does not

qualify the local converts to be regarded as Hindus. Savarkar argues that even if

India was in this sense their Fatherland these communities no longer recognized it

as their Holyland. They also did not look upon Sanskrit as their sacred language.

Hence, the factors of territoriality and blood alone do not make a person

"Hindu" in addition to that there should be an element of "common culture".

Savarkar defines this in the following words.

> Hindus are bound together not only by the tie of the love we bear to a common fatherland and by the common blood that courses through our veins and keeps our hearts throbbing and our affections warm, but also by the tie of the common homage we pay to our great civilization - our Hindu culture, which could not be better rendered than by the word Sanskriti suggestive as it is of that language, Sanskrit, which has been the chosen means of expression and preservation of that culture, of all that was best and worth-preserving in the history of our race. We are one because we are a nation, a race and own a common Sanskriti (civilization).[9]

The above words of Savarkar undoubtedly prove that cultural criteria

rather than the other two mentioned by him, namely, territoriality and blood, was

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[8] Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925 to the 1990s*, New Delhi, 1996, p. 28.

[9] Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, p. 12.

the chief determinant of the Hindutva. Hence, Savarkar's definition of Hindutva is characterized by cultural determinism. More important to this discussion is the fact that the culture which Savarkar talks about here is the one expressed and preserved by Sanskrit language. This qualification essentially narrows down the concept of culture to that which is associated with the Sanskrit language alone. Sanskrit is falsely cited by Savarkar as the common reference-point for all Indian languages and in accordance with classical Brahminical texts, as "language par excellence".[10] This necessitates every political programme reflecting Hindu nationalist ideology to recognize Sanskrit or Hindi (which Savarkar termed as the "eldest daughter" of Sanskrit) as the national language.

This cultural criteria also excludes the Muslims and Christians from the category of Hindus. Though Savarkar regarded them as Hindus territorially and by race, he disqualified them on cultural grounds. He writes: "Mohammedan or Christian communities posess all the essential qualifications of Hindutva but one and all that is that they do not look upon India as their holyland".[11] He further explains the reason for excluding them from the category of Hindu, in cultural and religious terms: "Their holyland is far off in Arabia and Palestine. Their mythology and godmen, ideas and heroes are not the children of this soil. Consequently their names and their outlook smack of foreign origin. Their love is divided".[12]

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[10] Ibid., p. 95
[11] Ibid., p. 113.
[12] Ibid.

Using the cultural criteria and blaming the converts for forgetting their fatherland and having different holyland, Savarkar excludes them from his definition of a 'Hindu'. They can become Hindu only by adopting the culture of the land and regarding it as their holyland. Savarkar writes:

> ......any convert of non-Hindu parentage to Hindutva can be a Hindu , if bonafide, he or she adopts our land as his or her country and marries a Hindu, thus coming to love our country as a real fatherland, and adopts our culture and thus adores our land as the Punyabhu (sacred land). The children of such a union as that would, other things being equal, be most emphatically Hindus.[13]

Hence, the Muslim and Christians have to give up their culture (religion) and adopt the Hindu culture to become Hindus. In Savarkar's formulation only Hindus are the legitimate, "sons" of India and hence, Hindus are by birthright entitled to rule India. If the Muslims and Christians did not change their culture then as Pandey suggests they "had a place in the country, *albiet* probably a subordinate one, as 'citizens' ('Bharatiya' or 'Indian')".[14] The definition of 'Hindu' offered by Savarkar, thus, successfully excludes the Muslims and Christians; but at the same time it also includes a large number of other religious categories.

With the help of the three criteria which he had outlined, Savarkar began to decide who were to be included within the Hindu community. The Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs fulfilled his test of "Hinduness" and were duly included within the category of Hindu. Hence, his "Hindu" was not limited to a particular religious

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[13] Ibid., p. 130.
[14] Pandey, "Hindus and Others", p. 3000.

community; instead, it was an all-embracing category which included those who regarded Hindusthan as their "holy land" and excluded Muslims and Christians.

Savarkar argues that the Aryans who settled in India had already formed a nation and it was this which was now embodied in the Hindus. The Hindus are thus imparted a great sense of antiquity and naturalness. Arguing for the antiquity of the word 'Hindu' he writes:

> It is quite probable that the great Indus was known as Hindu to the original inhabitants of our land and owing to the vocal peculiarity of the Aryans it got changed into Sindhu. Thus, Hindu would be the name that this land and the people that inhabited it bore from time so immemorial that even the Vedic name Sindhu is but a later and secondary form of it. If the epithet Sindhu dates its antiquity in the glimering twilight (sic) of history then the word Hindu dates its antiquity from a period so remoter (sic) than the first that even mythology fails to penetrate - to trace it to its source.[15]

Savarkar assigned the problem of ambiguity of the word 'Hindu' to the loose and eclectic usage of the terms 'Hindu', 'Hinduism' and 'Hindutva' in the recent past. Savarkar sought to differentiate these terms and impart definite meaning to them. According to him, while Hindutva denoted the historical, racial and cultural totality constituting the Hindu nation, Hinduism was the totality of all religious beliefs held by different communities of Hindus. "Hindutva", wrote Savarkar, "is not a word but a history. Not only the spiritual of religious history of our people as at times it is mistaken to be...., but a history in full. Hinduism is

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[15]   Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, p. 10.

only a derivative, a fraction a part of Hindutva. Unless it is made clear what is meant by the latter the first remains unintelligible and vague".[16]

Hindutva, thus was inclusive of Hinduism but was something more than that Savarkar tries to outline what 'Hinduism' actually means:

> Hinduism means the 'ism' of the Hindu; and as the word Hindu has been derived from the word Sindhu,...... meaning primarily all the people who reside in the land that extends from Sindhu (the Indus to the seas), Hinduism must necessarily mean the religion or the religions that are peculiar and native to this land and these people.[17]

He was against using the word wrongly to refer only to Vaidik or Sanatan Dharma. He argued that properly speaking the word 'Hinduism' should be applied to all the religious beliefs that the different communities of "Hindu" people held. Hence, he equated 'Hinduism' with the generic term "Hindu Dharma" which for him encompassed Sanatan Dharma, the religion of the "majority of Hindus" as well as the religions of the remaining Hindus, Sikh, Arya, Jain and Buddha dharma. Aware of the problems which arose due to conflation of 'Hinduism' with Sanatan Dharma, he writes:

> We have tried already to draw a clear line of demarcation between the two conceptions and protested against the wrong use of the word Hinduism to denote the *Sanatan Dhama* alone. Hindutva is not identical with Hinduism. This two fold mistake that identifies Hindutva with Hindu *Dharma* and both with *Sanatan* sect is justly resented by our non-*Sanatan* sects or religious systems and goads a small section of people amongst them not to explode this mistaken notion, but unfortunately to commit another grave and suicidal mistake in the opposite direction and disown their Hindutva itself. We hope that our definition will leave no ground for any such bitterness.[18]

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[16] Ibid., p. 3.
[17] Ibid., p. 104.
[18] Ibid., p. 121.

Savarkar by giving a broader definition for "Hinduism" was keen to project a unity between the different religious groups in India, excluding the Muslims and Christians. Savarkar was in fact describing the Muslim as the 'other' of the 'Hindu'. Savarkar in his *Hindutva* develops the notion that there is an organized enemy against whom the Hindus have been fighting throughout their history. The language he uses is very significant; he writes: "Nothing makes self-conscious of itself so much as a conflict with non-self. Nothing can weld peoples into a nation and nations into a state as the *pressure of a common foe* (emphasis mine)".[19] This statement is unambiguously directed at the subject of identity, the construction of a distinct Hindu identity being one of the principal themes of Savarkar's work. In conjunction with the development of a tightly defined Hindu identity Savarkar is also concerned to advance a specific Hindu militancy. This is justified using the language of distinctiveness of identity and racial unity:

> All those on this side of the Indus who claimed the land from Sindhu to Sindhu, from the Indus to the seas, as the land of their birth, felt that they were directly mentioned by that one single expression, Hindusthan. The enemies hated us as Hindus and the whole family of peoples and races, sects and creeds that flourished from Attock to Cuttack was suddenly individualized into a single Being.[20]

For Savarkar, the 'other' was primarily the Muslim and the British. In his later writings, denunciation of Muslims becomes more strident. According to Bailey, "these attacks were couched in the language of what might be called

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[19] Ibid., pp. 42-43.
[20] Ibid., p. 45.

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'majoritarianism' ".[21] Muslims were attacked because of their tradition of conquest and post-colonial concessions. His strongest statement is his call to the Hindus to take up arms against Muslims: "to forestall and counteract this Islamite peril our state must raise a mighty force exclusively constituted by Hindus alone, must open arms and munitions factories exclusively manned by Hindus alone and mobilize everything on a war scale".[22]

Hence, in the final analysis Savarkar was able to project a new Hindu identity which excluded Muslims and Christians, but included within its fold Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists etc. By this he gave a new dimension to the politics of religious identity. The importance of his definition of Hindutva is well presented in the publisher's preface to the book; which observed that,

> The definition (of Hindutva) acted as does some scientific discovery of a new truth in reshaping and re-co-ordinating all current Thought and Action....... At its touch (sic) arose an organic order where a chaos of castes and creeds ruled. The definition provided a broad basic foundation on which a consolidated and mighty Hindu Nation could take a secure stand.[23]

The Hindu organizations influenced by this definition of Savarkar began to mobilize the Hindus. This definition further hardened due to increase in clashes between the Hindu and Muslim politicians in the course of the national movement. The demand for Pakistan and the consequent partition resulted in the Hindu organizations viewing Indian nation as coterminus with the Hindu community.

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[21]   Bailey, "Whither the BJP?", p. 120.
[22]   Cited in Lise Mckean, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement*, Chicago, 1995, p. 89.
[23]   Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, p. vi.

RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS- Association of National Volunteers) was founded at Nagpur in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889-1940), a successful modern doctor who gave up his practice for the sake of the new organization. The colonial domination and a perception of "threat" from the Muslims awoke the feelings of vulnerability of Hindu society in Hedgewar. He saw the Hindus as effeminate, spineless and non-martial, and as a result vulnerable to the more aggressive faiths such as Islam and Christianity. Hindus were also seen as unorganized, steeped in religious superstitions and, hence, incapable of resisting the more organized, rational faiths. Hedgewar was convinced that to avert the dangers to their faith, the Hindus should organize themselves. This conviction compelled him to find a new organization to impart a new character to the Hindu society. In this he was influenced by Savarkar and Balakrishna Shriram Moonje, his friend and senior, to give a district cultural orientation to the RSS. The prominent members of the RSS have often described their organization publicly not as a religious institution within Hinduism, but as a cultural organization.[24]

Hedgewar recognized Hinduism as an evolving religious-cultural tradition that encompasses many dimensions of life. He thought that, out of the many different elements emphasized at times during Hinduism's long evolution, some

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[24] Culture here is understood in a broad inclusive sense informing the various aspects of religious, economic and political life.

were more valuable than others. Naturally then, he looked back to the legends of the Maratha ruler Shivaji, which he saw as the most glorious Hindu epoch and tried to codify a framework for Hindu community that would reunite Hindus around the values foregrounded there. As a result he wanted to build the RSS into "a symbol of martial, organized, rational Hinduism, stripped of its pagan superstitions".[25]

The RSS was not influenced by a glorious Hindu past alone. Instead there is a discernible combination of authentically Hindu and colonial western elements in it. The latter is best explained by the uniform the members of RSS wear; which includes khaki shorts and *lathis* (bamboo sticks), a combination clearly borrowed from the colonial police[26]. This para-military style of the RSS is a reflection of its attempt to introduce in Hindu society the cohesion and strength of the foreign aggressors. Moreover, there was also an assimilation of cultural and political features of the West such as European forms of extreme nationalism under the guise of a reinterpretation of traditional institutions and values, namely the *akhara*, asceticism and the Hindu sect.[27]

The organization clearly aimed at "the creation of an individual political activist with a vision of Hindu cultural renewal through personal discipline".[28]

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[25] Ashis Nandy and others, *Creating a Nationality : Ramjanmabhumi Movement and the Fear of the Self*, Delhi, 1993, p. 83.

[26] Ibid., p.84.

[27] Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925 to the 1990s*, New Delhi., 1996 pp.34-5. The term *akhara* designates a place where the young men of a locality gather every day for exercises, mainly body-building and wrestling.

[28] Daniel Gold, "Organized Hinduisms : From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation", in Marty and Appleby (eds), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 533.

The transformation of man is given supreme importance in the RSS; such a change was regarded as a necessary prerequisite for revitalizing society and for sustaining it. Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (1906-73), the successor of Hedgewar mentions four virtues that characterize the ideal person. The first is "invincible physical strength", by which he means the calm resolve needed for commitment to disciplined activity and not physical strength in the conventional sense. The second virtue, "character", is a personal resolve to commit oneself to a noble cause. Golwalkar, however, says that these two virtues must be guided by "intellectual acumen", the third virtue. Lastly,"fortitude" is a virtue which permits the honourable person to persevere in a virtuous life.[29] Thus, the virtuous individual is characterized by industriousness combined with a jealous and painstaking adherence to *dharma*. The RSS seeks to create such individuals with cultural and national loyalties through the institution of sha*kha* (local branch).[30]

Organization: The Building Blocks

From its inception, the basic unit of the RSS has been the *shakha*, which was conceived as, and still is, as the chief instrument for organizing the Hindu community. Membership in *shakha* varies between fifty to hundred male

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[29] M.S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, Bangalore. 1996 pp. 49-53.

[30] Golwalkar writes about the men whom the Shakhas aim to create:
"The Swayamsevak is a missionary with a national vision. Intensely aware that he is to work out the great plan of organizing a nation torn asunder for the past thousand years with thousand and one considerations, he resolves to prepare himself for that historic role. He learns to harmonise and direct his natural impulses, emotions and tendencies so as to become an effective instument for the task of national reconstruction. He effaces from his mind all ideas of selfish gains, of pelf and power of name and fame, while he serves the nation". Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*. p. 413.

participants. The numbers are consciously kept low to improve the group solidarity. The small numbers and orientation to a particular neighbourhood, where participants come from similar social background enhances the social solidarity within each *shakha*.

Each *shakha* is divided into four age groups: *shishu swayamsevaks* -six to ten year; *bal swayamsevaks* - ten to fourteen; *taruna swayamsevaks*-fourteen to twenty eight; *proudh swayamsevaks* - twenty -eight and older. Anderson and Damle say that their research convincingly substantiates the findings of J.A. Curram that about sixty percent of the *shakha* participants belonged to the age group between eighteen and twenty-five.[31] The *shakha*, is held seven days a week, in the morning, early evening, and at night. For those who cannot attend on a daily basis there are weekly and monthly *shakhas*.

The various age groups in each *shakha* are further divided into *gatas* (groups), the number of participants rarely exceeding twenty. A *gatanayak* (*gata* leader) and a *shikshak* (teacher) are attached to each *gata*. Both of them are appointed by the *shakha's mukhya shikshak* (chief teacher). A *gatanayak* is expected to be an "elder brother" of the other *swayamsevaks* in his group and a model of ideal behaviour, whom his *gata*-mates can emulate. He is responsible to his superiors for their behaviour and for their loyalty to the RSS. The *shikshak* teaches the games and exercises which the *swayamsevak* is expected to master. He

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[31] Walter Anderson and Shridhar D.Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron : The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*, New Delhi, 1987, p. 84.

may also lead his *gata* in discussions, a regular feature of the *shakha*. *Gatanyaks* and *shikshaks* usually meet with the local *pracharak* (full-time worker) once in every ten to fifteen days to discuss matters pertaining to the *shakha* like attendance, programmes, the functioning of the *shakha* and also RSS policy regarding various political and social issues, which gives them an orientation and helps them in their interactions with their *gata*-mates. These two functionaries form the first level in the RSS hierarchy and are the initial testing ground for the organization's leadership.

The *karyavah* (secretary), an older and respected member of the locality is the *de jure* authority of every *shakha*. The *de facto* authority, however, resides with the *mukhya shikshaks*, most of them having advanced through the ranks from the *gatanayak* and *shikshak* levels.The success of any *shakha* depends, to a large extent, on area leadership ability of a *mukya shikshak*. Most areas also have a *karyalay* (RSS office), where *swayamsevaks* come to discuss with the *pracharak* and to meet other *swayamsevaks*. The *shakha* is the base of the pyramid of authority above which there are number of levels, with the *sarsanghchalak* (RSS chief), "the guide and philosopher", at the apex (see Annexure I).

Outside this "constitutional" system are the *pracharaks*, who form a communications network and in whom resides the real power in the RSS structure. They are the links between the various levels of the RSS hierarchy and constitute the backbone of the organization. Hedgewar called on the *pracharaks* to

"become sadhus first".[32] Following the precedence set by their founder, the *pracharaks* renounce their professions and generally remain celibate in order to devote themselves to the mission of regenerating the Hindu community. They live an austere life of total devotion to the cause, one which professes to be a form of *karma yoga*, the yoga of action. They have the commitment, expertise and time to manage the RSS activities. The *pracharaks* report to each other on the affairs of the RSS at periodic conclaves at both the state and all-India levels; which helps the organization to develop a unified outlook throughout the country.

The state *pracharak* recruits most of the *pracharaks* in consultation with the local officials who know the applicant. Most of the *pracharaks* are recruited in their early twenties.[33] The state units determine their own manpower needs and have considerable discretion in assigning their own *pracharaks*,. However, the ultimate power for their placement resides with the *sarkaryavaha* (national general secretary), who may shift them to other states or "loan" them to affiliate organizations.

The *pracharaks* on "loan" have a dual loyalty - one to the RSS and the other to the affiliated organization. They occupy the major administrative positions in the affiliates. They are looked upon as the human instruments for the revitalization of society".[34] They consult with RSS leaders on unresolved internal controversies, on personnel selection and on major issues which confront the

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[32] Cited in Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, p. 244.

[33] Anderson and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, p. 88.

[34] Ibid., p. 80.

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organization. The advice of senior RSS figures is not necessarily accepted, but it is *respected* as the opinion of "detached " individuals. Anderson and Damle during the course of their research found almost all the *pracharaks* affirming that their primary loyalty was to the RSS and insisting that they would leave the affiliate if they chose to develop a separate path from the RSS.

Training : Making Men of "Character"

The *shakha's* activities form the core of the "character-building" process. Gold mentions the contention of prominent RSS members, that they have joined the organization to "build character"- both their own character and that of the nation.[35] In the *shakha* the participation in rituals and discussions, a common uniform, and the choice of physical activities are all designed to enhance a sense of community. This factor is vividly described in the following words by Golwalkar:

> It is in the sanctifying presence of the Bhagawa Dhawaj (the RSS flag) that the day-to-day activities of the Shakha are carried on. All sections of our people gather there. Forgetting all superficial distinctions of language, province, caste, community, party or sect, they gather as children of a common motherland and play in her sacred dust. They pray to the motherland in deep veneration. They resolve to lay down their lives for her glory. As they play and sing, a feeling of oneness brings them together. As they perform exercises together and march together, their hearts begin to throb in unison.

> More important than the programme is the atmosphere. An air of sweetness and sanctity pervades the atmosphere. In course of time, amidst the wide variety and diversity of the assembling persons, a wholesome unity emerges. The spirit of amity and harmony strikes root in their minds. And the inspiring dream of national unity submerging social, political , economic and other divisions becomes a living reality. Thus the shakha is the crucible which awakens noble impulses of dedicated patriotic service in our people and binds them together

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[35] Gold , "Organized Hinduism", p. 534.

with immortal fraternal bonds. It is the creative centre for sterling national character and lasting national cohesion.[36]

Shakhas are conducted on an open ground. The programme begins with the *swayamsevaks* arranging themselves in rows (in some cases half circles) before a flag staff. The rows may have up to twenty people (a *gata*): The rows of *shishu*, *bal*, *taruna* and *proudh*, stand from left to right facing the staff. At the front is the *agressar* (leader), usually the *gatanayak*, and the *shikshak* is at the back of the row. When the rows are assembled, the *Bhagava Dhwaj* is raised. This flag, associated with Shivaji, is the sacred image of the RSS and is honoured as the " guru" and the symbol of the "Nation-God".

Having raised the banner, the *swayamsevaks* offer *pranam* (salute) by raising the right hand to the chest, palm parallel to the ground, head bowed. Following roll call, the *swayamsevaks* assemble in different areas of the field in *gata* groups. The *shikshaks*, assisted by the *gatanayaks*, teach games and yogic exercises to the *swayamsevaks*.

The number of games is quite large and all of them are meant to build a spirit of cooperation.[37] The most popular game is Kabbadi. Sometimes "defensive" skills such as the use of *lathi* and sword are taught. After about half an hour the physical part of the programme ends. Then the members assemble in a

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[36] Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, p. 396.
[37] Anderson and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, p. 90.

circle for the discussion period, either in separate *gata*, combinations of *gata* , or as a single group. The themes of the discussion mostly relate to attributes of "good" character; like fidelity, fortitude, honesty, obedience to superiors, personal discipline, the need for unity in India, or some hero or heroic event in the history of Hindu India. Occasionally, patriotic songs are sung. Most of these songs praise Hindu warriors and heroes or describe the beauty of the Motherland.

Finally, the *swayamsevaks* again assemble in rows before the flag. The Sangh *prarthana* (RSS prayer) is then recited in Sanskrit by the whole group. After this structured part, the participants are encouraged to mix informally and visit the sick and those absent.[38]

A local *swayamsevak* is expected to attend the *shakha* every day. Absence from the *shakha* is considered one of the more serious offences against RSS discipline. The *mukhya shikshak* and the *gatanayak* visit the person who misses the *shakha*. Indiscipline during *shakha* attracts some immediate punishment.

There are also special *baudhik* (intellectual sessions), scheduled a few times each month, where a single *shakha* or a group of *shakhas* meet for a prepared lectures with issues to discuss at *shakha*. Occasionally, these meetings are also utilized to explain policy decisions made at Nagpur, to seek opinions on social and political issues, on to draw the *swayamsevaks'* attention to major organizational and ideological problems facing the Sangh.

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[38] Ibid., p. 91.

Each year the RSS celebrates six *utsavas* (festivals) : *Varsh Pratipad* (the Hindu New Year), *Hindu Samrajya Divotsav* (the Coronation Ceremony of Shivaji), *Raksha Bandhan* (when a sister reaffirms her brother's obligation of continuing protection by tying a silk thread around her brother's wrist), *Guru Dakshina* (Offerings to the Teacher), *Dasara* (commemorating the victory of Ram over Ravana) and the *Makar Sankranti* (the winter solstice). These festivals not only articulate the experience of those taking part, they also help to shape the spirit of the group.[39]

The RSS conducts a large number of camps to indoctrinate the *swayamsevaks*, to offer them instructions regarding teaching in the *shakhas* and to develop a sense of solidarity among members. The camps are roughly of three types. The first are the Instructors' Training Camps (ITC) usually conducted by district committees. These camps last about fifteen days, are isolated from outside contacts and are totally self-sufficient. The ITC camps are intended primarily for the older members and the emphasis is on the intellectual aspects of the RSS programme.

There are also numerous three day camps conducted throughout the year. Some are designed for specific groups like school students, college students, businessmen etc. These camps are particularly attractive to the younger members of the RSS.

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[39] Ibid., pp. 92-4.

By far the most important camps are the Officers Training Camps (OTC) which are aimed at training workers of the RSS. These camps are conducted for about are month during the summer months. Every *pracharak* is expected to attend two of these camps. Teachers and other office bearers attend at least one, while the *swayamsevaks* can attend after obtaining permission from the *shakha's mukhya shikshak* and the local *pracharak*. Those who have completed the second year of OTC are encouraged to attend the third year training camp held at Nagpur. The various activities carried out in the camp are designed to develop a sense of solidarity among the participants. The seminars and lectures frequently emphasize the unity of all Hindus. These activities are designed to teach the participants the games, exercises and songs which form the basis of the *shakha's* programme. All these activities and the various structural blocks are essentially means to achieve particular goals which are discernable from the ideological orientation of the organization.

Ideology

The RSS ever since its inception has come to represent an ideology which it has tried to advance vigorously, generating fear and criticism in the country. The Sangh finds its intellectual foundations for a new Hindu community, the development of which was its primary goal, not in the codified doctrines that might provide reasons for discord, but in a few basic nationalist concepts more ideologically attractive than analytically precise.

The corporate Hindu Nation (Bharat) is identified as the "living God" , as a deity to be worshipped, as the only land for the Hindus to live in and as having a mission to fulfill for the whole world.[40] Golwalkar, whose contribution to the RSS ideology is immense, argues that there are five components of this Hindu Nation "Geographical (Country), Racial (Race), Religious (Religion), Cultural (Culture) and Linguistic (Language), that the loss or destruction of any one of these means the end of the Nation as a Nation".[41] He argues that only the unity of these five components can keep India as a Hindu Nation. The metaphor of the Divine Mother is used to describe both the nation and the "sacred" geography where the nation resides. Both are considered to be material emanations from the *Sakti*. In this way both the land and the nation are impregnated with divinity.

Bharat is repeatedly depicted as the original and only homeland of the Hindus. The theory of Aryan invasion is rejected as "The Great Myth".[42] Bharat is also depicted as the place where Hindu culture and civilization have developed, where the common history of the Hindus has been unfolding. Bharat figures as a necessary condition for the preservation of Hindus and Hinduism. Thus, the land gains its importance as the basic requirement for Hinduness and is represented as the territorial basis for Hindu Rashtra. The nation as a "sacred" geography is spoken of as extending from Iran in the west to the Malay peninsula in the east,

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[40] Golwalkar , *Bunch of Thoughts* , pp. 356, 81-96.

[41] M.S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur, 1939, p. 33.

[42] Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts* , p. 114. Golwalkar in contrast with Savarkar claims that the Hindus did not come from outside but were the indigenous children of the soil since time immemorial.

from Tibet in the north to Sri Lanka in the south.[43] The nation is also considered to possess a soul. The concept of a national soul rests on the assumption that the cultural heritage of the land is derived from a common source.

The RSS believes in the concept of an organic society. It emphasizes the interdependence of all members of the society.[44] The ideal society is compared to a body which is comprised of different parts. Each part has its specific function which it has to perform perfectly in order to secure the well-being, growth and strength of the body. It is maintained that the social body functions well only when individuals perform their social, economic and religious duties, i.e., *dharma*.[45]

It is argued that the Hindu social body is weak and disorganized because *dharma* was neither clearly understood nor correctly observed. While the disintegration of Hindu society is perceived as advancing at a rapid pace in the contemporary period, the malady is traced back to the Islamic invasions of India, when it is alleged that Hindu thought ceased to inform the society.

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[43] Ibid., p. 84.

[44] The programme at shakha aims at creating a sense of organic solidarity among the various participants. This is described by Golwalkar himself "(in a human body) Each cell feels its identity with the entire body and is ever ready to sacrifice itself for the sake of the health and growth of the body. In fact, it is the self-immolation of millions of such cells that releases the energy for every bodily activity.
The training that is imparted every day in the Shakha in a strictly regulated fashion imparts that spirit of identification and well-concerted action. It gives the individual the necessary incentive to rub away his angularities, to behave in a spirit of oneness with the rest of his brethren in society and fall in line with the organised and disciplined way of life by adjusting himself to the varied outlooks of other minds. The persons assembling there learn to obey a single command. Discipline enters their blood". Ibid., p. 409.

[45] Ibid., pp. 25-6.

Another idea which figures recurrently in the RSS thought process is the identification of hostile forces which plot against the nation and which are responsible for the "disruptive" strains in the country. These forces are usually identified as different, united and powerful. They form the "other" against whom the Hindu community has to fight and occupy a place of unrivalled prominence in the discourses of RSS. Two general types of "disruptive" forces are identified: the Muslims and Christians and the principles of capitalism, socialism, or communism[46] The Muslims and Christians are blamed of culturally distancing themselves from the national mainstream. It is further argued that since they do not consider themselves culturally Indian, they do not experience a sense of community with other Indians. They are alleged to have separated themselves from the "national soul". Of these, the Muslims are considered to be a more serious problem because of the size of the Muslim community, a history of animosity with the Hindus and the existence of Muslim states in the subcontinent. Golwalkar writes:.

> They look to some foreign lands as their holy places. They call themselves 'Sheiks' and 'Syeds'. Sheikhs and Syeds are certain clans in Arabia. How then did these people come to feel that they are their descendants? That is because they have cut of their ancestral national moorings of this land and mentally merged themselves with the aggressors. They still think that they have come here only to conquer and establish their kingdoms.[47]

These religious communities are as a result viewed as "foreigners", against whom this nation has to be protected. Golwalkar's writings reflects this idea:

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[46] Golwalkar in his work, *Bunch of Thoughts,* devotes a chapter to this topic titled "Internal Threats".

[47] Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, pp. 125-6.

..... all those, who fall outside the five-fold limits (Country, Race, Religion, Culture and Language) of the (Nation) idea, can have no place in the national life, unless they abandon their differences...... and completely merge themselves in the National race. So long, ..., as they maintain their racial, religious and cultural differences, they cannot but be only foreigners.[48]

Golwalkar also hints at the consequences these "foreigners" would have to face if they choose to remain so. He writes:

..... the foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e. of the Hindu Nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country as wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges..... not even citizens' rights.[49]

The idea here is to compel the assimilation of religious minorities in the Hindu nation through the removal of the external signs by which their adherence to a particular community is designated. The minorities are required to pledge their allegiance to Hindu religious symbols.[50]

The concepts of democracy, capitalism and communism are considered contrary to the traditional principles of Hindu thought. These concepts are accused of limiting themselves to the premise that man is a "bundle of physical wants".[51] It is argued that these "foreign" philosophies stimulate the quest for

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[48] Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, pp. 45-6.

[49] Ibid., pp. 47-8.

[50] Religion comes to occupy the central position in the RSS belief system. Golwalkar writes : "In Hindusthan , Religion is an all-absorbing entity .... its very Soul. With us, every action in life, ... is a command of Religion .... We are what our great religion has made us. Our race spirit is a child of our Religion and so with us culture is but a product of our all-comprehensive Religion, a part of its body and not distinguishable from it". Ibid., pp. 21-6.

[51] Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, p. 22.

material gratification which results eventually in greed and class antagonism; attitudes that lead to exploitation, social warfare and anarchy.[52]

Driven by this ideology the RSS has successfully enlarged its social base over the years. The organization has been consistently establishing its presence in newer areas. The RSS made its presence felt in the Tamil region way back in 1939, when Dadarao Paramarth established the first *shakha* in Madras. The first *shakha* was started with fifteen participants. In the early forties the Sangh festivals were attended by about 500 people.[53] By 1980 there were *shakhas* in 175 places, weekly meetings in 104 places and "contacts had been established" in 626 places. This growth is attributed to the mass contact programme undertaken by the RSS in 1979-80.[54] At present the state is divided into nine *vibaghs* (divisions) and has 150 *pracharks* with 1,051 *shakhas* functioning.[55] There has been a remarkable growth in the reach of the Sangh all over the country (See Table 1).

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[52] Ibid., pp. 24-5.

[53] *Tamizhagathil Sangam Kanda Dadarao Paramarth*, Madras, 1991, pp. 41-3.

[54] *Vijaya Bharatam*, 10 April 1981, p. 23.

[55] Interview with Shivramji Joglekar, 7 Jan. 1998, Chennai; Outlook, 27 April 1998, p. 17.

Table - 1

RSS *Shakhas* in India

State	No. *Shakhas*
Assam	900
Andhra Pradesh	1,600
Bihar	2,300
Delhi	1,500
Haryana	600
J&K and Himachal	450
Gujarat	900
Kerala	4,149
Karnataka	2,305
Madhya Pradesh	3,230
Maharashtra	4,000
Rajasthan	3,500
Punjab	775
Tamil Nadu	1,051
Orissa	1,481
Uttar Pradesh	9,000
West Bengal	1,500
All - India Total	39,301

Source: *Outlook*, 27 April 1988.

The spatial expansion of the RSS has been accompanied by a conscious diversification of its activities (Table 2).

Table - 2

Particulars About *Shakha*

Total *Shakhas*	27,340
Weekly *Milans*	5,685
Mandali	6,669
Total *Upshakhas*	39,429
Social Service- Places	3,654
No. of Social Services	6,831

Source : *Vijaya Bharatam*, 27 September, 1996, Chennai.

There are about eighty affiliates of the Sangh working in various fields; all in pursuit of the RSS ideology and furthering its goals. The RSS has also created new organizations like Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Hindu Munnani, which though structurally 'independent' from the Sangh are essentilly managed by RSS personnel and are informed by the RSS ideology.

VISHWA HINDU PARISHAD

There are different versions prevalent about the origin of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP- World Hindu Council).[56] All these versions concur on one thing - the formation of the VHP at Bombay in 1964 with Swami Chinmayananda as its president and S.S. Apte as the general secretary. This new organization was to have the concepts of Hindutva,. Hindu Sangathan and Hindu Nationalism as its basic philosophy.

The RSS played a significant role in the formation of the VHP, Golwalkar, the then RSS chief, supported the formation of the VHP as an organization which would link the RSS with Hindu religious leadership. The RSS sought to meet the challenge posed by the proselytizing religions in India through the new organization.As a result, S.S. Apte, a high-ranking RSS official, wselected as the

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[56]   Anderson and Damle say that Golwalkar, the head of the RSS, dismayed by the lack of unity among Hindu religious leaders, convened a meeting with them in 1964. Eva Hellman mentions that the RSS *Pracharak* S.S. Apte founded it. Peter van der Veer relates it to Swami Chinmayananda hoisting a meeting of 150 religious leaders at his ashram in Bombay. Jaffrelot attributes it to the collaborative efforts of Apte and Swami Chinmayananda. See, Anderson and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, p. 133; Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, Berkeley, 1994, p. 130; Eva Hellman, "Dynamic Hinduism". *Seminar*, May 1994, p. 50; Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement* , p. 196.

first general secretary of the VHP and the RSS workers played an instrumental role in establishing the VHP's organisational network.

The VHP is described in its literature as a religious, cultural and social organization of over 600 million Hindus living in eighty countries. It claims to favour no specific Hindu sect or doctrine. The stated aim of the organisation is to unite an array of religious sects which are identified as Hindu-those which reverence India as thier holy land. The VHP has a nine-point statement of aims and objectives as revealed by its literature , *The Hindu Awakening: Retrospect and Promise*. The first objective is "to take steps to consolidate and strengthen Hindu society". The other points follow as a means to achieve this main objective. The VHP resolves to "protect, develop and spread" Hindu ethical and spiritual values; to establish contacts with and help all Hindus living abroad; to found an order of lay and initiate missionaries and open centres to train them for propogating "dynamic Hinduism". The organization aims to promote activities and research in cultural , scientific, literary, social, religious and charitable fields. The VHP seeks to support these activities by developing an infrastructural support which will "found; maintain, take over or render assistance to" not only charitable institutions such as schools, medical clinics, libraries, orphanages, and widows' homes but also religious institutions such as "temples, maths, and other centres for preaching and teaching the principles of Hindu Dharma and Culture". The VHP describes its mission as global and humanitarian and attempts to procure an international respectability which complements its aim to involve overseas

Hindus in its activities. The ninth and final point in its list of objectives is to diffuse knowledge of, and preach ethical and spiritual principles and practices of Hinduism suited to modern times in all parts of the world so as to be conducive to the welfare of humanity as a whole".[57]

Two years after its founding, the VHP convened a World Hindu Conference in 1966 during the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad. This conference is celebrated as the first such gathering of all the sects of "Hindu Dharma" since the reign of Harsha Vardhan 1,300 years ago. A second World Hindu Conference was held in 1979 in Allahabad. This conference, attended by an estimated 100,000 and delegates from the different strands of the "Hindu Nation", with the Dalai Lama opening the conference, was to a great extent representative and could claim to have been attended by a true cross-section of "Hinduism". In addition to its World Hindu Conferences, the VHP regularly organizes state and district conferences throughout India. These conferences are said to aim at establishing mass contacts so as to arouse consciousness in Hindu society.[58]

Organization

To meet its declared goals the VHP has divided the country into five zones, ten regions, twenty-five provinces, 210 divisions, 706 districts and 7,180 prakhands.[59] The organization itself has expanded considerably with eighteen

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[57] Cited in Lise Mckean, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement*, Chicago, 1995, p. 103.

[58] Ibid., pp. 104-5.

[59] Nandy and others, *Creating a Nationality*, p. 89.

departments functioning at the national level. Each of them looks after one programme of the Parishad, ranging from cow protection to the use of Sanskrit. The VHP also has a unit in every state, with branches at district, subdivisional and block levels. The central and regional executive bodies of the VHP provide leadership for its branches and for a confederacy of affiliated organizations whose support is integral to the execution of its projects and campaigns.

The personnel listed as constituting the VHP's formal organizational structure consists of fifteen life trustees, forty-five ordinary trustees, and twenty overseas trustees. The Governing Council consists or twenty-four office holders. Industrialists, jurists, maharajas and maharanis, *swamis* and pandits figure as high-ranking VHP officials.

Various religious leaders are involved by the VHP in its activities by appointing them as patrons and trustees. Religious leaders are also appointed to the VHP's Central Margdarshak Mandal (Advisory Committee), which consists, as the VHP literature says, of about 200 "Acharyas of several sects who will conduct and guide the religious, moral and ethical functions of Hindu society".[60] The Mandal, like the VHP's assembly of religious authorities which formulated the "minimum code of conduct for every Hindu", makes pronouncements on Hindu Dharma. Along with other VHP officials the Mandal members attend the various conferences of VHP and they also preach to assemblies. Through state level Mandals, the VHP involves regional and local religious leaders and their

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[60] Cited in Mckean, *Divine Enterprise*, p. 114.

followers in its activities. The responsibility of implementing the policies of Dharma Sansad is also delegated to the members of these Mandals.

The VHP established a Dharma Sansad (Parliament of Religion) in order to involve leaders of various religious sects in its activities. The VHP considers the Sansad to be an important means for strengthening "Sadhu Shakti" (Ascetic Power) and for increasing the traditional strength of *dharma*.[61] Members of the Sansad meet regularly to deliberate on issues of "Public importance" in religious and social fields. Some of the important functions of the Dharma Sansad are: to provide a religious order capable of sustaining the integrity of Hindu society in the present age, to develop shrines and places of pilgrimage into powerful cultural centres; to help those who voluntarily opt for conversion to Hinduism; and to provide effective measures to counter the "evil designs" of non-confomists.

The VHP has also set up two trusts, the Bharat Kalyan Pratishthan, to provide education and medical aid to the poor and needy, and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad Foundation, to work for the upliftment of the rural poor and the backward castes.

Ideology

All these activities of VHP are guided by its ideology, which has a striking resemblance to that of the RSS.While sharing the belief system of RSS, the key concept which guides the VHP is the idea of *dharma*. This concept featurers

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[61] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, pp. 351-2.

regularly in the VHP literature and its declarations. S.S. Apte, the then general secretary of VHP, in his speech at the World Hindu Conference in 1966 stressed that he regarded *dharma* as pivotal for the survival of the Hindus. He remarked that "Amongst the Hindus of the world a sense of duty and obligations to the society which of late is fast disappearing, requires to be regenerated on the basis of our Dharma" and even suggested that one of the overall aim of the conference was the rejuvenation of dharma: "To fulfil the object of rejuvenating and reviving our Dharma and Culture, we have set before us the primary task of inviting all the Hindus spread the world over to a Parishad".[62] It is often stated that the overall aims of the VHP are to protect the righteous, to punish the evil-doers and to establish the rule of *dharma*. The motto of the VHP , *Dharmo rakshati rakshitah*, rendered as "if you protect Dharma , Dharma will protect you" or "one who protects Dharma is protected in turn", aptly summarises the importance given to the concept of *dharma*.

The VHP identifies the different aspects of *dharma*. The *Dharma* is on the one had regarded as an eternal, universal, unchangeable principle, which identifies divinity to be at the core of existence and lays down the fundamental unity between the divine and everything which exists. On the other hand *dharma* is regarded as a *norm* for social as well as individual behaviour, and in this aspect it is not eternal, unchangeable or universal, but prescribes rules according to the situation. In its second aspect *dharma* is adaptable to changing circumstances and

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[62] Hellman, "Dynamic Hinduism" , pp.50-1

is hence not a static body of rules, but is compatible with reforms of different kinds. These new norms which are adopted are expected to be consistent with the basic principles on which the structure of Hindu society is said to have evolved. Dharma as norms of behaviour are identified as the concrete means to actualize the fundamental principles in mundane life. This dharma is not to be decided by a single individual, but by a consensus of sadhus belonging to all Hindu denominations. It is towards this aim that the VHP has established the Dharma Sansad.[63]

The VHP has been present in Tamilnadu ever since its inception at the national level. But it was only with the large scale conversions, which became a feature of Tamilnadu in the early eighties, that VHP began to play an activist role. Today VHP along with RSS and Hindu Munnani is actively involved in various activities furthering the cause of the Hindu community in Tamilnadu.

HINDU MUNNANI

The Hindu Munnani (HM - Hindu Front) was launched in October 1980 by Rama. Gopalan, an RSS organizer.[64]The Chennai branch of the new organization actively involved itself in mobilizing masses through its Vivekananda Propaganda Committee. The HM was conducting many street corner meetings, debates and discussions in the early days of its functioning . Some of the major early "achievements" listed by the organization are: installation of the

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[63] Ibid., pp. 51-2.
[64] *Vijaya Bharatam*, 10 April 1981, p. 6.

idol and commencement of worship in the Jalagandeswarar temple at Vellore, effectively countering the Muslim opposition and conducting the procession of the deity at Sakrappalli.[65] There was a quantitative and qualitative change in the activities of the HM after the mass conversions in the southern part of Tamilnadu in 1981. the Mandaikadu incident where the Hindu devotees were alleged harassed by Christian fishermen, resulting in large scale communal violence, helped the organization to establish itself firmly in southern Tamilnadu.[66]

The Munnani is a good example of the RSS tactics to enter into new modes of mobilization even while retaining its traditional structure and method of functioning. In the case of the HM the reason can be traced back to the change of perception in the RSS with regard to political power. Originally, the RSS had not regarded the conquest of state power as a priority. For Hedgewar and later Golwalkar, the most important goal of the organization was enunciated in terms of a socio-psychological reform, of which the *shakhas* were the main instrument. Balasaheb Deoras, the RSS chief, had already let the RSS get directly involved in political agitation though its association with the JP Movement, spearheaded by Jaya Prakash Narayan. Deoras considered electoral politics to be of crucial importance to the cause of Hindu nationalists, even when they did not belong to any party. The lack of concern shown by the political parties to the cause of the RSS persuaded him to think of the creation of a "Hindu Vote". This is clearly

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[65] Ibid., p. 7.

[66] For a description of the Mandaikadu incident, see George Mathew, "Hindu-Christian Communalism: An Analysis of Kanyakumari Riots", *Social Action*, October - December 1983, pp. 417-19.

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discernible from the following speech of Deoras on January 1979 at the Second

World Hindu Conference organized by the VHP. He declared:

> The Government thinks that the Hindus have no right to ask for even basic rights
> while other religious communitie shout loud and get special treatment from this
> very government.... politicians only think of the next election and personal gains
> for themselves. Hindus must now awaken themselves to such an extent that *even
> from the elections point of view the politicians will have to respect the Hindu
> sentiments* and change their policies accordingly..... if others put up demands,
> they were accepted, but even genuine demands by Hindus are ignored. This is
> because Muslims and other minorities usually vote *en bloc* while Hindus are
> divided. *Once Hindus get united, the government would start caring for them
> also* .... Therefore the need of the moment is to awaken our Hindu consciousness
> as Hindus (emphases mine).[67]

True to this concern expressed by Deoras, the HM has right from its

inception consistently and overtly, differing from the RSS and the VHP,

championed the cause of a "Hindu Vote Bank". The other declared aims of the

organization were "to create Hindu resurgence: to create unity among the Hindus;

to further the devotion and support of Hindu people for Hindu dharma, Hindu

religion and Hindu culture; to protect the welfare and rights of Hindus; and fight

for them when they are affected; and , to declare India as a Hindu nation".[68] The

Munnani also committed itself to achieving what it termed as its "final

objectives"; "to protect Hindu dharma; removal of adharma; to make the Hindu

rashtra excel in all fields; to establish Hindu rajya and to work for the creation of

Akhand Bharat".[69] The organization evidently shares the ideology of the RSS, of

whose creation it was. There is a distinct importance given to the concept of

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[67] Cited in Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, pp. 346-7.
[68] Thanulinga Nadar, *Hindukkal Ottu Moththamaga Vakkalikka Vendum*, Chennai, n.d, p.7.
[69] *Vijaya Bharatam*, 10 April 1981, p. 8.

dharma which the HM seeks to establish. This is identifiable from the motto of the organization, "Dharmam Kaakka; Adarmam akatra", which can be rendered as "To protect dharma; To remove adharma".[70] In this it has a very close affinity with the VHP which also, as described above, gives considerable importance to the concept of dharma. The HM considers itself as the protector of the Hindu masses who are discriminated, exploited and beseiged by enemies on all sides. This idea is reflected in the resolutions passed during the first Workers' Meeting of the HM in 1981 when it resolved to "prevent the extension of Hindu Harijans' concessions to other religious communities; create awareness among the masses against conversion, foreign money inflow for conversions and the domination of mullas and maulvis; take all efforts to abolish untouchability and caste problems; create a public opinion in favour of Hindu vote bank; undertake serious propaganda among the Hindus to support Hindu shops, doctors, lawyers etc.".[71] To achieve those objectives, it was resolved to launch a mass contact programme. The HM, hence, right from its inception was working to create a distinct Hindu identity.

There is no clear information about the structure of the Munnani. From the literature of the organization it is discernible that there are two parallel structures of hierarchy. The first one with the President of the organization at the top has

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[70] The emblem of the organization contains a *gopuram* (temple gateway), and swords and shield within a circle outside which the motto is inscribed. The *Gopuram* is said to denote the Hindu dharma, civilization and society, while the swords and shield represent the society's courage.

[71] *Vijaya Bharatam*, 10 April 1981, p. 19.

many district Presidents and goes down to the panchayat level in some cases. The second line of hierarchy has the state-level chief organizer at the helm, who is assisted by many district-level organizers. These organizers who are full-time workers seem to wield more power in the organization then the Presidents at their level. In 1993 there were about 1,200 branches of the HM with twenty organizers throughout the state.[72]

In the literature meant for training its volunteers, the HM spells out its eight-point philosophy. "A strong belief that from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari it is one nation, one people and one culture (Bharat is not a sub-continent, is not multi-cultural, the Aryan-Dravidian race theory is a fraud)". This emphasizes the homogeneity of India and reflects the strong nationalistic ideology of the HM, very similar to that of the RSS and the VHP. Significantly the Aryan-Dravidian race theory, which is the central belief of Dravidian politics in Tamilnadu, is rejected. Further, the "belief that Hindus can correct themselves; can progress; can integrate" is stressed, with the slogan "Aggressive Hinduism-Assertive Hindu resistance". There is a distinct emphasis on electoral politics in the philosophy of HM: "There are good Hindus in all parties. All of them have to be assembled on a single platform - so we do not have any party"; "there are groups lobbying for Muslims and Christians in all parties, similarly a group to protect the Hindu welfare and rights should be created"; the organization "will not contest in elections; but, will work for the success of a potential Hindu candidate"; and

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[72] Ibid, 19 February 1993, p. 10.

finally it believes in "protecting the Hindu welfare and rights by creating a Hindu vote bank". The philosophy of the HM attaches much importance to electoral politics and the organization believes in an activist role which will attract more attention and confrontation; hence the final point, "the police department is not our enemy, but a friend".[73]

The HM has also identified "forces beseiging and destroying" the Hindu society. In addition to the enemies identified by the RSS and the VHP, namely, the Muslims, Christians and communists, the HM identifies three more enemies: the Dravida Kazhagam, "betrayers" who criticize only Hindus and not other religious communities; self-interested secular parties who are anti-Hindu and appease the Muslims; and the anti-social elements who practice untouchability and induce caste conflicts destroying the unity of the Hindus.[74] Recognizing these enemies as "internal threats" the HM takes upon itself the task of protecting the Hindu society from them.

The Hindu organizations discussed above are informed by nationalist aspirations and the urge to "right the wrong" done to the Hindus. They share between them a common ideological orientation, not surprisingly, given the fact that the VHP and the HM were founded by RSS officials. These organizations continue to maintain their distinct structures enabling them to remain 'independent' of each other. Each of them also has different programmes; while

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[73] Hindu Munnani, *Payirchi Vaguppu Padangal*, Chennai , n.d., p. 5.
[74] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

the RSS lays emphasis on individual "character-building", the VHP is involved in constructing a Hindu church to organize and formalize the religion. The HM, on the other hand, with a greater emphasis on "Hindu vote bank" is involved in mass mobilization" to protect the welfare and rights of Hindus". Though their programmes differ, the ideology and objectives remain the same enabling them to closely co-ordinate and co-operate with each other, drawing on each others resources and local networks for mobilizing the Hindus. This close co-operation of the Hindu organizations with each other does not permit us to strictly separate their strategies of mobilization and deal with them individually. Hence, the following chapter will study the issues which they project and the strategies which they adopt to mobilize thematically even while not losing track of the significant role played by the individual organizations.

CHAPTER - IV

HINDU ORGANIZATIONS IN TAMILNADU: STRATEGIES OF MOBILIZATION

The Hindu organizations have been able to mobilize the Hindus by carefully choosing certain issues. These issues reflect the ideological orientation of these nationalistic Hindu organizations. Issues, both national and regional in nature are raised. The affectivity of the issues has an important bearing on the effectiveness of mobilization, making them very crucial for the enterprises of the Hindu organizations.

ISSUES OF MOBILIZATION

"Justice" for Hindus

The Hindus are viewed as being discriminated against in their own land as compared to the minority religious communities, the Muslims and Christians. It is often argued that, why should the Hindus who constitute eighty-nine percent of the population suffer for the sake of the minorities? The Hindu organizations demand equal treatment for the Hindu vis-à-vis the minorities. The various elements of "discrimination" meted out to the Hindus and their consequences find a prominent place in the discourse of these organizations. These instances of "discrimination" are attributed to the lack of concern of the politicians, who look only for the minority "vote bank" and hence support the minorities against the interests of Hindus.

The educational rights granted to the minorities are severely attacked. The different set of rules and regulations which are applied for the minority and non-minority educational institutions are often highlighted.[1] It is contended that the

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[1] See *Vijaya Bharatam.* 28 July 1997, p. 14.

rules are designed to control only the Hindu institutions, whereas the minorities are granted one too many concessions to appease them. These concessions, it is alleged, are being used by the minority institutions for converting Hindus to Islam and Christianity. The minorities are also accused of commercializing education despite getting the state aid. All this is said to result in the educational backwardness of the Hindus.[2]

The state support of religious pilgrimage of the minorities alone is another issue which is prominently highlighted. It is argued that the "secular" state is discriminating against the majority Hindus by supporting the Haj pilgrimage of the Muslims through the Wakf Board; while on the other hand, the Hindu pilgrimages like the Kailash Yatra are totally neglected and not supported.[3] These Hindu organizations accuse that the tax money of the Hindus is used for the religious funding of the minority communities which actively indulge in proselytization.

Common Civil Code, Conversions and Population

The issue of rapid growth of Muslim population receives greater attention in the discourse of the Hindu organizations. The Muslims are accused of carrying out a well-designed plan to make India a Muslim country through conversions, production of more children by marrying many wives and consciously avoiding family planning. The literatures often show the comparative growth/decline of the Hindu population vis-à-vis that of the Muslims. These reports which produce lot of statistical details express the fear that India will become a Muslim country by A.D. 2051.[4] They argue that a Muslim majority will result in the enforcement of

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[2] Nadar. *Hindukkal Ottu Moththamaga*, p. 5.
[3] *Vijaya Bharatam*, 7 June 1996, p. 22.
[4] Hindu Munnani, *Perugivarum Muslim Ennikkai- Oru Kannottam*, Chennai, n.d., pp-1-7.

Muslim law, elimination of non-Muslims, imposition of Jizya tax on non-Muslims, and jihad will be declared on non-Muslims till they convert to Islam. Further, the males will be murdered and women along-with the children enslaved and forced to work in Muslim houses. Properties will be confiscated, temples destroyed and priests and religious leaders will be killed while the religious texts will be torched.[5] These arguments are advanced to "educate" the Hindus about the "danger ahead". To check this the Hindu organizations demand a common civil code and enforcement of family planning for the Muslims.

Conversion of Hindus by the Muslims and Christians is taken up as a "challenge" by these organizations and they concentrate on preventing such conversions which deplete the Hindu population. Naturally, the attempts at conversion are deplored and the other religious communities are accused of compelling the "Hindu Harijans" to convert. These conversions were mostly taking place among the dalit population who were forced to convert to other religions to escape from a hierarchy of castes which confined them to the lowest stratum in the Hindu society.

In February 1981, more than 1,000 Harijans from Meenakshipuram, a small village in the Tirunelveli district, converted to Islam. The village was immediately renamed as "Rehmatnagar". From the time of this incident until September 1981 there was a wave of conversions throughout Tamilnadu. Tirunelveli, Ramanathapuram and Thanjavur districts witnessed a series of

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[5] Hindu Munnani, *Aimbathu Andukalil Bharatham Muslim Nadagum*, Chennai, n.d., p. 4.

conversions and there were stray incidents of conversion or threat of conversion

in Madurai, Chennai, Pondicherry and North Arcot (see Table 3).

Table 3 : Conversions in Tamilnadu February-September 1981

1981	Name of Village	District	From	To	Number	
					Converted	Threatened
February	Meenakshipuram	Tirunelveli	Dalits	Islam	1,000	-
May	Veeravanur	Ramanathapuram	Dalits	Islam	56	-
	Maravakudi	Ramanathapuram	Dalits	Ialam	48	-
	Melamadai	Ramanathapuram	Dalits	Islam	46	-
	Ernampatty	Madurai	Dalits	Islam	29	-
June	Kurayoor	Ramanathapuram	Dalits	Islam	300	-
	Kurayoor	Ramanathapuram	Christians	Islam	50	-
	Kanday	Madurai	Dalits	Islam	93	-
July	Thimmanaickenpalayam	Pondicherry	Dalits	Islam	-	1,500
	Kurayoor	Ramanathapuram	Dalits	Islam	192	-
	Arthiyoothu Elamanoor	Ramanathapuram	Dalits	Islam	n.a.	-
	Niie villages of Thiruthuraipoondi Mannargudi area	Thanjavur	Dalits	Islam	180	-
	Villupuram	South Arcot	Dalits	Islam	-	100
August	Kalpakkom	Madras	Dalits	Islam	-	2,500
	Meenakshipuram	Tirunelveli	Dalits	Islam	" 25	-
	Veeravanur	Ramanathapuram	Dalits	Islam	28	-
	Aalichikudi	South Arcot	Dalits	Islam	-	600
	Perananmbur	North Arcot	Dalits	Islam	21	-
	Madras suburb	Madras	Dalits	Buddh ism	-	5,000
	Ilamanur	Ramanathapuram	Dalits	Islam	500	-
	Aduthurai	Thanjavur	Dalits	Islam	9	-
	Athiyoothu	Ramanathapuram	Dalits	Islam	250	-
September	Kidarankondan, Keelayur	Thanjavur	Dalits	Islam	46	-
	Kunnaloor	Thanjavur	Dalits	Islam	-	7,500 approx (1500 families)
				Total	2,873	17,200

Source: Moin Shakir (ed.), Religion, State and Politics (Delhi: Ajanta, 1989).

The Hindu organizations were stung by these mass conversions. They

alleged that there was a conspiracy to convert the whole Harijan population to

Islam. The RSS magazine *Vijaya Bharatam* noted that "in Madurai and Ramanathapuram districts there are efforts to convert many Meenakshipurams into Rehmatnagars". It was further argued that "the same group which compelled hundreds of Harijans to convert to Islam, after seeing that there was no opposition to their daring work has decided to expand its operations".[6]

The Hindu organizations sought to mobilize public opinion against conversions. They rejected conversions as a means by which the Harijans can improve their social status. The editorial of *Vijaya Bharatam* commented:

> There is no truth in the contention that in Hindu religion Harijans are not given equal status with other Hindus. In contemporary times religion and caste have no connection with social status. Today, in any religion, persons with money, education and influence have a higher status. The social status of a person does not change merely because of conversion. There are lot of caste divisions even among the Muslims and Christians today. There are divisions like Shia, Sunni, Pattani among the Muslims and they have inequality and enmity between them. Hence, it is totally false to say that when Harijans convert to Islam they will be given equal status.
>
> The Muslims try to take advantage of the disunity among different sections in the Hindu society and increase their political strength.. So, they put few influential Harijans in the villages into their hands by purchasing them with the Arab money and by tempting and threatening methods they are thinking of converting other Harijans.[7]

The idea that these conversions do not have anything to do with the Hindu religion and the international conspiracy which is aimed at destroying the Hindu religion is often repeated with the aim of preventing the conversions. The editorial of *Vijaya Bharatam* notes:

[6]   *Vijaya Bharatam*, 5 June 1981, p. 2
[7]   Ibid.

The conversions in Ramanathapuram are not *concerned with religion*. A person need not convert from Hindu religion to worship Allah or Jesus. He need not give up Hindu society and Hindu culture; because, Hindu culture gives equal status to all religion. It is true that there is inequality in the Hindu society. We see a natural inequality in human mind in all societies and nations. *It is a day dream that the status of a person who converts from one religion to another will improve*. There are inequalities among the Muslim and Christian communities in Bharat. This is not a fault of religion, but of human mind...... This situation can be changed only by education and social reform, and not through conversion.

The conversions taking place in Meenakshipuram and other areas are a result of an *international conspiracy* ...... caste problem is an internal problem. We will not allow foreigners to reap riches by using this (emphasis mine).[8]

The conversions are seen as a threat to the Hindus; because of the increasing Muslim population and the possibility of Muslim domination in the future. The idiom that Tamil Nadu will became a "small Pakistan" or an "Aurangzeb country" is frequently used to denote the threat of Muslim dominance.[9] There are repeated references to the "crores of money" which are sent from the Arab countries to convert India into a Muslim country. The organized efforts at proselytization figure prominently in the discourses of the Hindu organizations . According to one of them, there are 80,000 Christian preachers and 1,25,000 preachers of Islam called "Tapnik" who receive crores of money annually and convert around 4,00,000 persons each, every year.[10] This issue projected as a threat to the: "Hindu nation" thus occupies a place of prominence in the mobilization of a Hindu identity.

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[8] Ibid., 3 July 1981, pp. 2,19.
[9] Ibid., 24 July 1981, p. 6.
[10] Ibid., 24 February 1995, pp. 8-10.

"Harassment" of The Hindus

The harassment of Hindus by the Muslims and Christians and their increasing domination is another issue of mobilization. The Muslims are accused of buying buildings and lands "with lot of money" and trying to create "small Pakistans". It is alleged that they are beginning to dominate market places and ruining the fortunes of Hindu merchants by selling goods at less than the capital amount. They are blamed for encroaching on the lands of Hindus and building mosques on them. There are frequent accusations of Muslim youths teasing and harassing Hindu women during their visits to temples. The Muslims are arraigned for attempting to lure dalits with money to Islam. It is alleged that Hindu temples were being destroyed in Muslim majority towns. They are charged with opening meat shops opposite temples, hindering temple activities and cutting water supplies during Hindu festivals, are accused of dividing Hindu population on the basis of caste and political affiliation and dominating them politically. They along with the Christians are indicted for hindering Hindu religious activities in government offices , even while encouraging their own religion.

The Christians are also accused of harassing the Hindus by converting large numbers of them with threats. They are arraigned for running a parallel government in many places, changing the place names to Christian names. Christian preachers are blamed for speaking lowly on Hindu gods and religion. The Christians are also indicted for encroaching on temple lands and building

churches on those lands. Christian organizations are accused of "capturing" orphaned Hindu children and giving them in adoption to foreign countries.[11]

These issues which are local in nature have a greater affectivity than other regional and national ones. Through these issues the Hindus are informed by these organizations that the other religious communities are always opposed to the interests of the Hindus, and are plotting to destroy the Hindus or at least dominate them.

Politics of Naming

The Hindu organizations have also mobilized Hindus on the issue of naming. They opposed the naming of a district in Tamil Nadu after Quaid-e-Milat, the Muslim League leader. The Tamilnadu governments of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) successively named the Dindukal and Nagapattinam districts after Quaid-e-Milat. This was opposed by these organizations who termed Quaid-e-Milat as a "betrayer of the nation" who was instrumental in the partition of India. They expressed the fear that such naming would result in the Muslim officials getting themselves transferred to that district, which will increase the danger of injustice and biases against Hindus. The Muslims will colonize the whole area by buying all the properties, creating a "small Pakistan". It was also argued that it was not a Tamil name; and opposed having Arabic name for a district in Tamil

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[11] Ibid., 27 February 1981 pp.6-19; Ibid., 6 Narch 1981, pp. 6,7; Ibid., 13 March 1981, pp. 7,10.

Nadu. They argued that such naming of a district after a "foreigner" is a shame to the Hindus and would develop hatred in them.

The declaration of India as a Hindu nation is also an issue for mobilization. It is argued that if India is declared as a Hindu nation it will help to safeguard its uniqueness; give self-respect to the Hindus who live like orphans all over the world; provide opportunities for a wholesome growth of the culture of this nation; stop blind imitation of foreign nations; prevent infiltration and separatism; and create a proper climate for the minorities to join the national mainstream. Further, the world will respect us; and we can teach without fear, shame or hesitation Hindu culture, "real history", spirituality and dharma; resulting in the growth of responsibility among Hindus; and growth of a sacrificial spirit destroying the narrow tendencies. It is contended that such a declaration will eradicate corruption and caste conflicts; and will solve the Sri Lankan problem, where the Hindus will be treated with respect or a separate land will be allotted for them to lead a secure life with self-respect.[12]

Protection of Cow and Temples

The killing of cow, projected as the "symbol of national culture" is strongly opposed. It is alleged that cow, which is being worshipped by the Hindus since the Vedic times, is killed "barbarously" in India "to get the votes of few Muslims".[13] They strongly argue that cow is an economically viable animal which

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[12] Rama. Gopalan, *Bharatham Hindu Naduthan - Aen? Eppadi?*, Chennai, n.d., pp. 10-13.
[13] Garudan (ed.) , *Komatha Engal Kulamatha*, Chennai, n.d., pp. 1-21.

is being unwisely slaughtered for its meat and skin. The slaughter houses are opposed as environmentally polluting. They demand a ban on cow slaughter and meat export.[14] It is demanded that the cow should be made the national animal and latest technology adopted to protect cows while enabling prosecution of those, who kill cows. More importantly, in the literature of the Hindu organizations Muslims figure as the slaughterers of cows and are highly censured.[15] Hence, this issue is also used to highlight the contradictions between the Hindus and Muslims and the latter's inclination to hurt the religious sentiments of the Hindus.

The State is accused of consciously ignoring the Hindu temples where there are thefts of idols, jewellery etc. The Hindu organizations accuse that the money offered by devotees to temples are used for non-religious purposes and to support other religions leading to the destruction of many temples. It is argued that many temples are totally neglected with no worship taking place there. The reason for such a sorry state, it is contended, is the state control of Hindu temples. So the Hindu organizations demand the establishment of an Independent Authority for the administration of Hindu temples.[16]

The Hindu organizations also mobilize against separatism and terrorism, described in their mobilization tracts as "cancer" and "AIDS" respectively.[17] They argue that such forces with the foreign aid are keen to destroy India.[18] Swadeshi

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[14] Hindu Munnani , *Pasuvadhai Thadaisattam Aen* ? Chennai, n.d.
[15] Sathyanarayana Maurya (Tr. Pu.na.Sankararajan and K.S.Gopalarathinam), *Pasuthai - Desathai*, Chennai, n.d.
[16] R.B.V.S. Maniyan , *Alayam Kaakka Or Arappor,* Chennai, n.d. pp. 14-15
[17] Kovai Maanaattukku Vaarungal, Hindu Vizhipunarvu Mannaattu Kuzhuvinar, 1993.
[18] Ko. Sanagan, Bayangaravathathai Muriyadippathu Eppadi?, Chennai, n.d.

also occupies an important position as an issue of mobilization[19]. It is argued that there is an economic invasion of India which has to be prevented at any cost. Thus, the Hindu organizations adopt various strategies to mobilize the support of masses on these issues and in the process build a Hindu identity.

STRATEGIES OF MOBILIZATION

To communicate their priorities and philosophy the Hindu organizations adopt various strategies, ranging from individual training to mass mobilization, and welfare measures to confrontational tactics. In all these the objective remains the same - to mobilize the Hindus.

Use Of Media

Media being an effective means to communicate with the general public and their followers, the Hindu organizations make an effective use of it. The RSS publishes a "Nationalist Weekly", *Vijaya Bharatam* in Tamil, while the VHP brings out a vernacular journal, *Hindu Mitran*. Other than these they also have their English publications, *Organizer* and *Hindu Vishva*, respectively. These publications keep the readers continuously 'informed' about the activities of the Hindu organizations and their nationalist ideology. More important than these journals are the several pamphlets and handbills (See Annexure II) brought out by these organizations. The Hindu Munnani brings out a large number of such

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Hindu Munnani. Bharathathilirunthu Tamizhagaththai Thundada Bayangara Sathi. Chennai. n.d.

[19] Suthesi Vizhipunarvu Eyakkam. *Venre Thirum! Suthesiyam!-Suthesi Padalgalum Dunkel Thitta Vilakkamum* , Chennai. n.d.

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pamphlets which are highly provocative and available at a lesser price. These pamphlets are used to articulate their viewpoint and demands (see Annexure III). These pamphlets give very 'convincing' arguments to support the various demands of the organization. Most of these tracts contain address slips to be filled by the 'convinced' reader so as to "help the ideas spread (further)". These journals and pamphlets usually portray the Hindu organizations as victims of violence unleashed by 'other' religious communities, mostly Muslims. They are replete with statistical datas to substantiate their arguments and demands. 'Investigative' reports of various types are brought out in these tracts to impress the readers about the "injustice" done to the Hindus. Other than these methods, there are also frequent calls for action and mobilization.

The Hindu organizations also bring out audio cassettes to 'educate' the masses on the "dangers" surrounding the Hindu society. One such cassette, *Kovai Maanaattukku Vaarungal* is aimed at mobilizing masses for the "Hindu Awakening Conference" organized by the Hindu Munnani at Coimbatore in 1993. Large number of audio cassettes with nationalist songs are made available by these organizations. These are played at meetings and festivals conducted by them to "awaken" the Hindu masses.

Characterization Of The 'Self' And The 'Other'

All the tracts published by these organizations revolve around a central theme - portrayal of the positives 'self' and a negative 'other'. This

characterization lies at the heart of all the narratives of these organizations which are found in their literature and expressed in their mobilization strategies.

Muslims appear as narrow-minded fanatics and fundamentalists who are all set to destroy Hindus and their religion. It is said that Muslims entered India as conquerors, aggressors and enemies who indulged in wars and destruction of temples. The present day Muslims are considered to be the "left -overs" of them.[20] It is contended that the Hindus have been waging "800 years of war" against the Muslims.[21] They appear as anti-nationals without patriotism because "an average Muslim in India can only support Pakistan because for him it is a better place and dearer than (his) life".[22] It is 'established' with 'ease' that ninety-nine percent of smugglers are Muslims, who ruin our economy and endeavour to create "small Pakistans" by purchasing buildings and lands with "crores of Arab money". Muslims are often referred to as very violent and as destroyers of public property, who issue "fatwas" against Hindus and kill them. Sometimes the existence of an innocent Muslim is recognized, but even he is believed to be under the influence of fanatical *Mullas* and *Maulvis*.

The narratives often suggest that the root cause for the problem with Muslims is their religion. It is argued that Islam as propounded in the *Quran* and *Hadis* is a torturous, slavish, oppressive religion which is intolerant towards other

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[20] Hindu Munnani, *Viraththuraviyin Vira Muzhakkam: Sri Rama Gopalan Sarpozhivu.*
[21] Hindu Munnani, *Muslim Egathipathiyaththai Ethirththu 800 Aandukala Hindukkalin Porattam*, Chennai, n.d.
[22] Munnani, *Viraththuraviyin.*

religions. Islam is accused of being an enemy of knowledge, learning and arts. The lack of democracy; injustices to women like sexual abuse, polygamy, illiteracy, *purdha* system and easy divorce; prevalence of idolatory; existence of caste system; the "mirage" of Islamic brotherhood are continuously exposed. Islam is said to be a "headache" all over the world and is arraigned for being against the concept of nation-state. It is argued that Islam is not a religion, but a "political conspiracy in the garb of religion".[23] The Hindu organizations argue that due to conversion the Muslims have lost their Tamil identity and are increasingly adopting Arabic customs, language and names. So, they refuse to recognize the Muslims in Tamilnadu as Tamils.

There are also frequent references to the frauds committed by Christian missionaries. It is contended that within Christianity there are many divisions and caste oppression. The Christian teachers are arraigned for harassing the Hindu students in schools and colleges. They are accused of carrying proselytization activities in their educational institutions. Christians are alleged of being violently opposed to Hinduism and as hindering the religious activities of Hindus. It is also contended that Christians all over the world are running a parallel government. So, Christianity is characterized as a political outfit and not as a religion.[24]

Communists are portrayed as anti-nationals, who were against India's independence and support separatism today. The communist party is

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[23] Hindu Munnani, *Muslimgalai Purinthu Kolvom*, Chennai, n.d.
[24] Hindu Munnani, *Kiristhuvap Padirigalin Arasiyal Sozhchigal*, Chennai, n.d.

characterized as a "foreign party", the Indian branch of the International Communist party. They are accused of disrespecting "patriots" and supporting the Muslim League. It is contended that they are abetting mass conversions from Hinduism and are hence "enemies of Hindu dharma". Communists are said to indulge in barbarous violence and suppression of human freedom, and are declared to be "enemies of society". It is contended that communism is a religion.[25]

The Dravida Kazhagam (DK) is portrayed as "the illegal child of the British" which was opposed to the Indian struggle for independence. It is accused of having spoiled the Muslims of Tamil Nadu. There are frequent references to violence committed by DK, which is accused of preaching atheism and creating divisions in the Hindu society and supporting separatism.[26]

The Hindus appear in these narratives as a divided lot. Hindus and Hindu organizations are portrayed as victims of violence perpetuated by the 'other'. Tolerance and broad-mindedness of the Hindus is referred to as their weakness : "We Hindus have so far converted twenty-two crore Hindu people (sic). We have also created and given another Pakistan. So we Hindus must give up our principle that all religions are acceptable and adopt the principle that only my religion is acceptable".[27] It is said that there is no dearth for devotion among Hindus in Tamilnadu; but there is no feeling of being a Hindu. It is also often complained

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[25] D.P. Thengadi, *Kammyunistugalai Kutramsattugirom*, Chennai, n.d.

[26] *Vijaya Bharatam*, 16 April 1982, p. 19.

[27] Ibid, 27 November 1981, pp. 8-9

that there is no unified training for Hindus and they do not come to the street, to

solve their social problems. The Hindus are also portrayed as ignorant and

innocent people:

> They do not know to cry even if they get hit. They always console
> themselves saying that to get hit is their fate.
>
> They do not know that Hindusthan is their homeland and they are its owners.
> Not only that, this is Hindus' nation and Hindu *rashtra*, but they also *do not
> realize that they live as majority in this land* by God's grace. *They have not
> realized how the owners and majority community of a nation should behave*.
>
> They should say forcefully and strongly that this is Hindusthan; it is our
> nation; we have the right to rule it on the basis of our culture (emphases
> mine).[28]

Hence , the need of the hour it is argued, is that of the Hindus realizing

their strength and asserting their right. The Hindu, according to these

organizations should no more allow himself to be "ill-treated" in his own land.

This characterization of the 'self' and the 'other' appears recurrently in all the

other mobilization strategies of the Hindu organizations.

Mobilization Through *Shakhas*

The RSS, unlike the HM and the VHP, concentrates on mobilizing

through its *shakhas*. By expanding its network of *shakhas* the RSS spreads its

ideology. The *swayamsevaks* which these *shakhas* develop are an important

means through which the RSS ideology is spread and fresh contacts established.

By holding training camps for the *swayamsevaks* in a particular, locality the RSS

'educates'the public. Further, the participants in such camp play an instrumental

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[28] Ibid., 6 January 1989, p.5

role in starting new branches of *shakha* in the surrounding areas, thereby expanding the *shakha* network

Gaining Legitimacy Through Welfare Measures

The RSS , through its affiliate Seva Bharti, established in 1979, undertakes a large number of welfare programmes (see Table-4). Seva Bharti aims at working in the fields of education medicine, spirituality and abolition of untouchability and conversion.The participants in the Seva Bharti-conducted programmes undergo "character-building" which may in many instances, if not all, be a very sustained one. Though concentrated in the cities and towns these programmes have started spilling out to the rural areas. In Tamilnadu, the Seva Bharti undertakes a variety of activities: in the educational field - tuition centres (in more than twenty places), students hostel and night education; in the medical field- leprosy, asthma and diabetes camps, and free eye camps; in the spiritual arena - *bhajan mandali*, *Thiruvilakku poojai*, temple renovation; and in vocational field - job-oriented measures like tailoring and handicraft courses.[29] The RSS organizes numerous blood donation camps, where the donations is followed by a programme of film show and signing of devotional and patriotic songs. The temple renovation programmes allow for mass participation. In one such programme, public and students of more than twenty colleges and youth totally numbering 1,100 participated.[30] There are also other affiliates like Samskrita

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[29] Ibid., 23 September 1994, p.5
[30] Ibid., 3 September 1993, p.19.

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Bharti which conducts Sanskrit classes. The VHP also involves itself in temple renovation works, where it associates with the dalits. It has even built about 200 temples for them in Tamil Nadu and trained them in the rituals. The HM undertakes welfare measures like free distribution of notebooks for school children and conducting *Vilakku Poojai*. These welfare measures help these organizations to establish new contacts and impart their nationalist ideology to the masses.

Vilakku Poojai

This is a ceremony in which women worship the lighted lamp to get the blessings of the goddess Lakshmi. The Hindu organizations have utilized this ceremony as a means to mobilize the women. Many reports occur in their publications about Vi*lakku Poojais* involving 108 or 1,008 women. These occasions are not confined merely to lamp worship, but are also used to discuss about the sorry state of the Hindu society, the solution for it and the role that women need to play.[31] Such *poojais* are also reported to have been arranged for issues like world welfare and cow protection, on which occasions patriotic songs are sung. This ceremony, though essentially religious, is used by those organisations to mobilize people on various issues and generate a favourable public opinion on such issues and about these organizations themselves. The ceremony is popularized by these organizations by distribution of instructions and methods for conducting the *Vilakku Poojai*, which also contain *slokas* in

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[31] Ibid., 21 February 1997, p. 21.

Sanskrit and Tamil along with some patriotic songs. Such *poojais* are also held in dalit localities to mobilize the women in those areas.

Raksha Bandhan

This north Indian festival which was celebrated by the RSS to symbolize brotherhood was made a public function where large numbers of people were tied the *rakhi* (see Table-4). An important feature of this festival was that it was celebrated in the dalit localities by the RSS, with the participation of other Hindu organizations. The aim is to emphasize the Hindu identity of the dalits and to convey to them the message that they are part of the Hindu community. It is stated that to avoid the discrimination against Hindus by the state, there has to be unity among them, which can be brought about by the *Raksha Bandhan* festival which stresses the Hindu brotherhood.

Table 4 : RSS in Tamilnadu

Social Service	Locations	122
	No. Services	243
Raksha Bandhan	Total Festivals	2,513
	Rakhis Tied	10,51,867
	Festival in Slums	383

Source : Vijaya Bharatam, 21 September 1990, Chennai.

Utilizing Festive Occasions

The Hindu organizations actively mobilize people on the Hindu festive occasions, when they distribute their literature and undertake welfare measures like providing drinking water, medical help etc. During the Mahamagam festival at Kumbakonam the number of beneficiaries of Seva Bharti alone were $3\frac{1}{2}$ lakh (see Table-5). By associating themselves closely with various religious festivities they seek to gain the good-will and legitimacy from masses.

Table 5 : Seva Bharti Activities in Mahamagam Festival, 1992

Activity	Centres	Beneficieries /Buyers
Butter Milk and Water	6	2,10,000
Information	6	1,644
Book sales	6	5,000
Free Medical care[a]	4	148
Exhibition	1	1,25,000
Cultural[b]	1	5,000

a- Sevaks - 27; Doctors - 5; Medical Assistants-11
b- Participants -58; Programmes -5.

Source: Vijaya Bharatam, 28 February 1992, Chennai.

Commemoration Days

The RSS celebrates many commemoration days in honour of personalities like B.R. Ambedkar, Subash Chandra Bose and Hedgewar. These occasions are used to spread its ideology. It also celebrates the Tamil New Year, when

processions are taken out through cities and towns . The centenary celebrations of Hedgewar was utilized by the RSS to launch a public contact programme (see Table-6). Many competitions were held for school and college students. Symposia, exhibitions, *Vilakku poojais* and *rangoli* competitions were held in many places. Folk arts were employed to spread the ideas of Hedgewar. In Madurai there was a "Hindu Sangamam" when about 4,000 swayamsevaks and 7,000 members of the general public participated in the procession which culminated in a public meeting attended by about 15,000 people. There was another "Hindu sangamam" at Nagercoil where more than 10,000 participated. At Nagore a "Ko-Pooja" was held in the presence of 5,000 people.[32] Such occasions were utilized by the RSS to expand its activities and communicate its ideas.

Table 6: RSS public contact programme during Hedgewar centenary celebrations in Tamilnadu

Total Villages	12,580
Villages Contacted	4,059
Families Contacted	3,05,880
Public Meetings	1,930
Workers involved	3,055
Addresses Received	4,864

Source: Nigaratra Nootrantu Vizha, Kesavar Pub, Chennai, 1990.

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[32] *Nigaratra Nootrandu Vizha*, Chennai, 1990, pp. 132-3.

The HM observes "Homage Day" in the memory of its volunteers who were killed. These occasions are used to renew the commitment of large number of volunteers to the organization and to conduct public functions.

Processions And Campaigns

The Hindu organizations undertake processions on various issues like cow protection, Swadeshi, temple protection etc. These *padyatras* and cycle processions are aimed at creating "awareness" among the masses and mobilizing support for the demands of these organizations. Slogan raising, singing of patriotic songs, explanatory meetings, gathering of new members, and appointing organizers and coordinators, are some of the activities that mark these processions. The VHP undertook a 1000 km padyatra for "temple recovery". It also spearheaded the Ayodhya signature campaign when a total of 19,17,592 persons signed in support of their cause.[33]

Agitations And Confrontations

The HM, and to a lesser extent the VHP, employ agitations as a means of mobilizing support for their demands. Various agitational methods like *dharna, ghaero*, hunger strike are adopted.

Confrontation as a strategy is used by the HM mainly to counter the DK activities. The DK announced that it would conduct Ravana *leela* when the effigy

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[33] *Vijaya Bharatam*, 26 March 1993, p. 10.

of Ram would be burnt. The HM countered this by declaring that it would burn the effigies of DK leaders and the "superstitions" contained in the *Bible* and *Quran*. The DK's proposed debate "Ramayana and Mahabharatha- which excels in eroticism and immorality?" was also opposed by the HM which mobilized support to ban the debate.[34]

Debates And Discussions

The Hindu organizations conduct debates, discussions and symposia to create a favourable public opinion and to spread their ideology. The VHP to create public support conducted a symposium entitled "Independent commission for administration of Hindu temples". Debates like "Patriotism, Spirituality, Social Reform-which is the urgent need for rejuvenation of Bharat?"decide that patriotism is the most important and mould the public opinion.[35] The VHP's affiliate Samskrita Parishad regularly conducts symposia, exhibitions and competitions.

Propaganda Against Caste and Conversions

The caste conflicts between the dalits and other Hindus is antithetical to the growth of a homogenous Hindu identity which the Hindu organizations seek to construct. Realizing the severity of the problem and its importance to develop Hindu identity, these organizations follow a four-pronged strategy. Firstly, they

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[34] Ibid., 8 September 1989, p. 24. Ibid, 18 February 1992, pp. 9-10
[35] Ibid, 7 January 1982, p. 7.

stress the unity of all Hindus and oppose caste oppression and untouchability;

secondly they attempt to dissuade any thoughts of conversions, by presenting a

negative characterization of other religions; thirdly, they adopt a counter-strategy

of "reconverting" many of the converts to Hinduism; and finally, they oppose

concessions to dalits professing other faiths.

After the Meenakshipuram conversions the Hindu organizations

intensified their activities with regard to the dalits. The conversions prompted the

VHP to organize its Jana Jagaran (awakening the masses) and Sanskriti Raksha

Yojana (Protect Hindu culture) campaigns in those areas. It also began a

movement for "Hindu Awareness Fund" to prevent conversions and to abolish

untouchability.

The Hindu organizations, namely, the RSS, the VHP and the HM joined

hands with the Arya Samaj and the Temple Protection Committee to form the

Hindu Unity Centre.

As a first step the centre got the "blessings of Hindu religious leaders" like

Dharmapuri Aadeenam, Madurai Aadeenam and Kanchi Sankaracharya. It began

to conduct numerous *padyatras*, conferences and people contact programmes. On

14 July 1981 it held a Hindu Unity Conference at Meenakshipuram attended by

many "religious leaders", who declared at the conference:

> We, the religious heads assembled today at Meenakshipuram solemnly
> declare that our *Vedas* and *Shastras* have not mentioned untouchability in
> any form, anywhere but have propounded only complete brotherhood..... We
> therefore ardently appeal to all our Hindu brethren to individually and

collectively throw out these evils lock, stock and barrel, and strive to ensure equality and fraternity among all sections of our Hindu people.[36]

A second Hindu Unity Conference was held on 27 July 1981 at Ramanathapuram, where for the purpose of "atma sakti", joint-fasting, *bhajans* and religious discourses were conducted. At the end a pledge was taken to eradicate untouchability from the Hindu society. Following this, lot of meetings and pledge-taking functions were organized all over Tamilnadu where people pledged to "treat Harijans as our brothers and to work for the progress of Bharat till the end" and that "Hindus are one family. There is no place for untouchability in Hindu dharma. Hindu unity is the lifeline of this nation".[37]

The Centre organized Hindu Unity and Resurgence Conferences at various places in the state. Conferences held at Chennai, Nagercoil, Vellore passed resolutions like, "Hindu children for Hindu schools"; "Hindu votes for those who care for Hindus". Several conferences of smaller proportions and public meetings were organized in numerous places. "Group-worships" were conducted by the HM where "Hindus and Hindu Harijan brothers participated".[38]

The Hindu organizations, mainly the VHP, are also involved in "reconverting" many of the converts to other faiths by conducting the *Suddhi* ceremony. The "reconverts" are given a sacred thread and are taught the Gayatri *mantra*. These organizations have responded to the recurring caste tensions by conducting *padyatras*, establishing Hindu Solidarity Peace Committees and by

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[36] Cited in Jaffrelot. "The Hindu Nationalist Movement", p. 349.
[37] *Vijaya Bharatam*, 14 August 1981, pp. 6,7; Ibid., 21 August 1981, pp. 16,17.
[38] Ibid., 5 February 1982. p. 19.

stressing on the necessity for the Hindus to remain united. They also organize religious classes, *Vilakku poojais*, tuition classes, and arrange for visit of religious heads to generate "awareness" among the masses about their Hindu identity and "Hindu brotherhood". The Hindu organizations try to popularize the Hindu religion among the dalits and involve them in various religious activities to 'strengthen' their Hindu identity.

Vehicles Of Mobilization

The VHP and the HM have effectively used the *Ratham* (chariot) as a means of mobilization. The *Ratham* is a mobile propaganda unit consisting of a van equipped with audio-visual equipment and a powerful public address system.

The VHP launched the *Gnana Ratham* or "Chariot of Wisdom" on 12 February 1986 from Kumbakonam. The VHP describes it as a "prudently thought of religious device to bring the message of Hindu religion to the doors of rural masses and help to eradicate untouchability". The *Gnana Ratham* becomes essential because there "is a necessity for spiritual growth in the rural masses today. To fulfill this, Hindu religious saints and Sannyasis should go to the villages. The VHP is making arrangements for this. It is to enable the Sannyasis to meet the village masses that we have created the *'Gnana Deepam' Ratham"*. The VHP mentions the aims with which the *Ratham* was launched by it: "To explain to the rural masses and make them understand the greatness of the Hindu dharma; to eradicate the wrong notions about the Hindu dharma which have been created

in the minds of the rural masses; to protect our people from becoming victims of the propaganda machinery of other religions; to bring the *mdathpathis* and *sannyasis* to the villages to give *darshan* to the village masses".[39] The aim in short was to promote the tenets of Hinduism and to prove its superiority over any other religion or faith.

Travelling with the *Gnana Ratham* was a "learned individual" who preaches "in the most simple and appealing manner". The *Ratham* sanctified by the idol of *Murukan* was also a mobile Hindu temple. The idol was installed in the *Ratham* by the Kanchi Sankaracharya and Pejawar Mathadheesha. The route of the vehicle was publicized much in advance so that villagers can prepare and assemble for its arrival. The programme included singing devotional hymns, a lecture on "any dharmic subject", and a feast for the poor. The *pooja* and *bhajan* were followed by the screening of a religious film show "and the devotees returned to their abodes - their faith and devotion intensified a hundredfold, and their self-confidence in maintaining their social and religious identity immensely reinforced.[40] Among the various programmes associated with the *Ratham*, the VHP attached greatest importance to the practice that any individual irrespective of any caste could perform the *abhishek* of the deity by himself or herself.

It is estimated that over 2,00,000 people participated in the *Ratham's* programmes during its progress through 110 villages of Tamilnadu. In a particular

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[39] Ibid., 7 March 1986, p. 13

[40] H.V. Seshadri, *Hindu Renaissance Under Way*, Bangalore, 1984, pp. 57-8

village, it is reported that 2,000 people "welcomed" the *Ratham*. Funding for the *Gnana Ratham* came from industrialist K.K. Birla , Lakshmi Mills, Aruna Sugar, Hivelm industries, Sundaram Charities, and *The Hindu* newspaper. *The Ratham* is credited with creating awareness among the village masses, which resulted in the convening of the *Poojari* (village priests) conference.

The Hanuman *Ratham* of the HM began its journey from Rameswaram on 9 February 1996 and reached the same place on 21 March 1996. In the mean while, it had travelled through the length and breadth of Tamilnadu carrying with it the ideology of the H.M. The *Ratham* had a Hanuman idol which had been installed and worshipped with sacrifices at Dhanushkodi. Rama Gopalan, the chief organizer of the HM travelled in the vehicle. The *Ratham* was launched because "people are living with lot a hate. Pessimistic thoughts like, whom to believe? will this nation progress? are on the rise today. If this has to be rectified we should establish 'Dharmarajya, Ramarajya'. It is to convey this message that the Ratham is launched".[41] The *Ratham* touched most of the important towns of Taminadu and visited numerous villages. The schedule of the *Ratham* and the public meeting which took place on each day of the journey at different places was publicized in advance. The *Ratham* carried a particular agenda; it demanded "an act to prevent conversion; family planning for all; equal opportunity and concessions for Hindus to start schools and colleges; establishment of an Independent Authority for temple administration; government salary for the six

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[41] *Vijaya Bharatam*, 16 February 1996, p. 4

lakh village priests; and, to give no concessions for converts".[42] These demands were 'popularized' by distribution of handbills, effective use of the audio-visual equipment of the *Ratham* and the public meetings at the end of the day.

Another *Ratham* launched by the HM to carry its message to the masses is the *Komatha Ratham* or "chariot of Mother cow". The issue on which the *Ratham* focused was cow protection. The demands were to : "declare cow as the national animal; ban cow slaughter; establish a commission to improve the quality of cows; and , cow protection centres for old cows".[43] The *Ratham* in addition to the image of Komatha and calf also contained those of Sri Krishna and Siva-Parvati on the Nandi. The idols were carefully chosen to attract both Saivities and the Vaishnavites.

These *Rathams* occupy an important place in the overall mobilization strategies of the Hindu organizations. The choice of idols is carefully made, to evoke popular response from the masses. While the *Gnana Ratham* was sanctified by *Murukan* a deity much popular in Tamil Nadu, the *Sakti Ratham*, also launched by the VHP, was associated with the Samayapuram Mariyamman, a goddess with a huge following in the state. Great deal of prestige was added to these *Ratham* enterprises when they were blessed by the Kanchi Sankaracharya and Pejawar Mathadheesha. These *Rathams* brought the divinities and *sadhus* closer to the masses, helping them to refurbish their Hindu identity. More

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 20 December 1995, pp. 16-17.

significantly, they ventured into dalit localities, which had till now been forcefully excluded from Hindu religious ceremonies and festivals, thereby 'reminding' them that they are very much a part of the Hindu society. This was aimed at preventing the dalits from converting to other religions. The *Rathams* using popular religious symbols , thus tried to mobilize the Hindus and strengthen their Hindu identity.

During the course of these *Rathams*, the Hindu organizations were able to establish new contacts with local people and recruit new followers from the rural and remote areas. Further, a local network of supporters was established which can be used at the opportune moment for mobilizing the masses. These enterprises also helped these organizations to spread their ideology and generate a favourable public opinion.

The "Resurgent" Vinayaga

The *Vinayaga* festival, essentially a household festival celebrated mainly in Chennai, has been reconstituted by the Hindu organizations into a meticulously organized spectacular public event; which is increasingly making its presence felt, violently though, in newer areas of the state breaking away from its metropolitan character. The god *Vinayaga* has a special position in the state. Being worshipped as the "destroyer of obstacles", he has come to occupy many street corners and village centres in Tamilnadu with his small shrines. Unlike his brother *Murukan*, he is hardly associated with violence and is predominantly looked upon as a

friendly divinity always at the disposal of his devotees. This diminutive elephant-headed son of Siva has of late come to symbolize the "resurgence of Hindus" at the behest of the Hindu organizations.

The *Vinayaga Chaturthi* has been successfully appropriated by the Hindu organizations as an occasion to mobilize the Hindus and strengthen their Hindu identity. The festival was brought to the streets of Chennai in the year 1984 by a small group of "enthusiasts". But, the god had to wait for another six years to undertake his "social awakening" programme . In 1990, the *Vinayaga* festival entered the streets of Chennai in a spectacular manner and was "speaking a language which was barely religious it resonated with the nation".[44] It was no more a mere household festival, instead the idols, funded by wealthy Marwari traders, were unprecedentally huge and were installed in the streets for public worship. The festival which was previously a one-day affair now became a gala event spreading for about a week. On the last day the idols were taken in a procession to the beach for immersion. The procession route was carefully chosen so as to cover the locality of Triplicane, where there is a substantial concentration of Muslims and the most important mosque of the city.

The *Vinayaga* in this "new incarnation" was brought to Tamilnadu by the HM and the VHP with the aim of unifying all Hindus and to create "the feeling that we are Hindus; awareness that this is our country; the responsibility and

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[44] M.S.S. Pandian., "Death in a 'City of Fools'", *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 1992, p. 2352.

public opinion that we ourselves have to solve the problems of this nation" and to stress that untouchability and caste conflicts should be eradicated.[45] It was also stated that the festival aimed at "creating a feeling of pride in being a Hindu", enabling greater participation of women and establishing "social equality" by installing idols of *Vinayaga* in "ignored" and slum areas.

Rama Gopalan, the chief organizer of the Hindu Munnani, detailed the plans for *Vinayaga Chaturthi* celebrations in his column "Thoughts-Reflections-Experiences" in *Vijaya Bharatam*. He writes:

"We should plan months before and arrange for discourses, dramas villupattu, a folk performance in which a story is sung with prose interludes to the accompaniment of music symposia, *Kaviarangam* (a poetry convention). A committee should work for this throughout the year, should explain the secret of our Hindu survival even after the invasions on Hindus for about 2000 years. Can explain about the holy places, persons and their lives. Can screen quality video cassettes. Can explain with latest technology that the Bharat, from Himalayas to Kanyakumari is our *Thai Nadu* (Motherland), *Thantaiyar Nadu* (Fatherland), *Dharm Bhoomi,. Karma Bhoomi, Punya Bhoom, Moksha Bhoomi.* A National Arts and Literature Committee should work for this throughout the year. Can give importance to music . By conducting such a variety of cultural programmes this function can be made joyful and useful".[46]

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[45] *Vijaya Bharatam* , 7 September 1990, p. 12.
[46] Ibid, p. 13.

There were many events which marked the *Vinayaga Chaturthi* celebrations in 1990. Discourses on *Ramayanam* and *Mahabaratham* were held. There was an enactment of play on the Ramjanmabhoomi by school children. Many *Kolam* (decorative designs drawn on floor with flour) competitions and debates were conducted. The celebrations included distribution of clothes to poor girl children from slums and their fathers. *Darithra Narayanan Poojai* (worship of God in the form of the poor), was conducted "to make the poor realize that they are also part of the Hindu society; it is the responsibility of all others to uplift them".

The *Vinayaga* festival was consciously converted into a public event and there was an attempt to include people from all sections. The slums where the dalits lived were given special attention and the festival was utilized to establish contacts with them and 'remind' them of their Hindu identity. The whole event was carefully designed to stress the Hindu identity of the participants as opposed to the 'other' religious communities by emphasizing on particular diacritical symbols. Rama. Gopalan writes in his column about the usefulness of the *Vinayaga Chaturthi* celebrations:

> Should help to stress that one should wear *thiruneeru, kungumam, thiruman, sandhanam* (religious marks) on the forehead *while coming out of the house everyday*. Should develop the idea to wear *vaetti* (dhothi), and not *kaili* (a piece of cloth worn by men, with chequered pattern or floral design). Should stress that one should give up foreign practices like cutting cakes and blowing candles on the birthdays of children. Should develop the strong idea that one should buy only from Hindu shops and only Hindu produces (emphasis mine).[47]

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[47] Ibid.

The festival, thus, aimed at creating a homogenous Hindu identity, on the one hand by juxtaposing it against the 'other', and on the other hand by glossing over the differences within the Hindu society. It was declared that with the coming of *Vinayaga* "the fear and weariness which had engulfed the Hindus has been removed, with joy and energy replacing them". The Vinayaga festival in course of time became a "national festival" to fight against separatism and terrorism, and to instill strength and self-confidence in the masses. It was declared that such a struggle necessitated the divine blessings to substantiate the human efforts. To secure the ethereal assistance an ingenious method was devised: "(to celebrate) *Ganapathi Homam* in all places where *Vinayaga Chaturthi* celebrations are taking place. *There should be participation from the poor people*, should collect small amount of funds and conduct the *Homam* in a *simple manner*. All should be given *prasadam* .... We request you to do this in all places. Along with that, ... in the same place where *Vinayaga* has been installed, Bharat Mata *pooja* should be conducted. The methods for conducing the *pooja* are in *recorded cassettes* with the Central Celebration Committee..... Women should themselves do the..... *pooja* . At the end all should be given *prasadam* (emphases mine)".[48]

This shows an attempt at two things . Firstly, the effort was to ritualize the celebrations thereby adding some prestige to it. But the rituals were to be in a "simple manner" so that the masses will not feel detached from the proceedings. Secondly, the distribution of recorded cassettes and *prasadam* were aimed at

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[48] Ibid., 17 July 1992, p. 10.

popularizing the function with a special emphasis on the poor and women, the latter being allotted a distinct responsibility. Bharat Mata *pooja* which was closely associated with the RSS entered into the *Vinayaga Chaturthi* celebrations, bringing with her the emphasis on nationalism and the ideology of the Hindu organizations.

The week long festival was to include celebrations of Students Day, Youth Day, Literary Day, Folk Arts Day, "such functions where every section will participate". A discourse "Hindu religion is answering" was to be conducted and support was to be exhibited for the swadeshi cause. More importantly, on the penultimate day of festivities, to be observed as *social equality day*, the idols were to be taken to all the slum areas. In the year 1992 there were 300 *Vinayagas* from the city slums. There was also a 'noticeable' change in the iconography of the god. He now began to appear in different forms, strikingly violent and huge. From a mere three feet in 1984, the idol in Triplicane area had grown to twenty-five feet in 1992, still shorter than his counterpart from Thyagarayanagar - the *Viswaroopa Raja Vinayaga*, who had gobbled up six tonnes of plaster of paris and twenty days of fifteen peoples labour to reach a threatening height of thirty feet. There was also a perceptible change in the spread of the festival, which was now celebrated in 3,000 places all over the state, including many bigger and smaller towns which were communally volatile (see Table-7). Rama. Gopalan declared that in the next year it was planned to celebrate *Vinayaga Chaturthi* in all

panchayats and have installations of idol in all wards. For Chennai city it was proposed to install at least ten idols in each of the 150 divisions of the city.

Table - 7
Vinayaga Chaturthi Festival In Chennai

Year	No. Idols	No. Participants
1990	62	3,000
1991	600	30,000
1992 [a]	1,600	N.A.
1993	3,000	N.A.
1994	N.A.	N.A.
1995	4,000	2 lakh
1996	5,001	N.A.

Source : *Vijaya Bharatham*, Chennai.

a- The Tamil daily *Dina Tanthi*, stated that the number of idols were 2,000 and participants 2 ¹/2 lakhs.

In all this, the *Vinayaga* is acclaimed as a "boon" for the divided Hindu society characterized by "lack of self-respect, social consciousness and social responsibility". The festival is also credited with the creation of a "great resurgence" in areas like Nagore and Nagapattinam where "the Hindus have been living in perennial fear because of Muslim domination". Hence the Hindu organizations claim that the festival had come to symbolize the "social awakening" that all Hindus should unite and a "great resurgence" of the united Hindus against the 'other' religious communities.

The following year witnessed further innovations in the festival programme. During all the seven days of the festivities discourses on various topics were arranged: "Why are we celebrating *Vinayaga Chaturthi* as a social function?"; "The uniqueness of Hindu culture"; "This Bharat nation is our god-how can we counter the dangers of separatism and terrorism?"; "Why is there no single sacred text, prophet or path in Hindu culture?"; Do Hindus worship one or numerous gods? Lessons from the life of Sri Rama - lessons of Ramayana - how essential are dharma and justice?"; "The internal and external enemies who Hindus face"; "The battles waged against foreign domination over the past 1,000 years - victory for Hindu solidarity".[49] The festival now provided an opportunity for the participants to educate themselves on the nationalist ideology of the Hindu organizations. Clearly, the nature of the celebrations were changing to increasingly accommodate sessions of nationalist discourse.

The *Vinayaga* rechristened as *Ezhuchchi Vinayaga* (Resurgent Vinayaga) in Chennai was a witness to further innovations. From all the slum areas of the city, on all those days of celebrations, one couple as to be honoured by being made the focus of the newly added *Dhampathi Pooja* (worship of couples) and *Kanniga pooja* (worship of virgin). "Religious and spiritual awareness classes" were conducted on those days of festivals , which were to be observed as Youth Day, Resurgence Day, Mothers Day, Social Solidarity Day And Self-Worship Day, the last of which is surely aimed at making the festival more participative

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[49]   Ibid., 9 July 1993, p. 7.

bringing the participants closer to the idol and 'helping' them to align themselves with the idol and its fortunes. This is discernible from the claim advanced that the *Vinayaga* festival brings together people belonging to different *sampradayas*, because every one can celebrate according to their own *sampradaya* (*Avaganam, Vinayagar Pradishtai, Ganapathi Homam, Arul Paaliththal, Nagarvalam and Visarjanam*). [50] In 1994 the festival became more colourful with the introduction of several games purportedly to develop "human integration, patriotism and devotion". The aim was to attract the youth towards the festival.

The year 1995 saw a further increase in the proportion of *Vinayagas* from the slum areas of the city, numbering around 1,000 idols. Religious education began to gain prominence in the programme. It is argued that "In Islam and Christianity children are taught about their religion. But, in Hindu society there is no such concerted effort. The *Vinayaga Chaturthi* celebrations will give such an opportunity at least for a week". The following year saw further innovations in the schedule of commemoration days which were listed as Children's Day, Youth Day, Martyrs Day, National Integration Day, Mothers Day, Equality and Brotherhood Day.

The *Vinayaga Chaturthi* processions usually had a public meeting towards the end in which speeches were made to inject 'new thoughts' in the minds of the masses, further solidifying their Hindu identity. The following extract from a speech of Rama. Gopalan is an example: "Now they are saying that we cannot go

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[50] Ibid., 3 September 1993, p. 11.

on processions if there is a mosque on the way. It seems we cannot go (on procession) even if there was no mosque in the past when we started these processions. The future generations might say that *there should be no mosque an the procession route* (emphasis mine).[51]

The *Vinayaga Chaturthi* festival was thus effectively appropriated by the Hindu organizations as a mobilization tool. The dalits living in the city slums have been mobilized by foregrounding their Hindu identity. They were assigned a 'prominent' position in the celebrations. In 1991, a dalit panchayat leader was given the honour of initiating the *Vinayaga* procession, in 1992 it was a dalit youth and in 1993 a fisherwoman took the *arathi* (a light or lighted camphor in a plate waved before the image of god) while Vanniya Adigal flagged off the procession. The Hindu organizations try to associate the dalits in Chennai slums by installing numerous idols in the slums, distributing clothes, involving them in various competitions and honouring them by special *poojas*. Anandhi vividly describes the impact of *Vinayaga* festival in slums:

"It is not only that the Vinayaka festival is now made more pervasive in the slums involving every family by supplying them with idols and money, but , more importantly, it has been given a community orientation: slum youths are given the responsibility to organize rituals for a week with no constraints on funds. Idols *representing each slum* are to be carried in public procession. This new collectivity is a Hindu collectivity. The RSS, for instance, in the course of

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[51] Ibid., 8 September 1995, p. 12

organizing the Vinayaka festival and the procession, spreads its anti-Muslim message during the week-long rituals the RSS taught the youths slogans abusive of Muslims and in praise of "Hindu country". Some of these slogans were in Hindi which they were asked to memorize. These slogans were later employed in the course of the procession. We may well remember here that Vinayaka festival was until recently a household festival in Tamil Nadu with little of community/public orientation".[52]

But , it was indeed this community orientation - a *Hindu* community orientation,. that these Hindu organizations were aiming to achieve. This compelled them to popularize the *Vinayaga* festival, associating different sections of the society through celebrations of commemorative days, conducting various competitions, making the whole affair "joyful" and at the same time "useful". The *prasadam* was to be distributed to everyone, there were numerous opportunities for "self-worship", the rituals were to be "simple" and funds collected were to be "small"-*what mattered most was participation of the masses and affirming their Hindu identity*. The nationalist ideology which 'necessitated' denunciation of Muslims was increasingly added to the festivities to 'strengthen' the Hindu identity.

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[52] Anandhi , *Contending Identities*, pp. 38-9

Creating A Hindu Church

The VHP, as part of its efforts to organize Hinduism, is actively mobilizing the heads of various *maths* and *adhenams* in Tamilnadu. Traditionally, these religious institutions have occupied a very important position in the religious culture of Tamilnadu. They had numerous temples under their control and more importantly, were key channels of religious communication. By associating itself with these *maths* and *adhenams*, the VHP is able to exploit their position in the religious culture and add prestige to its activities. This relationship is also mutually benefitial, because, these religious institutions which have lost their control over temples to the state, find it opportune to join hands under the banner of the VHP to regain their control.

The VHP has also established a system of patronage which enables it to expand its network of followers. It bestows titles such as "Veda Vibhushanam", "Vaikanasa Agamavibhushan", "Sivagama Vibhushan", "Agama Sri", "Thirumurai Semmal" on priests and other related persons belonging to various *sampradayas* during the state-level conferences of religious heads organized by it.[53] The VHP, by arrogating to itself this authority to grant titles, gains recognition among the priestly community. The state-level conferences of religious heads are used by the VHP to communicate its demands to the masses. These conferences, at the behest of the VHP, initate reform in Hinduism to popularize the religion. The VHP, along with the HM, is also striving to establish

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[53] D.S. Kothandaram, *Kanak Kan Kodi Vendum*, Chennai, n.d., p. 16.

a code of conduct for the Hindus (see Annexure). This code requires Hindus to define themselves in terms of specific beliefs, symbols and practices. As a part of the code, the Hindus are expected to affiliate themselves with these organizations. These organizations, thus, create for Hindus a codified form of Hinduism which would strengthen their Hindu identity.

Organizing the Village Priests

Any attempt to organize Hinduism cannot limit itself to the *madathipathis*, *adhenakartas* and priests of the 'high' gods. The VHP well aware of this is endeavouring to bring the village priests *(poosaris)* within its network of established religion. These village priests are responsible for conducting rituals at the countless shrines dedicated to the *gramadevatas*, which have a considerably large following. These temples and priests do not share the notion of "purity and pollution" which characterizes the religious culture based on the 'high' gods. The ritual system followed in these temples are not based on *agamas* and are beref of any uniformity, they are known for animal scarifices and stand markedly different from the temples dedicated to the 'high' gods.

Of late, the VHP in its efforts to organize Hinduism, which necessitates existence of uniform ritual structure, has begun to impart agamic ritual training to the village priests. The newness of these rituals to the village priests or the differences in ritual conception between them and the practitioners of agamic rituals is very explicit in the following report on the aganic training programme :

"Yes", the *poosaris*, who participated in the VHP organized 'Agamapooja training programme', said in one voice - " will pour water, will change clothes!"

"Should not say like that. should say, 'will shower holy water, will decorate', in a godly manner." "Is it so? So far, no one taught as so...." It is to remove such a defect that, known in common language as 'Poosaris training programme' and by it its real name as ' Agama training programme' was conducted, in which more than hundreds (of poosaris) from all districts of Tamilnadu participated".[54]

These training courses, lasting two weeks for which the village priests were charged a fee of twenty-five rupees and provided free food and lodging, show the eagerness of the VHP to attract large numbers of village priests. The village priests were taught the agamic rituals and trained in conducting sacrifices (*vaelvi*). They were given instructions not to eat meat and were taught *mantras* in Tamil and Sanskrit. By 1995, 700 village priests had been trained in agamic rituals. Through this training programme the VHP tries to make the ritual system uniform and thereby create a homogenous Hinduism.

The VHP has also begun to impart a new structure to these scattered and unorganized village priests, by mobilizing them under the banner of *Grama Koil Poosarigal Peravai* (Village Temple Priests Forum). The *Peravai* was formed by Hindu Dharmartha Samiti, an affiliate of the VHP. The first state-level conference of the *Peravai* held in 1995 was attended by 5,300 village priests. The objective of forming the *peravai* was " to protect dharma; to protect temple; to protect the welfare of the *poosaris*; to create unity among them"[55]. The VHP is effectively mobilizing the village priests through this *Peravai*. The success of

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[54] *Vijaya Bharatam*, 23 February, 1990, p. 12.
[55] Ibid., 23 June 1995, p. 14.

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which is reported, the claim being largely true, in Vijaya Bharatam: "Not only in the history of India, but in the history of the whole world, for the first time the priests of the village temples which are the centres of cultural life in Tamilnadu, have assembled in the Second State Conference of Village Temple Priests Forum without the differences of caste clan and language".[56] The number of priests who participated is reported to be 10,000 but was later inflated to 50,000. These priests were "educated" to follow proper behaviour and practice the agamic rituals. Kanchi Sankaracharya told them that,

> The Hindus have a custom of offering god whatever they eat. That is why, in village temples practices like animal sacrifices, offering toddy etc. began. Today, to protect the *Social purity* these practices should be given up' *Poosalis* should be *pure*. Only then society and villages will progress (emphases mine).[57]

So, the *poosaris* were told that they should necessarily change their behaviour and rituals and should learn the agamic practices. By 1996, the *Peravai* had conducted twenty conferences at the state and district levels in which about 25,000 *poosaris* had participated. *Poosaris*, numbering 134 were given sacred thread and were taught vedic rituals.[58] In 1997, a "Poosari Welfare Fund" was established. It had generated six lakh rupees, the interest of which was to be given as benefit fund to fifty *poosaris*.[59] The VHP, through this, has established a system of patronage and is expanding its network of supporters among the village priests.

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[56] Ibid., 15 March 1996, p.6.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 22 March 1996, p.8.
[59] Ibid., 25 April 1997, p. 14.

The *Peravai* has become an important element in the VHP's strategy to create an organized Hinduism. The members of the *Peravai* give the VHP an additional channel of communication to the masses. They are active participants in the activities of the VHP like cow protection,. temple protection etc. Through this network of village priests, the VHP is able to reach the rural masses. The programmes of the VHP, with regard to the village priests, aim to bring them closer to the Hindu organizations by establishing a system of patronage and to homogenize Hinduism and thereby establish an undifferentiated monolithic Hinduism.

The Hindu organizations, namely, the RSS, the VHP and the HM, thus, follow different strategies to mobilize the Hindu identity. They device various methods to reach the different sections of the society. At the heart of all their strategies is their stigmatization of the 'other', who are characterized in negative terms. But, they also seek to emulate the 'other' by adopting the strengths of the 'other'. The missionary zeal, creation of a Hindu Church, Social welfare measures, establishing a "Hindu Vote bank", are all instances of their emulation of the 'other' whom they seek fight. The strategies primarily seek to expand the network of supporters and give prominence to the diacritica which would differentiate the Hindus from the 'others' and draw thick boundaries between religious communities, thereby creating a strong Hindu identity.

CONCLUSION

This study has dealt with the politics of religious identity in the context of the Hindu Organizations in Tamilnadu. These Hindu organizations are religio-political movements which envisage the Hindu community alone as the base and universe of their activities. The Hindu community becomes the only relevant and valid category in politics and state affairs, and for the perception, analysis and reconstruction of the socio-cultural environment.

A distinction has been made between the various religion-related movements in this study. Conservatism has been identified as a movement, which is defensive and inward-looking, failing to 'react' to the modernist challenges. These movements, opposed to modernity, primarily concern themselves with 'conserving' whatever exists by strengthening their religion and do not venture into political arena. Different from Conservatism are Fundamentalism and Communalism, religio-political movements, which are characterized by their oppositional stance and their ability to adopt modernity. It has been argued that the tendency to apply the term fundamentalism to all the religio-political movements has resulted in a failure to appreciate the essential differences between the various religio-political movements. Hence, Fundamentalism and Communalism have been differentiated by their oppositional character. While the former is arraigned against a 'general other', the latter is predominantly occupied with a 'particular other'. Moreover, the reactivity of fundamentalism is informed

by the religious element which is not the case with Communalism, for which the religion is at best secondary factor. So, fundamentalism seeks to religionize politics, whereas communalism politicizes religion. Communalism has been understood in this study as a politics of religious identity, where the 'other' it opposes is a religious community.

Our understanding of communalism as politics of religious identity does not confirm with the primordial and circumstantial approaches to the study of identity. Both the natural "gives" and the circumstances are necessary conditions for identity formation, but they are not sufficient ones. It is necessary that appropriate human choices are made for the realization of the potential for identity formation. Hence, identities are viewed as malleable and free-flowing, subject to continuous articulation and re-articulation in various identity narratives. These narratives which are aimed at identity mobilization appeal to the affectivity of the readers. They rely heavily on the elements of past, culture and space to articulate their ideas.

The historical analysis of religious boundaries in Tamil country has helped us to gain a clear understanding of the religious identities in the past. It is clearly evident from this study that there was a plural religious tradition in the Tamil region from early times. The advent of Islam and Christianity added to the plural tradition. Even while changing their religion from what has now come to be known as Hinduism, the local converts carried with them their traditions making the religious boundaries fuzzy. The religious communities in pre-colonial period

were not defined and were free-flowing. They were also defined by other identities which denied the growth of a monolithic religious identity. The colonial mediation in this fluid situation with their modernist instruments of enumeration and mapping sought to define the religious communities by drawing definite boundaries between them. Our analysis of the British census has highlighted the problems faced by the enumerators to identify the Hindu community.

The study of Hindu organizations in Tamilnadu, in this background, has enriched our understanding of the politics of religious identity. The organizations, namely, the Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Hindu Munnani (HM) have independent structures but are ideologically unified, the last two owing their origin to the RSS. The RSS relies more on its organization, with *shakas* and *pracharaks* forming crucial elements to further the nationalist ideology. The VHP, on the other hand, concentrates on building an organized Hinduism through its Dharma Sansad. The HM, confined to Tamilnadu, actively involves itself in creating "awareness" among the Hindu masses by "protecting their rights and welfare", and creating a "Hindu vote bank".

The mobilization strategies of these organizations are based on various issues like, "discrimination" against the Hindus; "harassment" of them by other religious communities; increasing domination of other religious communities; "forced" conversion of the Hindus; cow and temple protection etc. They adopt various strategies ranging from welfare measures to confrontations and individual training to mass mobilization. Even while co-operating with each other in

furthering the cause of a Hindu nation, these organizations have some basic differences in the emphasis they give to different strategies of mobilization. The RSS lays emphasis on individual "character-building" through its *shakas*, the VHP actively mobilizes the *madathipathis* and *adeenakarthas*, the various religious heads throughout the state to build a Hindu Church. It also organizes the village priests, who form the lifeline of the religious culture in the rural areas of the state. By imparting them training in vedic rituals and by enforcing the notions of "purity and pollution" the VHP seeks to build a monolithic organized Hinduism. The HM gives greater emphasis to mass mobilization, when compared to the other two. It also actively adopts strategies of agitation and confrontation, thereby differing from the RSS and the VHP.

The analysis of the various mobilizational strategies of these organizations has helped us to identify certain important features of them. These organizations, firstly, are a reaction to the 'other'. The 'other' whom they are arraigned against is a 'particular other', which is a primarily a religious community. In their narratives, the Muslims figure predominantly as the 'other'. The 'other' occupies an important place in the narratives; the Hindu identity being frequently defined against the 'other'. The projection of an "other" is also important for the formation of a Hindu identity. This is aptly commented upon by psychologist Sudhir Kakar, who writes:

> It seems a Hindu is born only when the Muslim enters. Hindus cannot think of themselves as such without a simultaneous awareness of the Muslim's presence..... Little wonder that 'Hindutva' needs 'the Muslim Question' for the

creation of a united Hindu community and the expansion of its political ways and, in fact, will find it difficult to live without it.[1]

The 'other' not only aids the formation of a homogenous Hindu identity, but also defines the nature of that identity. This is discernible from the fact that the Hindu organizations not only oppose the 'other', but they also emulate them. The Muslims, and occasionally the Christians, are arraigned for all the difficulties faced by the Hindus. They are accused on several matters like conversions, population growth, common civil code, cow protection, terrorism etc. Frequently they are described as fanatics, conquerors, aggressors, anti-nationalists, destroyers of public property etc. But, even while stigmatizing them, the Hindu organizations emulate many of the characteristics of the 'other' religious communities, to overcome the weaknesses in the Hindu community. This is clearly evident from their attempt to build a Hindu Church and organize Hinduism on the model of the Catholic Church. The analysis also shows their inclination to build a "Hindu vote bank" to "counter the minority vote bank". Hence, it is clear that the Hindu organizations oppose and at the same time emulate the 'other', as posited in our hypothesis.

The Hindu organizations lay much emphasis on organizing the Hindu religion. Their activities are all aimed at building an ecclesiastical Hinduism which would "strengthen" the religion. The VHP has establish a Dhram Sansad, which involves various religious sects and leaders, to "guide" the Hindu religion. It is also mobilizing the village priest, who are highly unorganized, by imparting

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[1] Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 136.

training in vedic rituals, voicing their demands and establishing a fund for their benefit. The aim is clearly to bring all the priests of different traditions under a single Hindu Church. The Hindu organizations' eagerness to build an organized Hinduism is explicitly stated by Chinmayananda, the founder President of the VHP:

> I know that religious organization is against the very principle of Hinduism, but we have to move with the time. We seem to have entered today all over the world, in every walk of life, in every field of endeavour into an age of organization. You cannot send a rocket up without an organization. If disorganized, there is no strength, no vitality. Therefore, in the spiritual field, even though the individuals proceed forward and developed, if religion wants to serve the society, it also has to get organized.[2]

The Hindu organizations are not only organizing Hinduism, but are creating a "dynamic Hinduism". This is evident from their attempt to popularize the Hindu religion through various strategies like *Rathams*, *Vinayaga Chaturthi* etc. These occasions are used to 'reach' various sections of the society who had hitherto been kept out of Hindu ritual system, like the dalits. The *Vinayaga* festival exemplifies this effort at popularizing Hinduism by including programmes for all sections of the society and making it more participative with features like self-worship, distribution of *prasadam* etc.

Along with this effort at popularization, the Hindu organizations also attempt to universalize certain chosen elements of the Hindu religion like the God *Vinayaga*, the *mantra* "om", sun-worship etc. Another important feature of the "dynamic Hinduism", closely linked to the efforts at popularization and

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[2] Cited in Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, p. 202.

universalization of Hinduism, is the conscious efforts of the Hindu organizations to simplify the religious practices. This is aimed at attracting more people and increasing the 'reach' of the Hindu organizations. Hence, the Hindu organizations seek to build an organized Hinduism, but at the same time this Hinduism is also dynamic, for it aims at greater participation and universalization of the religion which are contrary to the traditional nature of Hinduism. This validates our hypothesis: The activities of Hindu organizations change the nature of Hindu religion.

The importance accorded to politics by the Hindu organizations is evidenced in their mobilizational strategies. The *Vinayaga* festival which was begun essentially as a religious festival witnessed a change in nature with the introduction of *Bharat Mata Pooja*, various debates on the national issues. The rituals of the festival were made simple and importance was given for other participative events like various competitions, debates, discussions, folk performances etc. The primacy here is not the religion, but to greater participation and the "usefulness" of the festival. The iconography of *Vinayaga* also changed considerably from the usual representation of the god, with innovations like "computer *Vinayaga*" which deviates from the grammar of iconography. This shows that the Hindu organizations did not attach much importance to religion, but they were effectively using the religious symbols to mobilize the masses for political purposes. Hence, our hypothesis: The Hindu organizations are primarily concerned with politics and not religion, is validated.

The above analysis has shown that the Hindu organizations seek to usher in many changes to the structure and nature of Hindu religion. They have also prescribed a "code of conduct" for all the Hindus to follow, which aims at influencing and changing their behaviour, beliefs and traditions. The attempt here is to build a politically active Hindu, who will support the cause furthered by the Hindu organizations. This Hindu identity is not defined by these organizations in traditional terms, but the traditional idiom is used by them, as we had hypothesized, to construct a new Hindu identity.

These Hindu organizations can not be termed as revivalists, for they do not seek to revive the bygone past even though they speak in the traditional language. Instead, they aim to engineer changes in the religion by popularizing, simplifying, universalizing and formalizing the Hindu religion. Their concern with a "particular other" and adoption of modernity does not permit us to term them as fundamentalists or conservatives. The preoccupation of the Hindu organizations with politics of religious identity classifies them as communalists. But, their stress on nationalism based on a Hindu identity qualifies them as ethno-nationalists.

The recent spurt of communal violence in Tamilnadu indicates the effect of mobilization of Hindus by the Hindu organizations. Any counter-violence unleashed by the Muslim communalists is certain to increase the fear of the 'other', which these organizations have always tried to emphasize and harden the religious identities, thereby triggering a vicious circle.

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ANNEXURE - I

RSS ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

I. *Sarasanghchalak*

II. *Kendriya Karyakari Mandal* (Central Working Committee)

    A. General Secretary

        1. Assistant General Secretary

    B.*Karyalaya Pramukh* (Office Secretary)--responsible for corredpondence and expenditure of funds.

    C. Zonal joint secretaries

    D. Program Chairman

        1. *Prachar Pramukh*--responsible for recruitment and placement of *pracharaks*.

        2. *Shararik Shikshan*--arranges physical exercises at shakha and camps.

        3. *Baudhik Pramukh*--determines songs to learn, books to be read, topics at *shakha* and *baudhik*.

        4. *Nidhi Pramukh*--arranges for collection of funds at Guru Dakshina*

        5. *Vyavastha Pramukh*--coordinator of activities.

III. *Akhil Bhartiya Pratinidhi Sabha* (All-India Representative Assembly). This meets once a month in Nagpur.
Resolutions are discussed and voted by the Sabha. Members are elected by *swayamsevaks* over 18.

IV. *Kshetra* (Zone)

    A. *Pracharak*

V. *Prant* (State)

    A. *Sanghchalak*
    B. *Karyavah*
    C. *Pracharak*
    D. Committee
    E. *Pratinidhi Sabha*

VI. *Vibhag* (Division)

    A. *Sanghchalak*
    B. *Karyavah*
    C. *Pracharak*
    D. Committee

VII. *Zila* (District)

    A. *Sanghchalak*
    B. *Karyavah*
    C. *Pracharak*
    D. Committee

IX. *Mandal* (Neighbourhood)

    A. *Karyavah*
    B. Committee

X. *Shakha*

    A. *Karyavah*
    B. *Mukhya Shikshak*
    C. *Shikshak*
    D. *Gatanayak*

*Subsequent to a decision to tax *gurudakshina* (Offerings), the RSS Constitution was amended to redefine the role of *Nidhi Pramukh*. *Shakha* themselves were vested with individual responsiblility in collecting donations to enable the RSS to operate with limits of tax exemption.

ANNEXURE - II

HINDU MUNNANI HANDBILL

HINDU BRETHREN ! UNDERSTAND THE CONSPIRACY

* Hindu population is decreasing because of proselytization and family planning.

* Hindu Sentiments are being hurt.

* "Secular" government is interfering only in Hindu temples and destroying them.

* Hindu wealth, business, lands are being transferred.

* All are running to speak, argue and struggle for Muslims and Christians. But for Hindus nobody!.

SO !

* To safeguard the welfare and rights of Hindus.

* To crush all conspiracies to divide and weaken the Hindu society.

* To shatter various attacks on Hindu society.

* To abolish untouchability, to end caste conflicts.

* To destroy the deception of secularism.

* To cut the roots of the conspiracy to create Pakistanis and Christianistanis in Bharat.

* To create Hindu power with self-respect, self-confidence, activity, courage, unity and self-control.

Partyless organization.

HINDU MUNNANI

Fearless Hindu ! Join hands and come!.

ANNEXURE - III

DEMANDS OF HINDU MUNNANI

An Act to prohibit religious conversion must be enacted.

A uniform civil code for all religions must be recommended.

Adequate measures should be taken to ensure that 'Family Planning' is adopted not only by Hindus but by all religious communities.

The Central and State Governments have taken measures for development of backward, harijans, and tribal sections of Hindus.

To pluck them and grant it to the converts to Islam and Christianity is unjust and improper. Because of this the rightful share of Hindus gets reduced and taken away. So these benefits must be granted only to Hindus.

The hindrances to start schools and colleges for Hindus should be removed. The concessions granted to Muslims or Christians in this regard must be made available for Hindus too.

An autonomous board must be established to administer Hindu temples and trusts.

Spiritual and cultural education must be imparted in schools and colleges. Cow slaughter must be totally prohibited. Many thousand cows are being smuggled to Kerala from Tamilnadu. This must be prohibited. Cow must be made national animal.

No district in Tamilnadu should be named after "Quaid-e-Millet Mohammed Ismail".

The atheistic propaganda that designates Hindu gods, customs, seers, and holy books must be prohibited.

Article 370 which treats Kashmir as though it is a separate nation and which encourages secessionist forces all over the country must be repealed with immediate effect.

Bharat is a great and ancient country. It is a country that has a very ancient spiritual tradition and culture. The governments that are formed in the centre and states should promise that they will protect, develop and propagate the spiritual culture of Hinduism.

ANNEXURE - IV

DUTIES OF HINDUS

Daily Duties

1. Getting - up from the bed before sun rise.

2. Worshipping their chosen deity while getting-up, after bath and before taking food.

3. Compulsory: by putting any one of the religious symbols on the forehead (like sacred ash, Kum Kum, sandal and Nam)

4. Allotting separate space or separate room for pooja (rituals and worship) for and offering incense sticks and camphor for the idol of choosen deity.

5. Pronouncing choosen deity's name all the time.

6. Daily allotting some time to read, at least few pages of any one of our religious scriptures.

7. helping our brethren, poorer than us, in whatever ways we can.

8. Lighting oil-lamp at home in the evenings.

9. Contemplating chosen deity for sometime before going to bed.

Weekly Duties

1. Visiting temple with family member every Friday or the day of one's likeness.

2. Doing meditation for 10 minutes once in a week, in the morning or evening.

3. One should attend and accure benefits from the chorul devotional songs (Bhajan), narration of puranic stories and lectures, at the neighborhood.

4. Attending with friends, the functions conducted by the Hindu organizations.

5. Visit a nearby hospital and pray, distribute prashad and console the patients over there.

Monthly Duties

1. At least once in a month, visit with family members and get consolation from saints, ascetics and heads of religious mutt.

2. Perform *bhajan*, rituals and other functions along with other co-Hindus. Pay pilgrimage to the place of spiritual significance.

3. Visit and serve the nearby orphanage or old age home.

General Duties

1. Compulsorily hang 'om' symbol /picture at your homes. 'Om' is a life mantra.

2. Support Hindu charity by becoming subscribers to dailies, weeklies and monthlies of the Hindu organisations.

3. Read the publications of the Hindu organizations and send your comments. Do not be casual/ negligent.

4. In any one way join with the neighboring Hindus and serve.

5. Explain to children about Hindu religion lucidly. Advice them that it is proud to say as an Hindu.

6. Buy Bhagawat Geeta, Puranas, Hindu organisations' publications etc., and read them along with other family members.

7. Contact Hindu organisations for doubts regarding Hindu religion.

8. Converse with propagators of Hindu organisations along with neighborhood Hindus.

9. As and when you confront with the ideas, either pro or against Hindu virtue, write your comments to journals without any hesitation.

10.Be proud that "I am a Hindu; Bharat is the Motherland of Hindus".