

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
SETTING THE CONTEXT	1
Scholarship, religion, and Indian society.....	1
Hindu nationalism.....	3
The scholarly discourse on Hindu nationalism.....	5
MAIN OBJECT	7
STRUCTURE OF THESIS	7
CHAPTER 1: PRESENTATION OF HINDU NATIONALISM.....	8
1.1 PERCEIVING OF INDIAN HISTORY	8
1.2 IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS FROM THE 19 TH CENTURY	11
1.3 <i>HINDUTVA</i> -IDEOLOGY AND THE EMERGENCE OF A DISTINCT MOVEMENT.....	13
1.4 AFTER INDEPENDENCE: PARTY POLITICS AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONALISATION.....	16
1.5 THE 1990IES: ACTIVISM AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP	21
CHAPTER 2: NOTES TO THE LITERATURE ON HINDU NATIONALISM.....	23
2.1 WESTERN LITERATURE ON HINDU NATIONALISM.....	23
2.2 COLLECTING BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DATA.....	24
2.3 RESULTS OF DATABASE SEARCHES	26
2.4 COMMENTS TO THE DATABASE FINDINGS	26
CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS OF SELECTED BOOK.....	29
3.1 APPROACHING RELIGION.....	30
Anti-essentialism	30
The social construction of reality	32
3.2 APPROACHING HINDU NATIONALISM.....	35
Democratic revolution	35
Politics in religious garb	36
3.3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY HINDU NATIONALISM.....	38
The irrelevancy of religion	38
The political instrumentality of religion	40
The psychological function of religion.....	41

3.4 PERCEIVING OF HINDU NATIONALISM.....	43
A legacy of colonialism and orientalism	43
A deviation from Hindu tradition?	44
CHAPTER 4: REFLECTIONS ON THE SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE.....	45
4.1 SCHOLARLY IDEALS, AIMS, AND CHALLENGES	45
The problem of essence	46
The religious framework: explanation by essence?	49
The political framework: substituting one essence for another?	53
4.2 SCHOLARSHIP AND RELIGION	55
Phenomenology under siege	57
The alternative of social constructionism	60
4.3 LEAVING OUT THE RELIGIOUS FRAMEWORK	64
The incompatibility of a religious modernity	64
Class analysis and the obstacle of cast.....	68
4.4 INCORPORATING THE RELIGIOUS FRAMEWORK.....	72
Religion as an analytical category	72
On the instrumentality of religious symbols and rituals	76
4.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS	79
The essentialism debate revisited	79
SUMMARY	82
LIST OF REFERENCES	83

INTRODUCTION

The 1990ies was a decade in which scholarly literature on Hindu nationalism boomed in the West. Now, nearly twenty years have past since Western scholars started to take an interest in the phenomenon of Hindu nationalism. That which recently seemed like today, has turned into history before we know it. In this thesis I will deal with scholarship on Hindu nationalism from the 1990ies, with a particular view to religion. My intention is to discuss, methodologically, some of the scholarly trends prevalent in this period of time which belongs to our close history.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Scholarship, religion, and Indian society

Conventional, Western understanding of Indian religion and society has been prone to severe criticism throughout the last decades. The critique appears twofold. The first objection is that too much have been made of religion in the study of India. The argument is that the importance attributed religion in shaping Indian society, has been exaggerated (Ludden, 1997, p. 1-23). The kernel of the argument is that there has existed a long-lived myth in the West of the Indian society as religious, irrational, and spiritual in character as opposed to the more empirically, rationally, and materialistically oriented West. Because of this myth, religion has been the main interpretative grid through which Indian society has been understood and explained by Western scholars (Ludden, 1997, p. 9).

The second objection concerns the actual knowledge of Indian religion and society. Critics argue that Indian civilisation has been associated with the religion of Hinduism exclusively, while the influence upon Indian society of other religions like Islam has been ignored (Ludden, 1997, p. 5-6). The Western knowledge of Hinduism is in turn being criticised from different angles. A common starting point is that the notion of Hinduism as a

unified, religious system is a Western, ethnocentric construction with little, if any, resemblance to the Indian reality (Frykenberg, 1997). Some object to what they conceive as a Brahmin bias within the construct of Hinduism (van der Veer, 1997). Others criticise the central place given to the cast system (Inden, 1990; Dirks, 2001). Others again object to formulating a singular entity like Hinduism at all, considering the religious plurality of India (Von Stietencron, 1997).

All this criticism can collectively be contextualised within the broader discourse of orientalist criticism, of which Edward Said has been the most well known proponent. Said's criticism of the Western perception of the Arab world was set forth in his book *Orientalism* from 1978 (Said, 1991). Said instigated a critical debate about how and why the Western world has produced its knowledge of the non-Western world. Said used the term orientalism to denote the Western, imperial way of thinking about, knowing, and dealing with the Orient. He argued that the Western production of knowledge of the Orient had to be seen in relation to the imperial project of the former to control and dominate the latter. More than establishing objective facts, Western knowledge produced the Orient as a contrast to itself. This contrast worked to substantiate the supremacy of the latter, and to legitimise its imperial ambitions and colonial rule (see Said, 1991, p. 7).

Whereas Said focused upon Western knowledge of the Arab world, other scholars have drawn attention to India. The argument still remains that orientalist scholarship is built upon a stereotyped image of the world which has come to penetrate conventional thinking throughout the 20th century. Whereas the West is seen to have entered the modern era of technology, science, and rational governance, the non-Western world is considered to be steeped in pre-modern traditions and worldviews. These are religious, irrational, and primitive of character. As Ronald Inden has stated in his book *Imagining India*, the logic of the orientalist scholars have caused them to assume about India that “the key to understanding the thinking of that civilization lay in understanding its religious basis” (Inden, 1990, p. 85).

The orientalist criticism is in fact criticism of epistemology, that is, criticism of the axiomatic premises on which knowledge is built. The orientalist scholarship has been criticised for its inherent essentialism.¹ The term essentialism is rooted in the Latin word *essentia*, which refers to the true, inner nature or being of a given object. The term essence derives from *esse*, which is the Latin verb for being, while in Greek, *ousia* derives from the verb for being (Kenny, 2004, p. 218). As a scientific approach essentialism can be described

¹ For instance has Inden made this a major point in his criticism of the orientalist scholarship (Inden, 1990, p. 2).

as the understanding that objects inhabit underlying or hidden structures which determine their observable behaviour. In extension, the ultimate goal of science will be to gain insight into the essence or nature of a given object (“Essens”, 1996). An example of current actuality would be a statement of the kind “Indians are essentially religious”. If Indians are essentially religious, their religiosity will govern their behaviour. Critics have suggested that orientalist scholarship reduces human activity to the working of cultural essences, hence propagating a kind of scientific determinism. Again, Inden can work as an example: “I wish to make possible studies of “ancient” India that would restore the agency that those histories have stripped from its people and institutions” (Inden, 1990, p. 1).

The orientalist criticism has itself been subjected to criticism. It has for instance been accused of “orientalising” its subject of study by treating the orientalist discourse as an undifferentiated entity while actually it contained many different voices (see Peabody, 2003, p. 9). By emphasising the power of the West over India, and by perceiving of both Hinduism and of cast as Western constructions, it has also been criticised for stripping Indians of their agency (Heehs, 2003, p. 175). Despite such critical objections, the orientalist criticism upholds a strong position in the scholarly community in the sense that much of contemporary, scholarly literature on Indian society comments upon it. Arguably, the orientalist criticism has gained such currency in the scholarly community so that to speak unreserved of Hinduism as a religion or of the spiritual character of India has become something of a taboo reminiscent of imperialism and colonialism.

Hindu nationalism

Coinciding in time with the debate on orientalism, religion appeared as a force stronger than ever within the public life of India. On December 6th, 1992, more than one hundred and fifty thousand people were gathered in the small pilgrimage town of Ayodhya in Faizabad District in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 454). These were people who had travelled from far and near. Some of them had been on the road for weeks. They were Hindus.

Ayodhya is the site of an old Muslim mosque, the Babri Masjid, which was built in 1528-29, most probably by Mir Baqi, under the authority of the first Mughal emperor, Babur (Asher, 2001, p. 29). Ayodhya is also known among Hindus as the birthplace of the god king Ram, the hero from the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana* (Klostermeier, 1994, p. 244). According to Hindu belief promoted by Hindu nationalism, the Babri Masjid was built to replace an ancient Hindu temple which commemorated the very birthplace of Ram. According to the story,

Babur had the temple destroyed, and its pillars were later used for building the Babri mosque (see Van der Veer, 1994, p. 2).

At midday on December 6th the crowd that had gathered in Ayodhya stormed the Babri mosque. Armed with axes, iron rods, and hammers the crowd started to tear down the mosque. Within five hours or so the massive, stone made building was demolished while the Hindu crowd was celebrating in the streets. As the news of the happening spread across the country riots broke out nationwide, later to spread beyond national borders to Pakistan, Bangladesh and Great Britain. In India, some twelve hundred people got killed in riots between December 6th and December 13th according to official numbers (Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 459). The Hindu nationalist movement was soon accused of having planned and staged the event in Ayodhya.

Hindu nationalism is a nationalist movement and a nationalist discourse. The movement goes back to the early 20th century. Its ideological roots spring forth from the end of the 19th century. Hence, as a discourse, one can say, Hindu nationalism is as old as any other kind of nationalism on the Indian subcontinent. The movement has as its main goal to strengthen the Indian nation, and to strengthen the position of the Hindu culture which it considers to be the very basis of that nation. It has traditionally presented the Indian nation as a Hindu nation, and has looked upon the Muslim and Christian communities of India as foreign elements that threaten national integrity. The Buddhist, Sikh, and Jain communities have, on the other hand, been included as natural members of the Indian nation, due to Hindu nationalism's understanding of the Hindu identity.

Hindu nationalists have argued that India's Hindu identity should be reflected in the making of the state, in the education of the people, and the working of society. It has worked to unite the many sects and traditions of India within a collective Hindu identity, and it has propagated its own version of a national Hinduism. Hence, like the orientalist critique is a contribution to the debate on Indian religion, so also is Hindu nationalism. Like the former, the latter has as its ambition to reconstruct Indian history free of Western biases. In contrast to the orientalist critics, however, Hindu nationalists have placed Hinduism in the centre of Indian society. Indian history is the history of the Hindu civilisation, their argument runs.

Despite the uncertainty of the archaeological evidences, Hindu nationalists have given full authority to the notion that the Babri mosque was built on the ruins of a Hindu temple. Hindu nationalists presented the Babri Masjid as a physical manifestation of how the Hindu culture and people have been suppressed by aggressive, imperialist invaders from the West. In their view, India's pride and future lay in raising it from the cultural enslavement which the

foreign masters had forced upon it throughout history, first the Muslims and then the British. In light of their historical interpretation, tearing down the Babrij mosque in Ayodhya and rebuilding the Ram-temple in its place, became a case of national self-respect. From 1984 onwards the Hindu nationalist movement launched several campaigns to liberate Rams birthplace and restore a Hindu temple in Ayodhya. These campaigns became highly popular.

The general apprehension is that the Hindu nationalist movement went through a considerable growth from the 1980ies and onwards. The most concrete evidence for such a growth is Hindu nationalisms political breakthrough during the last twenty years or so. The movement has had a long tradition for political engagement, however. Hindu Mahasabha was established as a Hindu nationalist party in 1909. But it was not until Bharatiya Jana Sangh became a member of the state-level coalition governments in the late 1970ies that Hindu nationalism became a political force to reckon with. In 1980 the Bharatiya Jana Sangh was followed by the Bharatiya Janata Party. The Bharatiya Janata Party advanced its number of members in the Indian parliament from two (7, 4 % of the total) in 1984 to eighty five (11, 4 % of the total) in 1989, and to one hundred and nineteen (20, 1 % of the total) in 1991 (Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 554, appendix D). In the national elections in 1998, the Bharatiya Janata Party gained some twenty five percent of the popular vote and became Indian biggest political party. It formed a coalition government which lasted until May 2004.

The scholarly discourse on Hindu nationalism

Scarcely accidental, a growing scholarly interest in Hindu nationalism coincided in time with the increasing political influence of the movement. Hindu nationalism was a phenomenon hardly touched upon in academic circles before the 1990ies (see paragraph 2.1 below). The increased political strength of Hindu nationalism no doubt triggered an intellectual interest in the phenomena which, in turn, can explain the growing production of books on the topic in the 1990ies (see paragraph 2.1 below).

The Ayodhya incident in 1992 and its build-up in the late 1980ies also gave force to the scholarly interest in Hindu nationalism. David Ludden, the editor of the book *Making India Hindu*, stated in the preface of that book that “In December 1992 it became obvious that college teachers do not have good enough books at hand for teaching about the recent history of politics and communal conflict in India” (Ludden, 1997, p. vii). Ludden thus suggested that the Ayodhya incident came as a surprise or appeared incomprehensible to the scholarly community. The statement was a concession that scholars engaged in South Asian studies had

not kept attention to important factors influencing Indian society and political life. Ludden saw the Ayodhya incident as a symptom of the broader issue of communalism in India, that is, the conflict between ethnic and religious groups. And yet no proper work on communalism existed, Ludden stated. The book that Ludden edited was the result of seminar activities which sought to make up for the deficiency. When narrowing down the issue at stake, Hindu nationalism was singled out as the main object of inquiry.

If we take Luddens statements to be representative, it seems that after Ayodhya a self-critical, scholarly community in the West came to acknowledge its lacking understanding of important forces in the Indian society, forces that would turn a remote and peaceful Indian town into a battleground in the course of hours, and further trigger riots between Hindus and Muslims on an international scale. Linked to the Ayodhya case, and epitomising the complex of communalism, Hindu nationalism stood out as the central theme to be investigated. Faced with an apparently aggressive and forceful movement, scholars embarked upon the challenge to try and understand the phenomenon of Hindu nationalism.

Seen with the eyes of an amateur, Hindu nationalism has a lot to do with religion. The Hindu nationalist movement has used religious symbols and rituals extensively and creatively, giving Hindu nationalism a religious shape. The movement has to a great extent been engaged in matters concerned with religion's place in society, and so also appears religious in content. Its political activism with strong religious overtones has been highly popular, drawing huge crowds of people. The Hindu nationalist appeal to religion on the one hand, and the popular response to this appeal on the other, forces one to reflect upon the role of religion in contemporary Hindu nationalism. To pose an adequate, if multidimensional question: how does religion contribute to the understanding of Hindu nationalism?

If we exchange the perspective of the amateur for the ones of professionals, then what becomes of religion? In the 1990ies Western scholars on Hindu nationalism faced an apparent paradox. Within the scholarly community the current of orientalist criticism sought to reduce the explanatory power of religion in scholarship on India. When looking at the events on the ground, however, religion seemed only to fortify its positions as a societal force. Since the 1980ies, religious matters had moved to the forefront of public life in India as the problems of Sikh separatists in Punjab, Muslim separatists in Jammu and Kashmir, the Shah Bano case, the Mandal Commission, and the Ayodhya incident succeeded each other (see Larson, 1995, p. 226-277). Hence, the social realities in India seemed to contradict one of the central scholarly perspectives at that time. In the midst of this confusing situation there was Hindu nationalism, whose view on Indian religion highly opposed the perspective of orientalism

critics. Considering this confusing plurality of incompatible signals in the 1990ies regarding religion in India: how did Western scholars on Hindu nationalism deal with religion?

MAIN OBJECT

The central objective in this thesis is to discuss some of the intellectual trends that operated in Western scholarship on Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies, with a particular view to religion. My observance is that the matter of religion was the subject of much dispute, and to a wave of reinterpretation and reconsideration within that field of scholarship. It is my intention to illuminate some of the characteristics of this situation. I have chosen to do so by analysing one book on Hindu nationalism from the period. I have deliberately selected a book which has applied the orientalism criticism in its analysis of Hindu nationalism. Through my analysis of the selected book I hope to shed light upon some of the scholarly challenges that have occurred in the wake of the orientalism critique, and some of the answers that have been proposed to meet these challenges. In its engagement with Hindu nationalism the selected book touches upon broader scholarly debates of its time. Making the selected book a starting point, I shall inquire into some of these debates. For my analysis I have selected *The saffron wave. Democracy and Hindu nationalism in modern India* by Thomas Blom Hansen (Hansen, 1999).

STRUCTURE OF THESIS

The thesis is divided into five main parts, including this introduction. In chapter one is given a brief presentation of Hindu nationalism. First is present some central ideological ideas of the movement, and then is given a sketch of the historical development of the movement from the late 19th century onwards. In chapter two is presented a very brief survey of the Western bibliography on Hindu nationalism, and some comments to the results of that survey. In chapter three is presented the analysis of the selected book. In chapter four I discuss the findings made in chapter three by viewing those findings in relation to broader scholarly discourses of the late 20th century.

CHAPTER 1: PRESENTATION OF HINDU NATIONALISM

The Hindu nationalist movement comprises many different branches and organisations. There are political parties, religious organisations, and social welfare organisations that see themselves as parts of this movement. As the objectives and activities of the various organisations differ, unambiguous statements about the character of the movement as a whole are problematic. The most well-known Hindu nationalist organisations are the political party Bharatiya Janata Party, the religious organisation Vishva Hindu Parisad, and the multifaceted Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The latter has, since its origin in 1925, been a dominant Hindu nationalist actor. Its network consists of more than 25 000 branches, according to its own estimates (see Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, (2003), *Sangh: A dynamic power-house*, [online], Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Accessible from: http://www.rss.org/New_RSS/History/Evolution.jsp [20.10.2003]). In addition, there is a large cluster of affiliated groups connected to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. These affiliates operate in a number of different fields, running for instance hospitals, schools, women's organisations, youth organisations, student unions, and labour unions. To gain knowledge of the relation between the different Hindu nationalist organisations is complicated as Hindu nationalists have made a point of keeping their internal relations to themselves. Hence, Hindu nationalism faces us with a cluster of more or less closely connected organisations and individuals, whose fellowship is primarily founded upon a shared ideology. This presentation will therefore open with a brief summary of some central Hindu nationalist ideas, before it provides a short history of the movement.

1.1 PERCEIVING OF INDIAN HISTORY

As Hindu nationalism contains many different organisations, it also contains many different voices. Some are more radical than others. The different organisations and members do not

necessarily share all opinions and all views, but there is a commonality in outlook that makes it reasonable to speak of a shared Hindu nationalist worldview, recognisable among the different organisations. It might be an exaggeration to speak of a Hindu nationalist ideology in the sense of a full-fledged theory. Yet, behind conceivably superficial slogans and mottos lies a common stock of ideas that makes allowance for using the word ideology in a looser sense.

Obviously, the writing of history is an important part of any nationalist project. History creates identity. The history of ones forefathers creates ones own genealogy, so to speak. History assists in explaining how the world has become what it is, and it thereby suggests how the world can be changed. Last, but not least, history can be used as an argument in itself for claims laid to land and territory. A particular understanding of Indian history lies at the bottom of the Hindu nationalist thinking. To know the Hindu nationalist understanding of Indian history is, arguably, to know the Hindu nationalist understanding of self. Hence, in the following I shall sketch out what may be characterised as a prototypical, Hindu nationalist perception of Indian history. Where nothing else is noted, the presentation builds upon my reading of Christophe Jaffrelot (Jaffrelot, 1993) and Chetan Bhatt (Bhatt, 2001).

The Hindu nationalist organisations say about themselves that their project is national reconstruction. They want to recreate the Hindu national identity and unity (see Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, (2003), *Sangh: Unique and evergreen*, [online], Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Accessible from: http://www.rss.org/New_RSS/History/Evolution.jsp [20.10.2003]). The Hindu nationalist project is, in other words, to recreate something that is believed already to have existed. Hindu nationalists trace the history of the Indian nations back to a mythic time. According to their belief, the land and people contained within the geographical area of what today is South Asia is perceived to have made up a primeval unity, that is, a nation. Its national fellowship was from the beginning grounded in the geographical territory and in the Hindu culture that pervaded the Indian nation. The original, Indian nation was in other words a Hindu nation, and the civilisation that emerged on the Indian subcontinent between 2000 B.C. and 1500 B.C. was an expression of the energies of that nation.

According to Hindu nationalist understanding, the golden age of the Hindu civilisation lasted until about 500 B.C. From then on, inner degeneration brought about the collapse of the Hindu nation. Hindu nationalists have pointed to what they see as the corrupted, hierarchical structure of the Brahmin-dominated society as one reason behind this spiritual degeneration and national disintegration. The immanent Hindu qualities of patriotism and spirit of fellowship lost weight to individualism and selfishness. The emergence of Buddhism in the 6th

century B.C. has often been seen by Hindu nationalists as a sign of this societal degeneration. Instead of motivating the individual to work for the community, the Buddhist philosophy was a self-centred concentration on the individual salvation, the argument runs. From then on, Hindus lost their common identity, and what had until then been one single empire was divided into smaller, rivalling kingdoms. In this way the Hindus lay themselves open to foreign invasions. Divided, unorganised, and naïve they let Muslims and the British conquer land and people. For over one thousand years hostile invaders ruled the country until the Hindus finally managed to gather in a battle against the foreign invaders and restore Indian independence.

The more than thousand years under Muslim and British rule is perceived by Hindu nationalists as one, continuous campaign against the Hindu culture. The foreign masters have let their culture infiltrate the societal structure and the intellectual and spiritual life of India. Against their will, Hindus have been converted to Islam and Christianity. In this way, Hindus have lost contact with their own culture and their own identity. Confusion has captured the Indian psyche, leading some to convert to Islam and others to Christianity. Others again were attracted to the secular mindset of the West. In either case, their loyalties were drawn away from the Hindu community and fellowship.

Hindu nationalists interpret modern Indian history in light of what they perceive as an identity crisis. In their view, the partition of British India in 1947 demonstrates how the lost, collective identity has divided what in fact are one people. The Muslim Indians that demanded a separate state, and the secular Hindus of the Congress party that gave in to these demands, were under the same confusion of identity, provoked by the thousand year old imperialism from the West. The secular profile of the Congress party in the postcolonial period has been seen as a further proof of how the Western mindset has managed to impress the Indian mentality. The Congress party, which has dominated Indian politics, is considered by Hindu nationalists to have been way too soft with the religious minorities of India. In the name of secularism, the religious minorities have obtained rights and privileges while the Hindu culture has been suppressed and the needs of the Hindu majority have been neglected.

Hindu nationalism considers India still to be under threat. While India has gained independence, its fragile unity is threatened by disintegrating forces. Pakistan is by its sheer existence a constant reminder of the divide of the original unity in 1947. The ambitions of Pakistan in Kashmir, the many internal separatist movements, the many religious minority groups, the Muslim and Christian missionaries, and the secular forces in politics are among

the most important threats to Indian unity, as they see it. The problem in all these cases is the lack of support of the Hindu culture which is the true, national identity of India.

In the view of Hindu nationalists, the main responsibility for the fall of the Hindu nation rests with the Hindus themselves. The cultural and national degeneration started as an internal process that accelerated with the foreign invasions. The Hindus have passively witnessed that their tradition has been ruined, and that their society has been divided. Hindus have allowed the influence of Islam and of Christianity within their own society without even giving regretfully converted Hindus a chance to return to the Hindu fold. In light of all this, the Hindu nationalist movement has set itself to resurrect what it perceives as the true Indian culture, and to bring back to life the former glory of past times.

1.2 IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS FROM THE 19TH CENTURY

It has been common to see Hindu nationalism as a marginal phenomenon that emerged in the 1920ies in opposition to the Congress party and the independent movement. In his book on Hindu nationalism, Bhatt makes it a point that Hindu nationalist ideas have existed from the late 19th century and that such ideas have had much wider support than what is often believed (Bhatt, 2001). Bhatt is not alone, however, in tracing ideological roots of Hindu nationalism back to the 19th century (see Andersen and Damle, 1987, p. 10-26; Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 11-19). According to Bhatt, the distinction that has been drawn between secular and religious nationalism in India is exaggerated. From the very beginning in the 19th century, Indian nationalist ideas were closely related to notions of a primordial, Hindu civilisation which, in turn, was connected to an archaic Hinduism. Instigated by the scholarly engagement with ancient Vedic texts, Indo-European linguistics, archaeology, etc., ideas about a primeval, Hindu civilisation started to flourish among Indian and European intellectuals in the late 19th century, the argument runs. The archaic Vedic texts were seen to represent not just a religious tradition, but a great civilisation. Inspired by European nationalism, Indians started to see themselves as constituting an ancient nation. Hence, archaic Hinduism became a testimony to the actual origin and existence of the Indian nation (see Bhatt, 2001, 7-12).

Bhatt notes that the orientalist scholarship of the 19th century contained speculations about the Arian race. Through comparative studies of linguistics there was found a certain affinity between the Latin, Greek, Iranian, and Indian languages of antiquity. The idea of a common, linguistic origin was supplemented by speculations about whether Europeans,

Iranians, and Indians also had a common ethnic origin. Among Indian intellectuals, the idea of the Arian race was connected to the ideas of Hinduism and nationalism. The Arians were seen as the original carriers of the Hindu civilisation. They were the people of the original, Indian nation (Bhatt, 2001, 12-15).

Speaking of its ideological origin, Christophe Jaffrelot states that “Hindu nationalism derives from socio-religious movements initiated by high cast Hindus, such as the Arya Samaj” (Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 11). Arya Samaj, or the society of Arians or nobles, was established by Dayananda Saraswati in Bombay in 1875 and in Lahore in 1877 (Bhatt, 2001, p. 16). Arya Samaj was first and foremost a religious- and social reform movement. The point here is that Arya Samaj made use of certain nationalistic concepts which later Hindu nationalists have drawn heavily upon (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 16-23). Among these was the notion of the Arians as the first and the noblest people on earth, originating in Tibet while later migrating to the uninhabited India, *Aryavarta*. Dayananda further presented an organic kind of thinking which came to be central in later Hindu nationalism. According to Dayananda, people and nature were closely bound so that the physical geography in *Aryavarta* contributed to the development of the noble character of the Arians. The political and social philosophy of Dayananda was built upon the Vedas, which he recognised as the eternal revelations of god that had been given to the Arians in archaic time as the only true religion of humanity. According to Dayananda, Hinduism had gone through a process of degeneration, partly due to the corrupted order of society which the Brahman cast had implemented. Despite his rejection of untouchability and the superiority of the Brahmin cast, Dayananda defended the *varnashramadharma*² as an ideal ordering of society, his point being that cast was based on individual merits and qualities, rather than on inheritance.

After Dayananda’s death in 1883, the Arya Samaj expanded its activities. The organisation established, for instance, educational institutions for women. Of great significance to the later Hindu nationalist movement was the innovation made by Arya Samaj of the reconverting ritual *shuddi*. *Shuddi* was a reaction to Christian and Muslim missionary activities among Hindus. *Shuddi* was to become an important element in the activities of the Vishva Hindu Parisad (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 20).

In addition to the Arya Samaj, there were other 19th century forerunners of Hindu nationalist thinking. By the late 19th century there developed a group of intellectuals in Bengal

² *Varnashramadharma* denotes the Hindu ordering of society, in which individuals are seen to have societal and individual duties and rights relative to their cast and their stage in life (see Klostermaier, 1994, 333-344).

that was known for its revolutionary forms of nationalist ideology. Some of the earliest forms of Indian nationalism that based itself on Hindu exclusiveness were put forth in this environment by intellectuals such as Rajnarain Basu and Nabagopal Mitra. For both of these thinkers, Hinduism was to form the core of the future, Indian nation (Bhatt, 2001, p. 23). According to Bhatt, the famous novelist Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya presents a legacy that has been influential for both secular and for Hindu nationalism. In much of Bankim's writing there is a merging of Hindu religion with Indian nationalism (Bhatt, 2001, p. 27). Another Bengalese intellectual whose thoughts came to influence upon later Hindu nationalism was Aurobindo Ghose. Ghose was a great source of inspiration for revolutionary, nationalist organisations in Bengal by the turn of the 19th Century. His idea of a holy nation, interpreted in wholly Hindu terms, was to be highly important in Hindu nationalist ideology throughout the 20th century (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 38; Hellman, 1993, p. 147-169).

Bhatt makes it a point to demonstrate how religious nationalism also existed in what has commonly been perceived as the thresholds of secularism, namely Congress party (Bhatt, 2001, p. 31-36). He points out that Bal Gangadhar Tilak, well known for his prominent role in the independent movement and as a leader of the Congress party, propagate a kind of Hindu primordialism which was combined with politicised Hindu devotion. While the thinking of Tilak can not be reduced to a plain Hindu nationalism, its association of Hinduism with a primordial, Indian nation is notable, Bhatt claims (Bhatt, 2001, p. 36). The way that Tilak blended Vedic Hinduism with popular devotion and regional nationalism, was to become an important method in later Hindu nationalism, he adds. The conclusion to the argument of Bhatt is that the association of Hinduism with Indian nationalism was more than a marginal phenomenon by the turn of the 19th century, even if direct links between early Indian nationalisms and the later Hindu nationalist movement of the 1920ies is hard to establish.

1.3 HINDUTVA-IDEOLOGY AND THE EMERGENCE OF A DISTINCT MOVEMENT

The general understanding is that Hindu nationalism only developed as a distinct ideology and as a distinct political movement in the 1920ies (Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 25; Bhatt, 2001, p. 41). The development of the Hindu nationalist ideology in this period is connected to one person in particular, the Maharashtrian Brahmin Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. His work *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* from 1923 came to be a foundational text for later Hindu nationalism (Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 25). Savarkar considered the term Hinduism to be a Western construction to be

rejected by Indians. He criticised the view that Hindus were defined by their religious beliefs alone, as the Hindu identity contained much more than that. The term that encompassed this totality was *hindutva*. The basic elements in his *hindutva* concept were blood, race³, ethnicity, territory, and affection (see Bhatt, 2001, s. 85-88, 95-99). Hence, Savarkar's view on Indian history built upon the same organic thinking as did Dayananda, in which land, people, and culture reciprocally nurtured each other.

The term *hindutva* has become fully institutionalised in the Hindu nationalist vocabulary (see for instance Siddharth, G. (30.04.96), *The eternal religion's defining movement in time*, [online], The Pioneer. URL: <http://bjp.org/history/htvgs-6.html> [20.10.2003]). All in all, it might be argued that the political ideas figuring in today's Hindu nationalism are more or less the same as those expressed by Savarkar in the 1920ies and 30ies. Central among these are that Hindus constitute a nation, that Hinduism is under siege from Muslim and Christian missionaries, that Muslim represented a fifth colonist in India, and that Hindus need to be militarised (see Bhatt, 2001, 77-78).

The development of Hindu nationalism as a movement is connected to the establishment of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or RSS, as the organisation is commonly termed. From the early decades of the 20th century there existed groups like Hindu Mahasabha and the Hindu Sangathan movement that worked to secure the socio-political interests of Hindus (see Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 17-25). However, it was not until the emergence of the RSS, that Hindu nationalism took shape as a well organised movement. The RSS was established by a group of activists from the Hindu Mahasabha in the city of Nagpur in Maharashtra in 1925. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar is considered to be the founder of the RSS (see Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 33-35).

Considering the relation to the colonial government at the time, Hedgewar concluded in the 1920ies that the Hindus were weak and unorganised in comparison to the Indian Muslims. His political analysis led him to suggest that in order for the Hindus to resist the threats of the British on one side, and the Muslims on the other, Hindus ought to be gathered in a militant, unified, disciplined, and aggressive force. Hence, from the beginning, great efforts were put into developing the organisational structure of the RSS.⁴ Daily routines like physical exercise, military drilling, weapon training, ideological teaching, and prayer were institutionalised already in 1926. It became compulsory to wear the RSS' uniform. Annual

³ The term race has been used in cultural rather than biological terms.

⁴ For a detailed outline of the organisational structure of the RSS, see Andersen and Damle, 1987, p. 83-98.

training camps were set up for RSS' officers. In 1930 the *pracharak*-system became an important element in the structure of the organisation. Senior officers, *pracharaks*, were sent around the country to establish local branches, *shakhas*, and to train recruits that were to become *swayamsevaks*, that is, voluntary workers of the cause of the Hindu nation (Bhatt, 2001, p. 120). In 1929, the title *sarsanghchalak* was given to the RSS leader who claimed full obedience from all members. Altogether, discipline, order, and unselfish dedication to the cause of Hindu nationalism were central themes in the RSS philosophy.

In their study of the RSS, Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle relates the ideology of Hedgewar and the organisational structure of the RSS to Hindu philosophy, practices, institutions and rituals (Andersen and Damle, 1987, p. 71-107). In their own words: "Because the RSS draws liberally from the Hindu past to construct its belief system, an investigation is necessary of how Hindu thought and practice inform the verbal symbols, signs, and rituals which the RSS employs" (Andersen and Damle, 1987, p. 71). Christophe Jaffrelot tends to see a combined influence in the RSS structure from, on one side, the British colonial police force and extreme forms of European nationalism, and on the other side, more authentic Hindu elements. His argument is that the RSS built on a strategy of emulation. It assimilated or adopted the elements which apparently made its enemy strong, while disguising these elements as interpretation of Hindu tradition. Hence, according to Jaffrelot, the paramilitary structure of the RSS reflects the efforts to introduce into Indian society the strengths of its aggressors, that is, the Westerners (see Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 34).

The RSS expanded successively from the 1930ies and onwards. After Hedgewar's death in 1940, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar became the new leader of the RSS. The close ties that had been between the RSS and the political party Hindu Mahasabha cooled down as the non-political character of the RSS increased under the rule of Golwalkar. Despite its retreat from activism, the RSS continued to increase in memberships throughout the Second World War (Andersen and Damle, 1987, p.38-45).

The thinking Golwalkar, reflected in the books *We; or our nationhood defined* from 1939 and *Bunch of Thoughts* from 1966, became highly influential in later Hindu nationalism (Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 52). The following outline of Golwalkar's thoughts is built upon my reading of Bhatt in particular (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 125-136). Golwalkar's conception of the Indian nation included the four components of land, race, culture and language. He saw the nation as a cultural unit and the state as a political unit. The core of his argument was that the shape of the state should be subordinated to and formed by the character of the nation. Golwalkar embraced the *varnashramadharma* as a superior and scientific social order. The

state was an important institution as long as it contributed to the upholding of this order. Any minority group should live in accordance with the conventions and traditions that belonged to the nation, without any special rights or privileges. Citizenship should be granted only those individuals that had affinity to the Hindu race, culture, and religion. According to Golwalkar, religion was not the private faith, but rather something that regulated all aspects of life. Religion was intrinsic to all aspects of the life of the Hindu race. Hence, there existed no real difference between religion and culture in Golwalkar's thinking. Both contributed to the special race-consciousness that pervaded the Hindu nation.

The RSS played no central part in the independence movement. Like the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS remained loyal to the British authorities. Their main argument for this strategy has been that they did not share the confrontational strategy on which the independent movement relied. The RSS saw national revival as a matter of long term work within the civil society of India. Through individual disciplining and exercise, the Hindu character was to be moulded slowly and patiently. As this character building work was both a physical and spiritual exercise, it could not be limited to the political sphere, the argument ran (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 120-123, 140-145).

1.4 AFTER INDEPENDENCE: PARTY POLITICS AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONALISATION

Believed by the Indian government to have staged the assassination of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the leader of the independent movement, in 1948, the RSS was banned during 1948 and 1949. Golwalkar was imprisoned along with a great number of other RSS members. The experience of the ban is said to have brought about strategic changes in the RSS, on one side leading the organisation into political activism, and on the other side resulting in the establishment of the many affiliated organisations (see Damle and Andersen, 1987, p. 56, 110-114).

The first affiliate of the RSS was the women's organisation Rashtra Sevika Samiti that was established in 1936. In 1948 the student organisation Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parisad was born. In 1952 the organisation Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram was established to work amongst the tribal groups in India. Its goal was to include the tribal groups into the Hindu fold. By help of the converting ritual *shuddhi* Hindu nationalists have intended to fight the Christian and Muslim missionary activities in India. In 1955 the labour union Bharatiya

Mazdoor Sangh was established to fight communism amongst industrial workers. The Bharat Vikas Parisad was established in 1963 to work with health related questions amongst the poor. In 1969 the Bharatiya Sikshan Mandal came about to further Hindu nationalist moral values in the educational system. In 1972 the Deendayal Research Institute was established to spread the *hindutva*-ideology amongst intellectuals. In 1976 Vidya Bharati was established in order to try and found primary and secondary schools that worked according to the *hindutva*-philosophy and in opposition to the Christian missionary schools. The list of RSS affiliates is hence far from exhausted. As will be noted in the following, two of the most powerful of the RSS affiliates has come to be the Vishva Hindu Parisad and the Bharatiya Janata Party.⁵

After the ban on the RSS was lifted in 1949, a growing number of RSS members were of the opinion that the organisation ought to take considerably more part in Indian politics. The Indian parliament was at that time dominated by the Congress party. Except for the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS looked upon all other parties as direct opponents to their own vision of society. In October 1951 a new political party, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, had its first meeting. The former president of the Hindu Mahasabha, Shyamprasad Mookerjee, was appointed its president (Graham, 1990, p. 28).

Until the 1960ies, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh was based on a firm Hindu nationalist ideology and a political structure with more or less close affinity to the RSS structure (see Graham, 1990, p. 48-51; Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 116-157). Throughout the 1960ies, however, the party started to tone down its Hindu nationalist agenda (see Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 158-192). By the end of the 1960ies, the political hegemony of the Congress party collapsed. In the new political situation following from that collapse, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh became a central actor in various coalition governments that were formed at stat level (see Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 221-229). After the Emergency, initiated by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the period 1975-1977, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh joined other parties in the Janata Party coalition. The coalition won the national elections by 295 out of 542 seats in the Indian parliament, the Lok Sabha, and thus formed a coalition government which lasted until 1980 (Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 282-313).

In 1980 central members left the Bharatiya Jana Sangh to form a new political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party. Under the leadership of Atal Behari Vajpayees, which lasted until the mid 1980ies, the strategy of the Bharatiya Janata Party was relatively moderate and

⁵ For a detailed outline of the different organisations, see Andersen and Damle, 1987, p. 108-157.

liberal. Concepts like “gandhian socialism” and “positive secularism”⁶ were used to denote the policies of the Bharatiya Janata Party. In the same period Indira Gandhi, leader of the secular oriented Congress Party, started to make direct appeal to Hindu nationalist voters through a series of religious-symbolic gestures. She visited several Hindu temples and shrines. She sought blessings from Hindu authorities in public. In 1983 the Congress party won the state election in Jammu and Kashmir through direct appeal to Hindu interests. In 1984 military actions of the Congress lead government against Khalistan separatists in Punjab ended in the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. As a direct result of that, Indira Gandhi was assassinated. The Congress Party won the national elections in 1984, and it seemed obvious that the liberal strategy of Vajpayee had failed (Bhatt, 2001, p. 168-169).

Lal Krishnan Advani succeeded Vajpayee as the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1986. With Advani as its leader, the party entered a period of open and more aggressive Hindu nationalist strategy. It entered the election campaign in 1989 with a militant *hindutva*-agenda, demanding that the temple of Ram in Ayodhya was to be reconstructed, abandonment of article 370 in the constitution that provided Kashmir special rights, demanding a replacement of the minority-commission with a human rights commission, and a new uniform civil code (Bhatt, 2001, p. 170-171). The Bharatiya Janata Party made an electoral alliance with the new Janata Party, and entered the National Front alliance created in 1988. In the 1989 election, Bharatiya Janata Party’s share of representatives in the Lok Sabha rose dramatically from two to eighty-six. The National Front constituted a coalition government which lasted until 1990 (see Jaffrelot, 1993, p. 381-383; Bhatt, 2001, p. 170-173).

After pressure from Golwalkar, some 60 representatives from different Hindu denominations, sects and casts were summoned for a meeting in Bombay in 1964. The plan was to create a new organisation that would represent all Hindus, independent of tradition, sect, and cast. In the spirit of Hindu nationalist thinking, the organisation was meant to contribute to the gathering and strengthening of the Hindu society. It was meant to protect, develop, and spread Hindu values. A central goal was to fight the ongoing conversion of Hindus to Islam and Christianity. As part of this strategy an all-Hindu council, the Vishva Hindu Parisad, was formed in 1966. The council was to work as an authority for the whole of the Hindu community (see Bhatt, 2001, 180-183). In this sense the Vishva Hindu Parisad emerged as an attempt to try and unify Hindus both dogmatically and institutionally.

⁶ The term was ambiguous, as it was based on the assumption that Hinduism was not a religion and hence could not be other than secular.

In 1966 the constitution the Vishva Hindu Parisad was ratified and its formal organs were set up. These were dominated by the RSS. A monthly magazine was set in motion, so also a training seminar for its members. The Vishva Hindu Parisad has become organised into national, territorial, provincial and district levels. On the international level, the Vishva Hindu Parisad has reported to have affiliates in 18 different countries (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 180-183; Vishva Hindu Parishad, *Affiliated bodies within India & outside India*, [online], Vishva Hindu Parishad. URL: http://www.vhp.org/englishsite/a-origin_growth/organisationstrength.htm [21.10.2003]).

The Vishva Hindu Parisad increased its activities in the 1980ies. In 1979 it held a world congress where an eight point code of conduct for all Hindus was staged. In 1983 the Vishva Hindu Parisad arranged a one month long campaign, an *ekatmata yagna*. A *yagna* is a traditional sacrificial ritual, typically performed by the Brahmin priesthood (see Klostermaier, 1994, p. 162-167). Bhatt explains that while *ekatmata* means to unite, the term also have certain nationalistic connotations like a singular motherland, *ek mata*, and a singular national soul, *ek atma* (Bhatt, 2001, 188-189). The *ekatmata yagna* procession was meant to raise money for the Vishva Hindu Parisad while also functioning to strengthen Hindu solidarity. The campaign consisted of three major processions that followed different routes through various parts of the country. In addition there were some ninety smaller processions. Altogether, close to sixty million people participated in the event (Andersen and Damle, 1987, p. 135). The processions followed traditional pilgrim routes, and converged in the city of Nagpur, the headquarters of the RSS. As the procession moved on, water from the Ganges was mixed with water from local rivers in order to demonstrate the unity and fellowship of the country (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 187-201). The processions were accompanied by portraits of Bharat Mata, representing the holy motherland in the shape of a goddess.

According to Bhatt, the Vishva Hindu Parisad hence embarked upon a strategy which involved devotion, *bhakti*, rather than the austere paths of esoteric knowledge, making what he terms “a novel syncretism of selected *bhakti* symbols, “upper” cast rituals like *yagnas* and *yatras*, *varnashramadharmas*, and a strictly “secular”, “geo-pious” symbolism of landscape, geography, territory and boundary” (Bhatt, 2001, p. 187). *Bhakti* is the devotional stream of Hinduism, characterised by a personal relationship between the devotee and the given deity. In *bhakti* worship is an emotional experience (see Brockington, 1993, p. 130-172). *Bhakti* may be seen as the main ingredient in what is today popular Hinduism (see Fuller, 1992; Klostermaier, 1994). As noted above, the term *yagna* refers to the sacrificial rituals that traditionally have been performed by the Brahmin cast exclusively. The term *yatra* literally

means a journey (Hellman, 1993, p. 26, note 2). Eva Hellman points out that in traditional Hinduism *rathayatra* is a common phenomenon connected, for instance, to temple festivals in which icons are brought out of their temples, placed on chariots, *raths*, and taken on journeys so that the devotees may have a vision of them (Hellman, 1993, p. 26). Hellman hence connects *yatra* to the *bhakti* tradition. Bhatt opens up another perspective on the Vishva Hindu Parisad as he points out that *yatra* relates to the traditions of ascetic pilgrimage in India (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 190). As it is, Indian ascetics have been strongly involved in the activities of the Vishva Hindu Parisad (see Hellman, 1993, p. 56-59). In his book on warrior ascetics in India, William R. Pinch notes how this particular brand of Hindu ascetics, whose history he traces back to the 16th century, have been idealised in modern day Hindu nationalism as heroic defenders of the Indian religion and nation (Pinch, 2006, p. 9). Summed up, we might say that in their innovative use of old traditions the Vishva Hindu Parisad have attempted to unify the multitude of religious activity in India.

A key symbol for the Vishva Hindu Parisad has been the goddess Bharat Mata, which is associated with the geographical territory of India. In 1983 a temple to Bharat Mata was consecrated in Hardwar. Another central symbol for the Vishva Hindu Parisad has been the god Ram. Through the *Ramjanmabhoomi* campaign to liberate birthplace of Ram in Ayodhya, the Vishva Hindu Parisad elevated the Ramayana to be one of the central texts of Hinduism. The Vishva Hindu Parisad has combined experimental rituals with innovative iconic representations of Ram (Bhatt, 2001, p. 191). Collecting consecrated bricks that were to be used as building blocks in the new temple in Ayodhya, is one such instance of innovation. In the so called *Ram Shila pujas* of 1988 bricks inscribed with the name of Ram were collected, consecrated, and worshipped all over the country. While the Vishva Hindu Parisad has presented Ram in many ways, great emphasis has been put on his warrior or *kshatriya* aspects.

I shall end this section with a reference to Eva Hellman, who has presented an illuminating perspective on the ideology, or should we say religion, of the Vishva Hindu Parisad. In here doctoral thesis on the Vishva Hindu Parisad, Hellman argues that Vishva Hindu Parisad represent a new kind of political Hinduism in which the ultimate object for devotion is located in the mundane sphere (Hellman, 1993). In this political Hinduism, the Hindu nation state, *Hindu rashtra*, is regarded as the realisation of the mere potentialities that lies in the divine principle, *Dharma*, in the holy land, *Bharat*, and in the holy people, *Hindu samaj*. The final result of the realisation of these divine potentialities is presented as the sovereign and divine Bharat Mata. Hellman's argument is that by locating the ultimate concern in the mundane world, *samsara*, the Vishva Hindu Parisad represents a break with the

traditional, Hindu outlook. In the latter, the ultimate concern is to liberate oneself from *samsara*, or the mundane world. Hellman also notes that the Vishva Hindu Parisad represents yet another break with the traditional, Hindu outlook in that it focuses on the collective rather than the individual.

1.5 THE 1990IES: ACTIVISM AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

In August 1990 the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Advani, launched a procession, the *Rath yatra*, that were to pass through ten of the North Indian states. The procession started by the Somnath temple in Gujarat and was to end at the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, where the work to build the temple of Ram was to begin. Massive riots broke out between Hindus and Muslims in the wake of Advani's procession. Advani was arrested in Bihar on order from the Bihar state chief minister. The arrest of Advani made the Bharatiya Janata Party pull back its support of the national coalition government, and the National Front had to leave office by the end of 1990. In the following electoral campaign the Bharatiya Janata Party launched the slogan "towards Ramrajya" as their motto, while adopting Savarkar's *hindutva*-definition as the policy of the party. The Congress party won the election, but the Bharatiya Janata Party increased their number of seats in parliament from eighty six to one hundred and twenty. Hence, it became the largest opposition party in the parliament (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 172-173).

As described in the introduction above, in December 1992, a crowd of some 150 000 Hindus marched on Ayodhya and tore down the Babri mosque. Suspicious that the Bharatiya Janata Party was involved in the Ayodhya incident, the Prime Minister Narasim Rao put all Indian states that were controlled by the Bharatiya Janata Party under direct control of the central authorities. Towards the mid 1990ies the Bharatiya Janata Party chose to follow a more moderate line. The militant *hindutva*-philosophy was watered out and the party tried to appeal to Muslims and untouchables. On state-level however, the Bharatiya Janata Party showed no moderation. In Gujarat, Bharatiya Janata Party was in a coalition with the violent Hindu nationalist party, the Shiv Sena (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 174).

From 1996 the Bharatiya Janata Party concerned itself more with the position of India in the global context. The party showed a greater willingness to liberalise Indian economy, while also wanting to protect the key industry of India. Its position was that neither the potential of India as an international actor, nor India's need for protection against Western cultural influence is possible without strengthening the cultural heritage of India. A proud and

self confident Hindu nationalism has been presented as the answer to the political, social, and economic challenges that India is faced with (see Bhatt, p. 175).

In 1996 Bharatiya Janata Party won one hundred and sixty one seats in the Lok Sabha and took over the government of India. They remained in office for fourteen days before they lost a vote of non-confidence. In 1998 Bharatiya Janata Party won 297 seats in the Lok Sabha, after which they took office as leader of a broad coalition government. Again, they lost a vote of non-confidence in October 1999. In the elections that followed, the National Democratic Alliance lead by Bharatiya Janata Party won with a small margin. The coalition government was in office until 2004. Intimating that the Bharatiya Janata Party has toned down its Hindu nationalist profile and agenda, Bhatt notes that the policies of the Bharatiya Janata Party have not only been restrained by its coalition partners, but also by the realities of government (Bhatt, 2001, p. 175). How the Bharatiya Janata Party and all the other Hindu nationalist organisations have fared as the 20th century has turned into a new millennium is a question that reaches beyond the scope of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2: NOTES TO THE LITERATURE ON HINDU NATIONALISM

This thesis deals with Western scholarship on Hindu nationalism. By Western scholarship I mean the scholarship that takes place in the Western world, that is Australia, Europe, and North America. I consider Western scholars to be those who are educated at Western universities and who are part of Western, scholarly communities.

2.1 WESTERN LITERATURE ON HINDU NATIONALISM

To uphold a distinction between Western and non-Western scholarship is to reify a cultural divide that appears somewhat artificial in the global world of contemporary scholarship. Today, scholarly theories, methods, and perspectives travel around the world in the manner of minutes. Ideas are exchanged in a speed and at a rate never witnessed before. Telegraphic and electronic means of communication enables, in principle, any scholar from anywhere in the world to participate in scholarly debates taking place anywhere. From this point of view, it appears somewhat strange to uphold a distinction between Western and non-Western scholarship. The following question illustrates my point: when a Japanese scholar who works in Japan applies a Marxist theory produced in Germany, is his scholarship to be termed Western or non-Western?

As I argue in paragraph 4.4 below, the important dividing lines in contemporary scholarship are those that exist between different scholarly paradigms and perspectives rather than those related to geography. Yet, this thesis appears to confirm the divide between Western and non-Western scholarship by relating itself to Western scholarship exclusively. The reason behind my focus on Western scholarship is my concern with the debate on orientalism. A central motive in this thesis is to shed light upon the presence of the orientalism debate in the scholarship on Hindu nationalism of the 1990ies. The orientalism criticism has addressed itself to Western scholarship in particular. It is a criticism of the

Western perception of the non-Western world. My interest is to investigate how the orientalism criticism has been dealt with by those who are the addressees of that criticism, hence my decision to focus on Western scholarship.

2.2 COLLECTING BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DATA

To make an exhaustive bibliography of the Western scholarly literature on Hindu nationalism demands extensive language skills, access to great many libraries and archives, and a lot of time. Books and articles have been written in all kinds of languages, and within all kinds of scholarly disciplines. The following is meant to give a slight impression of the Western literature on Hindu nationalism with reference to its volume and its time of publication. My purpose is to show one particular trend: the Western literature on Hindu nationalism is mainly written after the 1980ies, and mostly in the 1990ies.

In order to collect bibliographical information about the scholarly literature on Hindu nationalism, I have used one British and one North American online database, both specialised in recording scholarly publications. The use of two different databases works as a cross-check to the singular findings in each of the databases. The use of more databases would, of course, make the survey more accurate.

I have used the Copac online catalogue which is a database produced at the University of Manchester in England. The Copac catalogue gives access to the merged online catalogues of the 26 members of the Consortium of University Research Libraries (CURL) in the United Kingdom and Ireland, including the British Library and the National Library of Scotland (Copac, *About Copac*, [online], Victoria University of Manchester. Accessible from: <<http://copac.ac.uk/copac/about.html>> [18.07.2004]). I have further used the Library of Congress online Catalogue which is a North American online database produced by the Library of Congress (*Legal notices*, [online], Library of Congress. Accessible from: <<http://www.loc.gov/homepage/legal.html>> [04.08.2004]). Library of Congress functions as the national library of the USA, serving both as a public and government library.

The use of Anglo-Saxon databases that are connected to Anglo-Saxon libraries gives an Anglo-Saxon bias to the database results, as these databases are likely to be oriented towards the scholarly activity of the Anglo-Saxon world in particular. Scholarly publications from continental Europe might therefore pass unnoticed by them. Further adding to the

Anglo-Saxon bias of this survey is the fact that the North American database that is used enforced me to limit my searches by language. My searches in that database are therefore limited to publications in English. The British database that is used gave, on the other hand, no allowance to limit my searches by language. However, the greater share of the publications recorded in the British database is published in English. All shortcomings considered my bibliographical survey does not justify any general statements about the Western literature on Hindu nationalism as such. For convenience sake in the following, when I talk about the Western literature on Hindu nationalism I refer to the literature recorded in my database searches, if not otherwise indicated.

A great share of the English literature on Hindu nationalism is written by non-Western scholars, Indians in particular. As I want to display the Western literature on Hindu nationalism I have had to find some criterion by which to identify the Western, as opposed to non-Western literature. There is no unproblematic way to do this, and any criterion is burdened with weaknesses. I have chosen to make the place of publication the criterion by which I single out Western literature. Hence, I have treated any item published by a Western, that is Australian, European, or North American, publisher as a Western publication. This choice of criterion implies that literature written by Western scholars, but published by non-Western publishers, fails to be included in my list. *Vice a versa*, it implies that literature written by non-Western scholars, but published by Western publishers, will be included in my list. My choice of criterion is based on the assumption that the mainstream, however, of Western scholarship is published by Western publishers.

The Copac catalogue and the Library of Congress catalogue have been searched with eight different search terms that are related to the subject of Hindu nationalism. In this way I have tried to cover the field as broadly as possible in order to prevent too many items from escaping the track down. My search terms have been: "Hindu nationalism", "Hindu nationalist movement", "Hindutva", "political Hinduism", "Hindu Mahasabha", "Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh", "Vishva Hindu Parisad", and "Bharatiya Janata Sangh". Single articles have been excluded from the list. Some of the books on Hindu nationalism are collections of articles, however. Doctoral dissertations are included in the list. My searches were executed in the period between 16.07.04 and 09.08.04.

2.3 RESULTS OF DATABASE SEARCHES

My searches in the Copac online catalogue and the Library of Congress online catalogue gave a total list of seventy eight Western publications on Hindu nationalism. Out of the total number of recorded publications, thirteen were later editions of earlier publications, leaving the searches with a total of sixty five original publications on Hindu nationalism. One of these was published in 1981, while two were published in 1987. One was published in 1989 and sixty one were published in 1990 and after. The picture that evolves from my searches is clear: there are no recorded publications from Western publishers on Hindu nationalism before 1981. In the 1980ies we find four publications, and the remaining sixty one recorded publications are published between 1990 and 2004. Far from all publications recorded under my searches do make Hindu nationalism their main object of analysis. Some of them have broader thematic scopes in which Hindu nationalism only plays a smaller part. The number of books devoted singularly to a discussion of Hindu nationalism is therefore smaller than the total number of books recorded.

2.4 COMMENTS TO THE DATABASE FINDINGS

The above database searches are limited in number and range, and so is a loose foundation on which to base any conclusion. And yet, the results of these database searches say something about the Western literature on Hindu nationalism, at least in the Anglo-Saxon world. According to my findings, just over five percent of the literature on Hindu nationalism was published in the 1980ies, while the remaining ninety five percent was published in the period between 1990 and 2004. Hence, it seems that Hindu nationalism was a topic more or less untouched by Western scholars until the late 1980ies. The fact that the trend is so clear and in mutual correspondence between two different databases adds strength to the impression. Searches in continental European databases might, as already mentioned, display a different tendency. Also, one must consider the possibility that early publications on Hindu nationalism for various reasons are not filed and recorded in internet databases, and so have slipped my account. A search in library archives might give other results than searches on internet. On the other hand, both the Copac online catalogue and the Library of Congress online catalogue had

at the time of my searches recorded publications going back to 1921, indicating that old age is no hindrance for online recording.

If we take the database results to be indicative of a trend in the Western scholarly literature, the question is as to why this trend. Hindu nationalism has existed as a distinct and well organised movement since the 1920ies, and its ideological roots go back to the nineteenth century. The movement may not have travelled under the name of Hindu nationalism in the older days, but the phenomenon which the label is meant to cover has been around for several decades. With such a long history, why is it that Hindu nationalism only captured the interest of Western scholars in the late 1980ies? The case of Hindu nationalism might be used to reflect more generally upon what it is that make a given phenomenon scholarly attractive. When and why is something considered worthwhile scholarly investigation?

Considering the international scene, the growing political influence of Hindu nationalism coincided in time with what has been termed religious radicalisation, religious fundamentalism, politicised religion, etc. The Iranian revolution in 1979 which led to the set up of an Islamic republic in Iran, seemed to prepare the ground for a new era in which religion increasingly became a central theme in politics around the globe (see Lawrence, 1995). Considering this international context, and the apparent fact that religion was becoming radicalised and politicised in different parts of the world, Hindu nationalism could be seen as one instance of a broader international trend (see The Fundamentalist project).

The international scene of religious radicalisation and politicised religion at the time most certainly contributes to explain the scholarly interest in Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies. There may be additional explanations to the sudden boom in literature on Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies, however. As noted in the introductory chapter above, the Western scholarly interest in Hindu nationalism coincided in time with the growing influence of the movement within institutionalised, Indian politics. As already noted, this coinciding of events is hardly any coincidence. But what does it tell us? Perhaps it points to a tendency in Western, scholarly communities to be particularly interested in the sphere of politics. The interest in politics, one must assume, reveals an interest in power. No doubt, the issue of power is a central theme in Western scholarship. From the survey that I have made, it may seem that Hindu nationalism only captured the interest of Western scholars at the moment it took the shape of a growing and influential political party that functioned within the frames of institutionalised politics. Perhaps the survey reveals a tendency in Western scholarship to equate societal power with political power, and political power with institutionalised, political

power, so that scholars searching for the sources of societal power tend to do so in the sphere of institutionalised politics.

When discussing scholarly trends, one should not forget the power of the media in setting the agenda for what the general opinion find to be of interest and importance at any given time. Scholarly activity does not happen in a vacuum, but is, to a certain extent at least, influenced by broader trends in society. To the extent that scholars are attempting to make their scholarship attractive to the general opinion, they need to relate to and absorb the trends of the broader society. My point here is that these broader societal trends are influenced by the media. Hence, in order to understand the changing landscape of scholarly trends it might be of great interest to investigate the interplay between scholarship and the media.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS OF SELECTED BOOK

As any other societal phenomena, Hindu nationalism can be studied from a multitude of angles. It can be analysed within the frameworks of politics, religion, jurisprudence, demography, history, psychology, or other. Focus can be put on its organisational structure, its ideological content, its activities, or other. Any given approach to and interpretation of Hindu nationalism reflects a selection made among the various conceptual tools, analytical frameworks, methodological approaches, and theoretical positions provided by the scholarly traditions. The choice of one perspective might eliminate other perspectives. An argument or a thesis can thus be analysed by what it contains, but also by what it does not contain. Likewise, the scholarly approach to religion can reveal itself in either of two ways: in what the scholar does say about religion, and in what the scholar does not say about religion.

In this chapter will be analysed how religion was dealt with in the selected book on Hindu nationalism. I will discuss how religion is seen to throw light upon the advent of Hindu nationalism. Posed as a question we might ask how religion is seen to have interacted with, influenced on, and become part of the societal phenomenon of Hindu nationalism. The question of how religion might throw light upon Hindu nationalism opens up the broader question of what we understand religion to be. The term religion is a scholarly category with universal aspirations, intended to explain certain aspects of human life. The term is charged with ambiguity, and the attempts at defining religion are manifold. A particular definition of religion often come from a particular scholarly discipline, or is the outcome of a particular theory of religion. Within the scholarly disciplines we can distinguish broadly between functionalist approaches to religion, primarily associated with the social sciences, and the phenomenological approaches to religion, primarily associated with the historically oriented disciplines, the humanities. Functionalist theories of religion are often described as causal explanations, as they generally seek to find underlying reasons for why religion occurs. The classical example of a functionalist theory of religion is the one by Emilè Durkheim, in which religion is explained in terms of its capacity to generate social solidarity and stability in a society (see Durkheim, 1995). Phenomenological approaches to religion are more concerned

with the descriptive rather than the causal understanding of religion which, in turn, might lead to a typology of religious phenomena (Erricker, 2002, p. 82).

As religion can be thought of as different things it can be seen to influence the course of events in different ways. We understand from this that the question of religion's role in the advent of Hindu nationalism bodes for more than one answer, and that the answers suggested might be connected to particular perceptions of religion. In this chapter, I hope to make visible the perception of religion which emerges in the selected book as I analyse its engagement with the phenomenon of Hindu nationalism.

3.1 APPROACHING RELIGION

In *The saffron wave* religion is dealt with in the context of identity. Attention is given to the relation between religious and political identities in India. A central objective in the book is to illuminate how religious identities in India have been socially constructed. Behind this focus upon the constructed nature of the social world lies a thrust to challenge what is often referred to as essentialism.

Anti-essentialism

The selected book presents a certain epistemological position with regard to religion. By epistemology I mean the basic mode of cognition by which the world is understood. *The saffron wave* intends to avoid an essentialist approach to religion in India. The author is concerned not to treat religion as an inherent, natural, or essential quality of the Indian people who are the subjects of his analysis. Instead, he brings attention to the constructed nature of religion in India.

In order to follow the anti-essentialist argument of Hansen, a few words on essentialism is needed. The philosopher of science Karl Reimund Popper has given a critical account of essentialism in *Conjectures and refutations* (Popper, 1965). It might be objected that the point of view of Popper is of little use to studies of human life, as he was perhaps more concerned with the natural sciences. Arguably, my choice of reference is justified by the fact that Popper's theories on science have been highly debated also in the social sciences and the humanities (Smith, 1998: 106-111; Anderson, Hughes and Sharrock, 1988: 203; Clark, 2004: 30-34; Gregersen and K ppe, 1985: 75-78). Hence, it is reasonable to say that the

theories of Popper have had great discursive power in the human sciences, and so have contributed to shape opinions within those fields of scholarship. In addition, I find Popper's account of essentialism to be so general in character that it can be applied to the phenomenon whether it appears in the natural or human sciences.

According to Popper, essentialism is an epistemological position which builds upon the Aristotelian notion that every object contains an essence, that is, an innate principle or nature which constitutes the character of that object. It is further described as Galilean in outlook because of its notion that science produces theories which are factual descriptions of the world (Popper, 1965, p. 101). Popper objected to essentialism for reasons that I shall come back to in paragraph 4.1 below.

The anti-essentialist position in *The saffron wave* is part of the orientalism criticism in that book. If we follow the argument of the author, colonial rulers and orientalist scholars created an image of India as a deeply religious society. Even if the orientalist construction bore little resemblance to the Indian reality, the idea of the highly religious Indians came to establish itself as an objective matter of fact. Hansen suggests that this understanding of India is prone to a certain essentialising of culture which divided the world into well-defined zones of civilizations (see Hansen, 1999, p. 11, 68). Beyond the plurality of India's cultural traditions it is believed to exist a unity of common doctrines and worldviews that represents the essence of the Indian civilisation, Hansen notes. This essence is considered religious in character, expressed in the Hindu culture, and epitomised by the tradition of Hinduism. The central point for Hansen is that orientalist knowledge is operational in the context of Hindu nationalism. The orientalist knowledge is used by Hindu nationalists to legitimate their pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim agenda, he argues. The orientalist knowledge has made Hindu nationalists, journalists, and scholars alike explain the political appeal of Hindu nationalism as a natural response from essentially religious Hindus to the calling of Hinduism (see Hansen, 1999, p. 10-14).

The anti-essentialism in *The saffron wave* also seems to be motivated by a wish to defend the dignity of the Indian democratic system. Hansen intimates that general opinion holds the Indian democracy in low esteem, and that the importance of religious identities in Indian politics contributes to the image of India as a second range democracy (see Hansen, 1999, p. 9). The way I read *The saffron wave* it seeks to restore the dignity of the Indian democracy by rationalising the place of religion within Indian politics. By rationalise I mean to demystify, disenchant, and make reasonable and explicable the presence of religion. Arguably, *The saffron wave* does so by politicising Indian religion. By this I mean that the

book gives political explanations for why religious identities are important in Indian politics. If we follow the argument in the book, religious identities have become important in the formation of political loyalties in India because of the particularity of colonial governance.

To sum up, I will argue that the anti-essentialist stance towards religion in *The saffron wave* is motivated by a wish to defend the position of Indian society as no less rational or modern than Western societies. Its author is concerned to demonstrate that the central position of religious identities in India by no means signals Indian backwardness. His mean to this end is to rationalise the position of religion in Indian society. As I hope to show, he does so by approaching religion as a socially constructed entity whose presence in society is explained by its instrumentality for those who are its constructors. Behind the anti-essentialist and constructivist position in *The saffron wave* lies, in other words, an instrumentalist approach to religion.

The social construction of reality

The epistemological position referred to as social constructionism has become an influential theoretical perspective in scholarly disciplines like sociology, anthropology, psychology and the humanities (Henriksen and Krogseth, 2001, p. 104). Social constructionism emphasises the constructed nature of knowledge and its socio-cultural relativity. It considers human identity to be constructed, fluid, and in constant interaction with its surroundings. Social constructionism is said to be anti-essentialist, as it rejects the possibility of knowing the inner nature of objects (Henriksen and Krogseth, 2001, p. 104). I will suggest that the anti-essentialist approach to religious identities found in *The saffron wave* is informed by social constructionism.

To my opinion, Hansen approached the issue of religion in a way that resembles the perspective elaborated by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman in *The social construction of reality* (Berger and Luckman, 1966). These early proponents of social constructionism developed a dialectic understanding of social reality which they put on the formula “Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product” (Berger and Luckman, 1966, p. 79). Their basic contention is that society is constructed by humans, who constantly express themselves in mental and material activity. Once created, the products of this externalising process obtain the character of an objective reality, independent of their constructors. These objectified products in turn come to form the conditions within which humans are born, act and live. They are, in other words, internalised in the individuals. In

short, this is how Berger and Luckman perceived of the process by which reality is constructed. To my opinion, Hansen approaches the issue of religion along the same lines. My claim is this: in *The saffron wave* religion in the 20th century India is dealt with as an externalisation, objectification, and internalisation of colonial activity.

To the extent that Hansen speak of Hinduism it is as an idealised, Eurocentric construction with a strong Brahmin bias to it, invented in the 18th and 19th centuries by orientalist scholars and colonial rulers (see Hansen, 1999, p. 65-67). Hinduism thus appears, in the terminology of Berger and Luckman, as an externalisation of the West. Hansen deals with the categories of Hindu, Muslim, and cast in much the same way, that is, as colonial constructions of the 19th century. In its effort to know, administer, and rule, the British administration collected systematic knowledge of the Indian subjects. Hansen points out that in this work, the colonial administration not only made use of existing cultural categories, but that it actually reified a new categorical division in Indian society. Customary laws that earlier had been local, fluid, and negotiable were turned into standardised, codified, and fixed systems. Locally existing cultural categories were aggregated into more abstract categories of Muslims, Hindus, and casts (see Hansen, 1999, p. 33-36, 60, 65-67). In this way we might say that identities which conventionally are thought of as indigenous, religious identities are disclosed by Hansen as externalisations of the colonial administration.

As if following the scheme of Berger and Luckman, Hansen goes on to describe how the identities of Hindu, Muslim, and cast became objectified in colonial India. This process was connected to the political life of colonial India. A central argument in *The saffron wave* is that colonial rule introduced a democratic revolution to India (see paragraph 3.2 below). As the British saw community as the natural unit of Indian society, however, the democratic discourse on rights and equality was applied to communities rather than to individuals. The idea of equality before the law was in India transformed into ideas of equality between cultural groups, and codifications of legal rights were transformed into codifications of rights between communities, Hansen points out (see Hansen, 1999, p. 33-37). When the British introduced limited rights to political representation they established separate constituencies for Muslims and Hindus, thus amalgamating religious and political identities. Hansen also points out that the colonial census operations contributed to objectify religious categories, as the Indian population was enumerated according to religious and cast belonging. It soon became common knowledge among Indians that India was made up of a Hindu majority and a Muslim minority. Altogether, the point for Hansen is that colonial governance came to

objectify religious identities as it organised the public and political life of India according to religious affiliation.

Finally, *The saffron wave* suggests that the religious identities became internalised in the Indian understanding of reality due to the democratic revolution. The democratic revolution remoulded the way Indians viewed themselves, now as political subjects entitled to rights, political representation, and just treatment, the argument goes. However, in colonial India religious identities were the central identities through which Indians came to know themselves as legal and political subjects. Hence, due to colonial governance the Indians came to interpret the democratic discourse on rights as collective rights entitled to religious communities rather than individual rights. Because of the colonial governance the Indians came to see themselves as a congregation of different, yet in principle equal, communities divided primarily by religion and cast (see Hansen, 1999, p. 35-36). Hence, I will argue that identities which conventionally are thought of as religious identities appear in *The saffron wave* as administrative categories constructed by colonial rule in its effort to control and govern India. Eventually, these administrative categories evolved into political categories through which the Indian subjects came to negotiate with the colonial, and later, the postcolonial Indian state.

To sum up section 3.1 we might say that Hansen approaches Indian religion from a starting point of anti-essentialism. He wants to demonstrate that religion in India is not a pre-modern, natural, all-pervasive instinct of the Indian population, but rather a phenomenon constructed in historical time and space. He intends to show that Indians are not ultimately driven by religious sentiments and passions. In other words, he seeks to reduce the importance attributed to religion in explaining the behaviour of Indians. Apparently, the empirical facts on the ground seem to contradict his point of view, as religion appears highly important in the formation of political loyalties in India. While Hansen recognises the significance of Hindu, Muslim, and cast identities in the public life of India, he is highly critical of the way in which antagonism between religious communities in India have been presented as a natural result of the passions growing from an essentially religious society. He seeks to demonstrate that the religious identities and communities which orientalist scholars have made appear as original and natural, in fact are political constructions of colonial origin. Hansen thus rejects any essentialist approach to religion by emphasising the constructed nature of the religious identities in India.

3.2 APPROACHING HINDU NATIONALISM

The saffron wave approaches Hindu nationalism as a political phenomenon. By this I mean that the movement is dealt with as a political movement, and that the explanation to its relative success is found in the political realities of India. In Hansen's framework of understanding the movement both results from and expresses the particular workings of the Indian democracy.

Democratic revolution

In order to analyse the Indian democracy and to place the advent of Hindu nationalism within it, Hansen introduces what he terms "a radical reading of Alexis de Tocqueville's idea of the democratic revolution" (see Hansen, 1999, p. 18-24). Democracy has to be seen as a process of questioning and subversion of established authorities, hierarchies, and social orders, he argues. This process modifies social practices and institutions, and it makes new identities and claims possible. Eventually it changes the way a society understands itself. Democracy spreads from the political sphere onto other spheres, imposing a fundamental, ontological instability upon society. In the face of this instability there will occur needs for, and projects of social order and identity. Hence, democracy not only releases forces of liberalism, but can also produce reactions in the shape of authoritarian longings. In order to obtain legitimacy, these projects often present themselves as beyond the sphere of politics, as supported by history, and as truth beyond questioning. We can easily see that the Hindu nationalist movement, as described in chapter 1 above, falls into this characterisation. Another dimension of the democratic revolution is its discourse on abstract individuals that are endowed with equal rights, Hansen states. This discourse made inequality of all kinds appear as illegitimate oppression. As democracy spreads, subordination will not be tolerated and people will be inclined to revolt against it.

As touched upon in paragraph 3.1, Hansen considered colonial rule to have introduced a democratic revolution to India which dislocated earlier hierarchies and social orders, and which changed the Indian understanding of self. It is within this context that Hansen places early Hindu nationalism. Its attempt, among the many in the 1920ies, at defining Indian nationhood was, according to him, part of the democratic revolution in which Indians engaged in a new discourse on equality, sovereignty, and rights (see Hansen, 1999, p. 88). As already mentioned, the new democratic discourse was structured by the orientalist perception, and so

democratic rights were articulated as collective rights, belonging to religious communities. The conclusion to the argument seems to be that Indian politics became suffused by religion due to the orientalist mode in which the democratic revolution was introduced to India. Hindu nationalism appears as the pivotal expression of this particular twist in Indian politics, where social, economic, judicial, and other interests were articulated as collective interests belonging to religious communities.

Politics in religious garb

In explaining the success of Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies, Hansen combines his exegesis of India's political history with a class-analysis. In *The saffron wave* we learn that the new public and political spheres that emerged in colonial India became arenas dominated by the Indian elite. The author points out that in colonial India only the upper and middle classes were entrusted jobs in the state apparatus, so that these groups became the pillars of colonial administration. Also, when democratic rights to political representation and organisational life were introduced, such rights were appointed to the upper and middle classes only, as the masses of Indian were considered unfit for political and civil engagement. Since the postcolonial state was a mere inheritor of colonial governance, Indian public and politics continued to be dominated by the elite, Hansen argued (see Hansen, 1999, p. 46). The state became a protector and provider of resources and jobs for these groups, who in turn developed a strong interest in keeping up the system. However, the democratic discourse on equality and rights continued to diffuse throughout the social layers of India. It fed a growing political awareness among the masses of Indians, who slowly began to feel entitled to services and recognition from the state, the argument runs.

The democratic revolution intensified in the 1980ies (see Hansen, 1999, p. 134-153). The emergence of the lower social strata on the public and political scene left a feeling of encroachment and insecurity among India's middle class, Hansen argues (see Hansen, 1999, p. 144-145). The latter group felt threatened by the sharpened competition over jobs and education that followed as reservation policies⁷ and political mobilisation brought new social groups into public life. As a response, the middle class developed contempt for the political

⁷ In 1980 the Mandal Commission, appointed by the Indian government in 1979, recommended that 27% of all governmental jobs and educational seats were reserved for members of "other backward classes", or OBC's as the term was popularised (see Larson, 1995, p. 261-266).

arena as such. It started to challenge the legitimacy of the state and to despise democratic and secular principles. Hindu nationalist rhetoric became its natural ally. At the same time the new economic liberalism shook the protectionist structures that so far had favoured the middle class, and the opening up of the country to the new global economy left a feeling of backwardness in this group, as exposure to foreign goods and technology revealed the poor quality of Indian industry. Again, the Hindu nationalist rhetoric on Indian strength, pride, and self-respect made appeal (see Hansen, 1999, p. 8-9).

Another point for Hansen is that the political climate of the 1980's made Hindu nationalist rhetoric more actual and acceptable. A new era of political populism created a wave of contempt among ordinary Indians that actualised the traditional anti-political discourse of Hindu nationalism. In search of popular votes the Congress party started to make appeal to communal symbols and issues, thus legitimising communal leanings within Indian politics. At the same time the Muslim communities experienced a strengthening of identity and a wave of conservatism as their contact with the Arab world and with Islamic radicalism increased. As communal identities became more visible and outspoken in the Indian public, the Hindu population became more receptive to the rhetoric of Hindu nationalism, the argument runs (see Hansen, 1999, p.134-153).

To sum up this paragraph, Hansen views Hindu nationalism as a result of, and a reaction to the process of democratisation. Applying the model of democratic revolution, he presents the Hindu nationalist movement as one of those projects that attempt to create social order and identity in the face of the ontological instability produced by democratic politics. The movement did so, he argues, by imposing an orientalist perspective that presents India as essentially Hindu (see Hansen, 1999, p. 19). This project, in turn, made appeal in the Indian middle class, whose privileged position in society was challenged as the democratic revolution intensified. The process of democratisation together with the exposure to the new global economy created a feeling of disorder, insecurity, and lack of self-confidence within the middle class. Hindu nationalism gave a direction to those feelings, as it blamed everything that was wrong on India's minorities and on the secular policies of the Congress party.

I will suggest that Hansen's explanation to contemporary Hindu nationalism is part of his orientalist criticism. He seeks to devalue the religious framework of interpretation by introducing a socio-political analysis. He presents the orientalist perception of India as a veil behind which Hindu nationalism hide its power-seeking, political ambitions:

Without transgressing these established tenets of what India "really is" to millions of Indians, the Hindu nationalist movement could stage its bid for remoulding the public culture of India and for winning political power in the Indian state as the natural, inevitable, completely unpolitical reaction of ordinary, pious Hindus against a culturally insensitive, Westernized, and corrupted state (Hansen, 1999, p 10).

Thus placing Hindu nationalism as a political movement hiding behind apparent religious motives, Hansen turns to explaining the success of the movement. He does so through the framework of a class-based, socio-political analysis, in which the social category of class becomes his main analytical tool. To him, Hindu nationalism is a middle class phenomenon. The immediate explanation to the success of the movement is found in the political voting behaviour of the middle class. This voting behaviour is, in turn, seen to result from the middle class' reaction to the democratisation of Indian society. It appears from the perspective of Hansen, that Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies was all a matter of power and politics. Religion appears as a smokescreen which hid these real driving forces in Indian society. In this way, Hansen seems to be moving towards a Marxist perception of religion.

3.3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY HINDU NATIONALISM

If we are to judge by *The saffron wave*, religion appears irrelevant to the dynamics which explains Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies. The central actors within Hansen's analysis are the Hindu nationalist movement on one side, and its middle class constituency on the other. Religion does not occur as a central motive to either of the two parties.

The irrelevancy of religion

According to Hansen, Hindu nationalism admittedly makes use of and appeal to religion, yet religion is not a goal in itself to the movement. Hansen states that "the objectives and practices of Hindu nationalism go far beyond religion and ritualized practices" (Hansen, 1999, p. 10). According to him, the Hindu nationalist movement is primarily concerned with how India can develop into a strong, powerful, and respectable nation. The movement sees as its

main task to create a unified and stable society, whose ultimate goal is to strengthen the Indian nation as such. To secure the welfare of the Indian state is, in other words, the primary scope of the Hindu nationalist movement (see Hansen, 1999, p. 10-11).

No more than religion is presented as a driving force within the Hindu nationalist movement itself, is it portrayed by Hansen as a motive to its adherents. He points out that since independence the secular, Indian state had provided jobs, economic security, political influence, and social prestige for the Indian middle class. As the democratic revolution intensified the prominent position of the middle class was challenged by the emergence of minority groups and lower classes in public and political life, and by the new global economy. The middle class reaction was to retreat into the anti-secular, anti-political, xenophobic and authoritarian discourse of Hindu nationalism. According to Hansen, it was not the religious dimensions of the Hindu nationalist rhetoric which attracted its middle class adherents, but rather its discourse on order, national respect, and strength. In times of social instability the middle class was in need of the very discipline and the promises of collective strength which Hindu nationalism promised.

Hence, the success of Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies is seen by Hansen as a result of the middle class' reaction to the challenges of modern democracy. The central motive behind its support of Hindu nationalism is seen to be its fear of loosing power and prestige. In this way, Hansen's analysis appears to contain elements of Marxist analysis in which history is seen to be driven forward by a constant class struggle over social, economic, and political power. *The saffron wave* does not, however, present any clear cut materialistic interpretation in the sense that material interests alone were seen to motivate the middle class struggle. Hansen partly takes to socio-economic explanations in order to explain why the middle class felt threatened by the democratic revolution: "The feeling of encroachment had partly to do with sharpened competition over jobs and education because of the entry of newly mobile social groups" (Hansen, 1999, p. 145). But non-material interests were also presented as motives behind the middle class' resentment: "But it was also linked to a sense of "depurification of values" accompanying the increased visibility of lower-caste groups in the public realm, in institutions, government offices, and so on" (Hansen, 1999, p. 145). *The saffron wave* thus hints at a possible upper cast bias in the Indian middle class.

Notions of purity and pollution are by many considered to be a central aspect of the religious traditions of Hindus (see Fuller, 1992). It is considered a religious duty among many Hindus to keep themselves as ritually pure as possible. The sources of ritual pollution are many, of which the most immediate are organic life, like bodily fluids and waste matters. The

notions of ritual purity and pollution are intimately linked to the cast system, which divide society into a system of hierarchical inequality. The upper cast Hindus are considered to be of greater ritual purity than lower cast Hindus. This means that in order to protect their ritual purity, the upper cast Hindus need to keep away from lower cast Hindus who are considered to be more ritually polluted than themselves. While the significance of the notions of purity and pollution in Indian society may vary greatly, these notions are thought to have influenced upon the cast system to the extent that Hindus are seen to marry endogamous⁸ as part of their religious duty (see Brockington, 1993, p. 198-202; Fuller, 1992, p. 12-16). If we transfer the perspective of ritual purity into the context of Hindu nationalism, the middle class reaction to the process of democratisation might appear to contain a religious dimension, related to cast.

As far as I can see, Hansen does not explore the issue of the potential cast dimension of the middle class and its reaction to the democratisation of India. This makes sense, considering his anti-orientalist position and intention. His project is to devalue the importance of religion and to demonstrate that other than religious motives are operational in the context of Hindu nationalism. For him, orientalist scholarship has overemphasised the importance of religion with regard to the political behaviour of Indians. To him, Hindu nationalism is a political phenomenon whose roots are to be found in the political realities of India. More than that, the movement reflects the particular cultural and religious wrapping of Indian politics. For Hansen, Hindu nationalism is an expression of how religious and political identities have been amalgamated in India due to colonial governance.

The political instrumentality of religion

The saffron wave suggests that religion inhabits an instrumentalist role in Hindu nationalism. This instrumentalist perspective is, of course, related to the political approach to Hindu nationalism that we find in the book. In *The saffron wave* the Hindu nationalist movement is portrayed as a political actor who seeks influence for itself in the political system of India, and recognition for India in the international system of nation states. Being a nationalist movement the primary goal of Hindu nationalism is to integrate and strengthen the Indian nation and to create a unique, Indian identity. Within this broader project to consolidate the Indian nation religion appears as a useful tool which gives content to the Hindu nationalist

⁸ By endogamous I mean that the different cast groups marry within their own cast group.

vision of India. There has to be created a kernel to the Indian nation, something that will make Indians feel truly Indian. To the Hindu nationalists this something has come to be Hinduism. Hinduism ought to be the kernel of the Indian national identity, as perceived by Hindu nationalists. Within this kind of interpretative framework that we find in *The saffron wave*, religious symbols, rituals, traditions, and identities appear as useful devices in the Hindu nationalist project of consolidating and strengthening the Indian nation. Religion does not appear as a goal in itself, but rather as a mean to another end, namely the consolidation of the Hindu population and the Indian nation.

The saffron wave suggests yet another instrumentalist role of religion in the advent of Hindu nationalism. The book seeks to demonstrate how Hindu nationalism has used religious institutions, symbols, and rituals deliberately and strategically to attract adherents and voters. In chapter 5 of the *The saffron wave* we learn how the use of religious symbols, rituals, myths, and traditions was an important part of Hindu nationalism's strategy for winning support throughout the 1980ies and 90ies (see Hansen, 1999, p. 154-199). All in all, in *The saffron wave* there is a strong focus on the political instrumentality of religion. Hence, we might say that book works within a broader discourse of functionalist approaches to religion which tends to see religion in light of the function it has to various social actors.

The psychological function of religion

I will suggest that *The saffron wave* opens up to the possibility of yet another function of religion in the context of Hindu nationalism. This psychological function of religion emerges from Hansen's particular understanding of democracy and the democratic revolution (see Hansen, 1999, p. 18-22). Apart from being a set of governmental regulations and institutions, democracy has to be seen as a process of questioning and subversion of established authorities, hierarchies and social orders, Hansen argues. This process spreads from the political sphere onto other areas of society, imposing a fundamental, ontological undecidability upon society. Democratic governance reveals that institutionalised practice in fact is founded upon human acts of power. Thus revealing the constructed nature of the social world, the democratic revolution makes it impossible for political power ever to become legitimate as it was in pre-modern times, when it could present itself as a divinely sanctioned, natural order of things. Democracy thus modified social practices and institutions, and it makes new social identities and claims possible. It ultimately changes the way society understands itself.

The revolutionary, democratic creed of universal equality, freedom and sovereignty also makes possible a more radical and generalised form of social antagonism, Hansen argues. The democratic discourse on abstract individuals endowed with equal rights makes inequality of all kinds appear as results of oppression. Inequality is hence deemed unnatural and illegitimate. As the democratic discourse spreads throughout society, subordination of any kind will not be tolerated, and people are inclined to revolt against it. Thus, when the democratic revolution is set in motion, it will spread from one sphere to another and from one social layer to another. Hansen's point is that this is what happened in India in the 1970ies, 80ies, and 90ies as the lower social strata started to make themselves heard on the political and public scene of India.

Politics appears in Hansen's vocabulary as strategies for controlling the ontological undecidability of social life. Democracy produces a gradually more politicised society where legitimacy, authority, and truth are always contested. Confronted with the ontological uncertainty produced by modern democracy, there occur needs in the population for stability and certainty, the argument runs. Hansen views Hindu nationalism as one such project which seeks to counter the uncertainty which follows in the wake of democratisation. It does so by emphasising order, discipline, physical strength, and selfless loyalty to the cause of Hindutva, and by creating a Hindu identity that is presented as natural, constant, and beyond questioning. Hansen thus presented the Hindu nationalist mobilisation of the Hindu identity as an attempt to control the chaos produced by democratic politics:

My argument is that the articulation of Hindutva (Hinduness) in politics and in public life is primarily a way of making sense of the social world, a strategy that aims at creating a certain order within the disorderly realm of democratic politics, by imposing a matrix of a natural, eternal, and essentialized "Hindu culture" upon it (Hansen, 1999, p. 19).

The Hindu nationalist emphasis on the Hindu identity and the Hindu culture hence appears as means by which the Hindu nationalist movement solved the psychological stress emerging from modern life. This project met a psychological need within the Indian middle class who, in the 1980ies and 90ies, was haunted by fear and anxiety in the face of societal change. Within this framework of interpretation, the Hindu identity and the Hindu tradition which Hindu nationalism promoted appear as safe havens of truth and stability that contrasts the relativity and chaos of modern life. From this point of view, religious identities and traditions appear met the psychological need for order and truth and unquestionable facts in a time of social change.

3.4 PERCEIVING OF HINDU NATIONALISM

The author of *The saffron wave* writes within the frameworks of a post-colonial perspective. His focus is on the legacy of the colonial rule in India. The treatment in *The saffron wave* of Hindu nationalism is highly influenced by that post-colonial perspective, as the author emphasises strongly the relation between colonialism, orientalism, and Hindu nationalism.

A legacy of colonialism and orientalism

To a great extent, *The saffron wave* presents the phenomenon of Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies as a reflection of colonialism and orientalism. The movement of Hindu nationalism is seen to have originated with the democratic revolution which the colonial government of India brought about, and which made Indians identify themselves anew as a sovereign people. Thus, Hindu nationalism is seen to have emerged as one of many projects in the early 20th century to try and identify the Indian self within the new, democratic discourse of universal rights and sovereignty. The crucial point is that Hindu nationalisms understanding of self was structured by the orientalist perception of India. Hence, the movement applied the orientalist categories and the orientalist perspective on Indian history in its construction of a new Indian identity. In this way, the Hindu nationalist movement appears as a product of colonialism and orientalism.

The eventual appeal of Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies also appears in *The saffron wave* to be a reflection of colonialism and orientalism. The reason behind the middle class support of Hindu nationalism was, according to the perspective in *The saffron wave*, the fear of the middle class of loosing the very power and prestige with which it had been invested by the colonial rule. In this way, colonial rule appears to have consolidated the social group which was to become Hindu nationalist adherents. In addition, colonialism appears to have created the societal conditions which brought the middle class into the arms of Hindu nationalism, as colonialism brought democracy to India and thus instigated the process that eventually led to the downfall of the middle class dominance. Hence, in a double sense, *The saffron wave* presents the success of contemporary Hindu nationalism to be an outcome of colonialism in India. Due to the way in which the colonial government had naturalised communalism in India, the Indian middle class was disposed towards making the Indian Muslims the target of their complaints and frustration, the argument seems to be. The Indian middle class was, Hansen notes, primarily made up of Hindus.

A deviation from Hindu tradition?

Characterising the Hindu nationalist movement, Hansen states that “It is, if anything, a “revenge” of colonial governmentality more than any representation of Hindu culture as such” (Hansen, 1999, p. 9). This statement, of course, might have several levels of meanings. As already noted, Hansen saw the Hindu nationalist movement as a product of colonial governance in more than one way. The author does not explicate how he perceives of Hindu culture. The point seems to be clear, however, that whatever Hindu culture is, Hindu nationalism is not a prominent representative of that culture. Elsewhere, Hansen reveals a political, functionalist, and instrumentalist perspective on culture, which corresponds with his political, post-colonial perspective: “In my view, culture is yesterday’s politics stabilized, depoliticized, and authorized as “truth”, and “history”, and we must scrutinize how governments, intellectuals and movements made culture and nation coincide, and subsequently made this pair a compelling element of popular identities” (Hansen, 1999, p. 30). Within such a framework of understanding, culture is the historical result of political power and manipulation by political leaders and others. Applied onto the colonial and post-colonial history of India, this perspective brings attention to the role of colonial rulers and orientalist scholars in creating established facts about history and culture.

While the discourse on orientalism and colonialism is central in Hansen’s model of explanation, it is also operational in his approach to Hindu nationalist ideology. Hansen argues that the cultural identities which Hindu nationalism presents as natural, original, and essential, to a great extent were constructions of colonial origin. By reducing the Hindu nationalist understanding of the Indian self and its history to a construction of orientalist scholarship, Hansen tears apart the ideological foundation of Hindu nationalism. The Hindu nationalist claim that India is fundamentally Hindu appears in *The saffron wave* as a construct that has been produced by orientalist scholars and colonial rulers.

CHAPTER 4: REFLECTIONS ON THE SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE

The analysis in the previous chapter is the starting point for reflections made in this chapter on some of the challenges that faces contemporary scholarship as it deals with religion. *The saffron wave* opens up a field of issues that are relevant beyond that particular book and its particular theme of Hindu nationalism. Some of these are specific to the study of India, while others are of a more general, scientific character. Hence, in this chapter *The saffron wave* is a point of departure for inquiring into broader scholarly debates of the late 20th century.

4.1 SCHOLARLY IDEALS, AIMS, AND CHALLENGES

The anti-essentialist stance that we find in *The saffron wave* reflects a broader trend in contemporary, Western scholarship. As *The saffron wave* exemplifies, anti-essentialism is a central ingredient in the orientalism criticism. It has, however, gained ground beyond that very discourse. The most conspicuous and explicit anti-essentialist positions we do perhaps find in the fields of sociology and anthropology. These disciplines have come to emphasise strongly the relative, instable, and socially constructed nature of reality and identity. Their explanations are sought in social relations rather than in intrinsic properties of the phenomena in question, or so they say (Furseth and Repstad, 2003, p. 12-14; Gellner, 2002, p. 22). We easily see how such perspectives contrast essentialism as described in paragraph 3.1 above.

Anti-essentialism as we find it in *The saffron wave* and elsewhere is a kind of scientific critique. It is criticism directed at the most fundamental premises for scientific activity and knowledge, namely epistemology and ontology. Accordingly, its implications are profound. As the term indicates, anti-essentialism is a reaction to essentialism. Trained in the historically oriented disciplines of the humanities, I take it as a principle of learning that any phenomenon is better understood when its historical background is known. Hence, the first section in this paragraph contains a few words on the history of essentialism and the successive challenges

of it that we may term anti-essentialist. In the second section I discuss essentialism in relation to the study of religion. In the last section I discuss essentialism with a particular view to *The saffron wave*.

The problem of essence

As mentioned in paragraph 3.1 above, Popper related essentialism to the epistemology of Aristotle. In a book on the history of the human sciences, Tore Nordenstam traces essentialism back to both Aristotle and Plato, and to the scientific ideal that originated with these two philosophers of antiquity (Nordenstam, 1996, p. 40-48). According to Nordenstam, both Plato and Aristotle adhered to the ontological premise that the world has an eternal and unchangeable structure which represents a more profound reality than the changeable appearances of the empirical world. From this ontology grew a view on science that dominated until at least the 19th century, in which the central object in science was to disclose the eternal aspects of the world and to discover its unchangeable structures, its essences.

Nordenstam notes that essentialism was first rejected in the 17th century as the new mechanics of Galileo, Kepler and Newton revolutionized the natural sciences (Nordenstam, 1996, p. 63-67). In the humanities, however, essentialism was challenged only in the late 18th and early 19th century, when a new, dynamic understanding of humanity and history emerged to replace the static worldview of antiquity. Within this new perception of humanity and history there was no place for eternal essences as the human nature was seen as dynamic and changeable (Nordenstam, 1996, p. 71-77).

The essentialist thinking did not disappear from Western scholarship with the new human sciences, however. The historically oriented perspective and the individualising tendency that dominated the humanities in the 18th and 19th centuries were countered by a renewed focus upon structure from the late 19th century onwards. In stark opposition to the rationalist tradition from Plato, René Descartes, and Emanuel Kant, early structuralists like Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Ferdinand de Saussure put attention to the power that hidden structures of the psyche, the material resources, and the language respectively had over human consciousness (Nordenstam, 1996, p. 152-156). Structuralism became a highly popular position in Western scholarship of the 1950ies and 60ies (Stromberg, 1994, p. 289). One of its main proponents at that time, the anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss adhered to the same scientific program as did Plato and Aristotle. Science was for all of these to seek the unchangeable structures of the world that are governed by universal laws, Nordenstam notes

(Nordenstam, 1996, p. 158). The program of 20th century structuralism thus seems to be ridden by the same essentialist epistemology as was the scientific ideal of antiquity.

The essentialist thinking of structuralism was challenged in the 1960ies by post-structuralism, or deconstruction, and post-modernism. We are hence back to where we started, namely with contemporary anti-essentialism. Post-structuralism and post-modernism became highly influential among Western scholars in the 1980ies (Stromberg, 1994, p. 313-322). Both positions reject the notion that truth is a fixed, eternal object. They both work with the premise that truth and knowledge are relative, plural, and diverse. There is no ultimate truth, or ultimate exegesis of history, or ultimate explanation of the world. There is only a multitude of interpretations of which none are more truthful than others, and of which all are relative to time and place (Williams and May, 1996, p. 155-167). We see how such a view of truth and knowledge opposes the scientific program of structuralism, as such a program presupposes that science can discover the objective reality behind appearances.

Hence, anti-essentialism is described as a novel challenging of a millennial old way of thinking about the world in the West. Perhaps the most radical expression of anti-essentialism is found in the theoretical positions of post-structuralism and post-modernism. And perhaps today anti-essentialism is a more explicitly expressed position among scholars of the social sciences, as compared to those associated with the humanities. However, it would be wrong to assume that the critical remarks of proclaimed anti-essentialists are unknown to or disavowed by scholars of the humanities. On the contrary, many a historian will recognise such critical remarks as the very quintessence of their own discipline. The understanding among anti-essentialists in the 1980ies and 90ies that knowledge is socially constructed is probably old news to the professional historian whose main method is the critical examination of primary sources. Writing on European, intellectual history, Stromberg illustrates my point in his ironic commenting on the focus in post-structuralism on relativism:

In a pluralistic culture one becomes conscious that things once taken for granted are conventions. Historians discovered this quite a while back (late nineteenth century). The assumption that a work of history tells the truth “exactly as it happened”, which would be the same for everybody, came to seem naïve to historians well before 1914 (Stromberg, 1994, p. 315).

A question might be if contemporary anti-essentialism is part of what Thomas Kuhn have termed a scientific revolution (Kuhn, 1996), or if it merely indicates that the historical approach has gained ground beyond professional borders.

At this point it might be noted that the notion of essence was actually not so settled in ancient Greek philosophy. In Greek philosophy *ousia* is not necessarily and always seen as a single, unified property that causes the other properties of a given subject. For Aristotle, the essence of a subject can itself be a complex matter (Detel, 2006, p. 259). The term *ousia* does reflect the notion that objects in the world have an underlying reality. But whether that reality is static or dynamic is not a settled philosophical question in ancient Greek philosophy (personal communication with Professor Jens Braarvig). Hence, the intellectual tradition of antiquity is not necessarily as static as it may be described.

Having thus viewed essentialism in relation to the history of science, I move on to investigate more closely some of the critical remarks directed at essentialism. According to Karl Popper, essentialism's first claim is that science can establish theories about the world which are true beyond reasonable doubt. Its second claim is that the truly scientific theories describe the essential qualities of things, and that such theories are ultimate explanations that need no further explanation. Popper rejected essentialism on both accounts (Popper, 1965, p. 103-107). For him, science can never provide universally true theories, as one can never conclude from a limited amount of empirical tests that a theory has universal validity. Future empirical tests might always bring new results and thus enforce a modification or rejection of the theory in question. According to Popper, science can only provide hypothesis which always might be subjected to falsification. Popper also criticises the claim that science aims at ultimate explanations. An ultimate explanation is one that can not and need not be further explained. For Popper, any explanation can aggregate new questions and hence lead to new explanations. In this perspective, the belief in ultimate explanations becomes an obstacle to fruitful questioning and scientific inquiry, as it does not encourage further investigation once the ultimate explanation is found. Popper's point seems to be that essentialism leads to scientific stagnation due to its notion of ultimate explanations.

We see that Popper did not criticise the belief in essences as such. In fact, he never rejected the ontological status of essences. On the contrary, he adhered to the idea that "much is hidden from us, and that much of what is hidden may be discovered" (Popper, 1965, p. 105). Thus, Popper recognises the essentialist view that there exists a reality beyond appearances, and that this reality can be discovered by science. For Popper, however, the existence of hidden matters does not reduce the ontological status of the world of appearances. Popper considers not only underlying structures to have true existence. For him reality consists of different layers, of which all are equally real. Accordingly, beyond every theory that explains the world lies a deeper, more abstract, and more universal theory of

explanation (Popper, 1965, p. 115). The conclusion to the argument is that there can be no ultimate theory of explanation. Instead, all theories are equal attempts to describe reality.

Popper's objections to essentialism concerns epistemology rather than ontology. He rejects the belief in ultimate explanations rather than the belief in essences as such. In comparison, while post-structuralism, post-modernism, and social constructionism comprises the arguments of Popper, their criticism seems also to go a step further. Whereas Popper remains agnostic regarding the existence of essences, the latter group of theories seems to reject the ontological status of essences, insisting that human reality is socially constructed (Barker, 2003, p. 19-20; Williams, 2005, p. 11; Burr, 1995, p. 5). At this point, we should keep in mind that the latter group of theories directs its anti-essentialist stance towards studies of the human world exclusively, whereas Popper is oriented towards the natural sciences. Post-modernist, post-structuralist, and social constructionist thinking rejects naturalism in the study of human life. It tends to see humans as cultural rather than biological creatures. That is, it considers the human conditions to be created by culture rather than by nature. From such a perspective, essentialism is a label that sticks to naturalism.

To sum up this section I will suggest that essentialism have earned the status of a bygone, scientific approach that no longer meets the requirements set by scholarship. It has come to be associated with metaphysical speculation, and so it is considered an inappropriate ingredient in scientific theorising of the late 20th.

The religious framework: explanation by essence?

The saffron wave illustrates that, with regard to India, it has been condemned as essentialism to explain human behaviour as a function of religion. Hence, if *The saffron wave* is representative, the analytical category of religion is losing its explanatory potential within Western scholarship on India. While much of the orientalist criticism probably is justifiable, it is, arguably, naïve to reject that religion matters in Indian society. As I will come back to in paragraph 4.4, a religious framework of analysis can contribute to the understanding of Hindu nationalism. However, the anti-essentialist criticism of the religious framework of analysis is important as it enforces awareness to a range of theoretical and methodological challenges that faces studies of religion. In this section I will reflect upon the arguments behind the anti-essentialist criticism and the implications that they may have for studies of religion.

Apparently, one problem with the religious framework of analysis is that it takes religion to be an inherent quality of the Indian population. It thus ignores that which for

Hansen seems to be a central point, namely that religion is socially constructed rather than a pre-given faculty of the Indian people. The argument of social constructionism, post-structuralism, and post-modernism is easily recognisable in this kind of criticism.

Surely, it is problematic to deal with religion as an inherent, human quality that functions independent of time and place, as if it was an instinct of sorts. To perceive of religion in such a fashion is, arguably, to move beyond the epistemological frameworks within which contemporary scholarship on religion operate. Neither the social sciences nor the humanities have the methodological means to answer the question if humans have an instinct for religion. To speak of religion as an instinct is to attribute an element of determinism to the human being. From a methodologically point of view, notions of determinism are challenged by the problem of induction. To actualise the argument of Popper, one can never conclude from a limited amount of tests that a phenomenon has universal validity. Neither the social sciences nor the humanities can provide an exhaustive empirical material to back a theory of human determinism. There is always the possibility that future, empirical material will bring new results and so enforce a revision of the theory. In addition, of course, notions of human determinism have come to be morally discredited due to their association with evolutionary theory and social Darwinism.

It goes without saying that to perceive of religion as an institution of supernatural origin is just as problematic within the frames of scholarship as is the essentialist view described above. Both positions lack the empirical foundation on which the human sciences rely for legitimacy. Hence, scholars are left with the option to deal with religion as a human construction. However, I find the reason for this to be a matter of epistemology rather than of ontology. If *The saffron wave* suggests that religion should be dealt with as a human construction because this is what religion is, the argument that I find more persuasive is that religion should be dealt with as a social construction because it is only as such that science have access to religion. Underlying this argument is the notion that the human sciences should be empirically based. With regard to religion, the only empirical material available is the human expressions of religion, whether in the shape of physical manifestations, social institutions, or human utterances. To the extent that science can make religion its object of inquiry, it is as a product of human activity. Hence, that scholars perceive of religion as a human construction has more to do with the limits of science and less with the properties of the world. This statement implies the same agnosticism that Popper subscribed to when he submitted that much is hidden from us. Its logic is that science can not provide any ultimate answer to the question of why or from where religion occurs. Accordingly, the argument that

religion is a social construction appears essentialist as it favours one description of reality over others.

Thus, I agree with Hansen that scholars should deal with religion as a human construction rather than an inherent quality of the human being, even if I disagree over the reasons for why this is so. Having said that, what does it imply to perceive of religion as a human construction? Among other things, it means to bring the historical perspective onto religion. If we agree that religious expressions are historical phenomena, we acknowledge that they are relative to time and place. To say that they are relative to time and place is to say that they might be expressed differently in different places and at different times. Also, it is to say that they might mean different things in different places and at different times. To perceive of religion as a historical phenomenon is, in other words, to perceive of it as something that can change in shape and content according to time and place. With this perspective in mind it becomes difficult to make strong generalisations about the working of religion. However, the term religion aspires to be a universal, analytical category. As such, it presumes that there is something universally distinct about the phenomena to which the term is applied. It presumes that there is something about religion that exists and functions independent of time and place. In other words, there is a tension between seeing religion as historically contingent and seeing it as a universal phenomenon. The question becomes if and how we can use religion as a universal category without losing sight of the historical dimension.

To bring the historical perspective onto religion also means to place religion within its historical context. If we agree that religion is relative to its historical context, we acknowledge that religion is a dynamic force that interacts with other societal forces like economy, culture, politics, demography, etc. To say that religion interacts with other societal forces is to say that it mutually influences upon, and is being influenced by these other forces. With this perspective in mind, it becomes difficult to deal with religion as a separate sphere that functions independent of other social spheres. And yet, in order to investigate how religion interacts with other societal forces, one needs to extract that which is considered religious from the rest of societal life. The challenge is, on one hand, to deal with religion as a distinct phenomenon without cutting it loose from the historical context of which it is part, and on the other hand, to contextualise religion without reducing it to a mere function of some other societal force. This point brings me to the other problem associated with the religious framework of analysis, namely that of reductionism.

If judged by *The saffron wave*, the religious framework of analysis has earned a reputation for reductionism among scholars on India. In science, the term reductionism denotes the intellectual endeavour to reduce a complex matter to a set of basic, explanatory factors. In a more precise manner reductionism also denotes the act of explaining phenomena identified in one scientific field with theories established in another scientific field (Sharma, 1994, p. 128-129). In both senses of the term, reductionism is often charged negatively as a simplification or misrepresentation of reality. Like *The saffron wave* illustrated, some scholars react to what they perceive as a long tradition in the West of attributing religion the status of an all-embracing explanation of Indian society. According to this kind of criticism, other societal spheres like politics, culture, and social relations have been reduced to functions of Indian religion. The religious analysis of Indian society is thus considered erroneous as it oversees other societal, cultural, and human forces that influences upon social life. This kind of criticism resembles the anti-essentialist argument of Popper. Its main objection to the religious framework of analysis is that it has made religion the ultimate explanation and the ultimate reality of Indian society.

Arguably, the human world is far too complicated to lend itself to simple explanations by one or few principles. Hence, reductionism thus understood is not a favourable ingredient in any scientific analysis of the human world. At the same time, it is difficult not to agree to the fact pointed out by Gavin Flood that all research is reductionism of sorts, or otherwise it would be a mere representation of the totality of the object in study (Flood, 1999, p. 66). From this point of view, reductionism is integral to any kind of analysis or explanation of the social world. The challenge is to balance the apparent contradiction between the scientific ideal of non-reductionism on one side, and the knowledge that reductionism inevitably enters into any scholarly analysis on the other.

To sum up this section, I suggest that essentialism ought to be avoided in studies of religion, as in any other studies of human activity. In the frames of scholarship, religion should be dealt with as a social construction. Having said that, the present discussion has intended to demonstrate that there are certain methodological challenges facing the social constructionist perspective, among which are the issues of particularity versus universality, abstraction versus contextualisation, and the issue of reductionism.

The political framework: substituting one essence for another?

As is made clear by now, *The saffron wave* represented an anti-essentialist criticism of the religious framework of analysis. In that book, religion was neither to be seen as the essence of Indian society, nor as the ultimate explanation of Hindu nationalism. In this section I will reflect upon the alternative framework of analysis put forward in *The saffron wave*. In my reading of that book, a political framework of analysis was applied in order to avoid cultural essentialism. Religion was dealt with as a political construction, and Hindu nationalism was explained as a reaction to the political process of democratisation. My contention is that in his effort to avoid cultural essentialism, Hansen introduced another kind of essentialism in which power struggle appears as an essential driving force in the human being.

In *The saffron wave*, the social constructionist perspective on religion meant bringing attention to the politics involved in religion. What seems at first to be the argument is that politics have made religion important in Indian society. To recapitulate chapter 3.1, Hansen suggested that the political leadership of India imposed a system upon its subjects in which religious affiliation and tradition were guidelines for the organising of public and political life. The conclusion to this argument is that the religiously infused reality of India is politically constructed and not a natural state of being. If the argument of Hansen is followed a step further, however, politics account for the religious reality of India in an even more profound way. To recollect chapter 3.1 again, *The saffron wave* presented Hindu, Muslim, and cast identities as constructions imposed upon Indians from political authorities in order for the latter to achieve political ends. In turn, people came to adopt and hold on to these identities because the political and institutional systems demanded that they did, and not because such identities were of fundamental and religious significance to them. On closer examination then, the argument seems not only to be that politics have made religion important in India, but that politics have contributed to construct religion, or what is commonly seen as religion in India.

Having thus exposed the political character of apparent religious identities, Hansen moved on to explain the growth of Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies. As it appears from chapter 3 above, religion was not attributed any significant explanatory power in Hansen's analysis. To him, contemporary Hindu nationalism was a middle class phenomenon. As discussed in chapter 3.2, his argument was that the Indian middle class felt their privileged position threatened as the democratisation of India made lower social classes gain in political strength and power. The middle class reacted by embracing the conservative ideology of

Hindu nationalism, as the latter appeared to suite the political, economic, and social interests of the former. Thus, Hansen challenged the religious framework of analysis by applying a political analysis that explained contemporary Hindu nationalism as a middle class struggle to defend its political, economic, and social position against attacks from lower social classes.

Arguably, the kind of explanation that Hansen presented in *The saffron wave* can be termed essentialist. To open my argument I will suggest that Hansen's explanation to the success of Hindu nationalism is based upon a class analysis. Writing on politics and class analysis, Barry Hindess has characterised the latter in the following terms: "What the various forms of class analysis share is a common insistence on the importance of classes and the relation between them for the analysis of capitalist societies (...)" (Hindess, 1987, p. 4). Thus viewed, class analysis, whether of a Marxist or non-Marxist kind, is one that considers classes to be major, collective actors with strong societal force. It considers class struggle to be one of the central forces behind societal change. To my opinion, Hansen's explanation of Hindu nationalism falls into such a notion of class analysis, as it presents the Indian middle class as a collective actor whose support of Hindu nationalism is uniformly triggered by the acts of that other collective actor, the lower classes in India.

Class analysis is closely associated with the materialist thinking of Marxism. A focal point for much of the criticism directed at class analysis has therefore been the economic reductionism associated with Marxism (Hindess, 1987, p. 88). My point here is not to charge Hansen with economic reductionism. As I suggested in paragraph 3.3, the class analysis in *The saffron wave* is not based upon any explicit materialist theory of society or history. In fact, it is difficult to say anything at all about the basis of Hansen's class analysis. Even if class struggle appears as the central explanation to the success of Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies, nowhere in *The saffron wave* is the concept of class discussed. The reader is never told who the Indian middle class is, what its foundation is, or when and how it has emerged. It nevertheless appears in Hansen's analysis to act as a unit in its support of Hindu nationalism. The author thus seems to have taken its existence and coherence for granted without reflecting upon the nature of its being. Even if the uncritical use of the vocabulary of class renders it possible to place Hansen's analysis within a Marxist framework of interpretation, I leave the question of economic reductionism aside. Instead, I will contend that his analysis is haunted by another kind of reductionism.

The central argument in *The saffron wave* was that the middle class supported Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies because its privileged position in society was threatened by the democratisation of Indian society. The motive that explained the success of contemporary

Hindu nationalism was, in other words, the middle class' urge to defend its societal position. This kind of explanation presupposes that the Indian middle class is a collective unit that acts uniformly according to a common interest in trying to maximise its relative power in society. The explanation of contemporary Hindu nationalism is hence reduced to the acting of one principle, namely that of power struggle. Such an explanation implies that lust for power is an inherent quality that motivates humans for action and that explains political behaviour. It makes lust for power appear as an irreducible, self-evident, explanatory principle that can not be further explained. To the best of my understanding, such a notion of human lust for power falls pray to the same criticism as do essentialist approaches to religion: it is difficult to verify in a scientifically satisfying manner. It contains elements of determinism. It reduces human behaviour to the acting of one principle. Hence, if we acknowledge that human beings are historically contingent, the notion of human lust for power is problematic for the same reasons as are any essentialist notion of religion.

To sum up this section, I will contend that Hansen substituted one essence for another as he replaced the religious framework of analysis with his political framework of analysis. Considering Hansen's condescending view of cultural essentialism, *The saffron wave* leaves us to question whether he was critical of essentialism as such, or whether it was only a particular kind of essentialism that he rejected. Put differently, we might ask if the essentialism underlying Hansen's own argument was intentional or not. Whatever the answer might be, *The saffron wave* is a reminder of how easily essentialism slips into scholarly analysis. As already argued, all explanations are reductions of sorts. As such they have a potential for essentialism. Thus, to the extent that scholars attempt at scholarly explanations, they run the risk of falling into essentialism.

4.2 SCHOLARSHIP AND RELIGION

The anti-essentialist criticism of the religious framework of analysis found in *The saffron wave* had a parallel within the academic study of religion at that time. A critical debate regarding the theoretical and methodological foundations for the study of religion proceeded from the 1970ies and throughout the 1990ies in which the phenomenology of religion

associated with Mircea Eliade came under harsh criticism.⁹ Phenomenology of religion was criticised for its inherent essentialism, its lack of historical and contextual orientation, and its claims to objectivity and truth. Apparently then, the wave of post-structuralist and post-modernism criticism also made itself evident in the academic study of religion.

Eliade is by his critics and others considered a highly influential scholar (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 4; Strenski, 1989, p. 70; Holt, 1996, p. xi-xii), and the phenomenology of religion associated with him is considered one of the most influential paradigms in the academic study of religion (Flood, 1999, p. 8 and 10; Gilhus and Mikaelsson, 2001, p. 30-31). One of his critics has, however, placed Eliade as a mere representative of a much broader *sui generis* discourse on religion which both predates and extends far beyond the phenomenology of Eliade (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 57-61). The term *sui generis* is Latin for belonging to its own kind (“Sui generis”, 1995). With regard to religion, the term denotes the claim that religion is an autonomous phenomenon that can not be reduced to or explained as anything else. A call to emphasis the autonomy of religion was already evident in the writing of Friedrich Schliermacher of the late 18th Century (Hjelde, 1998, p. 35). Hence, we might say that a *sui generis* discourse on religion can be traced back to Romanticism at least. For Russell T. McCutcheon, the *sui generis* discourse has dominated the academic study of religion, and Eliade has been its foremost representative in the 20th Century. If such characterisation is justifiable, the criticism of phenomenology of religion appears to indicate the ongoing of a shift in the academic study of religion.

This paragraph opens with a brief outline of certain aspects of the criticism directed at phenomenology of religion.¹⁰ In the second section I discuss social constructionism as an alternative mean to perceiving of religion. For reasons discussed in paragraph 4.1, I agree that within the frame of scholarship religion has to be dealt with as a social construction. Hence, I am in general support of a social constructionist perspective on religion. However, as I intend to show, the instrumentalist perspective that appears to underlie much of the social constructionist scholarship, needs some modification in order to be a more fruitful framework of interpretation. *The saffron wave* shall work as an illustration.

⁹ Some critics of phenomenology of religion have been Ivan Strenski (Strenski, 2006), Jonathan Z. Smith (Smith, 1978), Robert A. Segal (Segal, 1999), Kurt Rudolph (Rudolph, 1989), Russell T. McCutcheon (McCutcheon, 1997) and Gavin Flood (Flood, 1999).

¹⁰ The outline is based upon the criticism of Russell T. McCutcheon (McCutcheon, 1997) and Gavin Flood (Flood, 1999) in particular, since their criticism is contemporaneous with *The saffron wave* and so reflects the standing of the debate at that time.

Phenomenology under siege

Undoubtedly a weighty simplification, yet the critical debate on phenomenology of religion can be summarised as a discussion of three interconnected issues: that of compartmentalising, that of de-contextualisation, and that of objectivity. A starting point for much of the criticism is the central claim in phenomenology that religion constitutes a separate compartment in the life of human beings. According to Eliade, there is a unique quality to religion that can not be reduced to anything else. Consequentially, religion must be dealt with on its own terms and on its own level of references. To seek explanations for religion outside its own domain is tantamount to not taking religion seriously. It is to overlook that unique quality which constitutes the phenomenon in the first place, and to neglect its deep meaning for devotees (Eliade, 1984, p. 6; Eliade, 1996, p. xvii). The claim that religion is a special case has led to the claim that a special method is needed in order to study religion. Speaking of its origin, Clive Erricker has described phenomenology of religion as an attempt to create a coherent method for studying religion (Erricker, 2002, p. 78).

The tendency to compartmentalise religion has been criticised for the essentialism on which it builds. Beyond phenomenology's universal theory on religion lays the notion that a unique, religious essence inhabits all people at all times so that religious symbols and practises have the same meaning regardless of time and place (see for instance Eliade, 1959, p. 8-18). Objections have been made on methodological grounds. The *sui generis* discourse on religion is said to rely on unqualified presumptions and circular arguments as it appeals to human intuition and the self-evidence of the empirical data in order to defend its claim that religion is a special case (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 198-199). In so doing, it does not to meet the methodological standards set for modern sciences as such standards require that theories are open to testing and argumentation (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 209). To put it bluntly, the accusation is that phenomenology of religion has no defensible argument for stating that religion is a special case. Its position is considered a tautology of the kind "a horse is a horse because it is a horse". As such, it brings neither arguments nor empirical evidences to prove its own theory, but depends on the a-priori acceptance of the claim under scrutiny.

The essentialist notion that religion is a unique phenomenon is also criticised on ontological grounds. McCutcheon argues that all human actions and expressions, religion included, are multidimensional and multifunctional (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 28). Such an epistemological position, of course, makes it difficult to speak of religion as something qualitatively different from other human activities. The assertion that religion is an object

with a plurality of meanings and functions also makes it difficult for any one particular interpretation of religion to claim a privileged position. The aim in phenomenology to develop a unique method for studying a unique phenomenon thus appears groundless. McCutcheon argues that “To continue to promote the analytical usefulness of autonomous religious experience, as opposed to the polymethodic approach, fails to identify the complexity of human actions entrenched in their contexts” (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 23). Thus echoing the call of post-modern and post-structuralist scholarship to emphasise complexity, historicity, and contextuality, the above argument draws attention to a second issue in the criticism of phenomenology, namely that of de-contextualisation.

By emphasising the *sui generis* quality of religion, phenomenology of religion is criticised for having abstracted religion from its economic, political, social, and cultural context, thus having turned it into an idealised and a-historical entity. McCutcheon has presented criticism from the point of view of power and politics. Rather than the focus on religion as an internal experience of the individual, attention should be brought to the social emergence and functioning of religion, his argument runs (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 31) For him, taking religion out of context is problematic because it ignores and even secludes the political and repressive functions of religion. As phenomenology has treated religion as a self-referential entity, it has ignored the ways in which religion might have emerged from, and functioned to sustain social orders and repressive systems. By overlooking the political function of religion, it indirectly gives legitimacy to the repressive systems that religion has served to sustain, McCutcheon argues (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 29, 40, and 42-50).

The lacking concern in phenomenology with historical context has been criticised from yet another perspective. Critics have objected that phenomenology of religion, contrary to its own claims, is a reductionism as it reduces historical particularities to expressions of a universal essence (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 42 and 45; Flood, 1999, p. 99-104). When religious expressions are abstracted from their historical context, the particular meaning that such expression had within that particular context is lost, the argument goes. The conclusion is that the universalising theory of phenomenology can not claim to present the devotees points of view, but must be characterised as just another reductionism.

A third issue in the criticism of phenomenology of religion is that of scientific objectivity. As Gavin Flood has pointed out, phenomenology of religion intends to give an objective, unbiased, and emphatic understanding of religion (Flood, 1999, p. 8-9). According to Flood, the claim in phenomenology of religion to objectivity is based upon a certain philosophy of consciousness that attributes the researcher a privileged position as objective

observer (Flood, 1999, p. 9-10). For McCutcheon and Flood alike, the belief in objectivity and truth on which phenomenology is founded can be criticised from a post-modern perspective. Consequently, they both dismiss the notion of scientific objectivity on the epistemological grounds that knowledge is always historically contingent, that is, knowledge is always situated, contextual, and relative. There exists no de-contextualised researcher who can set aside subjective judgements in order to see things objectively. Rather, researchers are subjects constructed within, and hence formed by particular contexts (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 193-194; Flood, 1999, p. 8-9 and p. 104-108). In this way, phenomenology of religion is criticised for having de-contextualised not only its object of research, but also the subjective researcher. In the words of McCutcheon, “by proclaiming themselves as the sole interpreters of this supposedly autonomous aspect of human life, scholars claim for themselves and their methods a similar autonomy from historical flux and conflict” (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 13).

A central problem with phenomenology of religion thus seems to be that it has concealed the constructed and situated nature of its knowledge. What is asked for in the study of religion is reflexivity, that is, critical reflections upon ones own production of knowledge, and the premises on which that production is built (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 194; Flood, 1999, p. 6). As if demonstrating reflexivity in the field, McCutcheon suggested that the de-contextualising operation in phenomenology of religion must be seen as a political strategy that is linked to broader socio-political issues of power. At one level, it works to sustain the social privileges of a group of researchers, as it authorises their view on religion to the exclusion of others (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 31). At another level, it is connected to Western, imperial ambitions (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 161-167). To describe non-Westerners in essentialist and de-contextualised terms is a well known, Western, imperial strategy for turning the former into governable subjects, the argument runs. Accordingly, the *sui generis* discourse on religion has played into the hands of Western powers in their attempt to dominate the non-Western world. When hence viewed, the knowledge accumulated by phenomenology of religion appears as a political device used in a global struggle for power.

This last remark by McCutcheon is reminiscent of the orientalist criticism in that it focuses upon the relation between Western, imperial power and the production of knowledge of the non-Western world. The above outline might hence suggest that the orientalist criticism together with post-modern and post-structuralist criticisms constitutes a bedrock from which a critical debate in the 1990ies on the study of religion emerged. Critics have brought awareness to the relational, situated, and constructed nature of established knowledge. Deeming phenomenology scientifically outdated, their criticism concluded in an

appeal to work out a new approach to religion. The focus upon essence, meaning, and experience was to be exchanged for focus upon historicity, context, and function. The way I read *The saffron wave*, that book is an attempt to meet these kinds of requirements. The alternative perspective on religion presented in *The saffron wave* is, I have suggested, that of social constructionism. It is to this perspective I now turn.

The alternative of social constructionism

Social constructionism is not a uniform theoretical position. Rather, the term is said to cover a broad range of studies with only an eclectic surface affinity, and with a plural genealogy (Velody and Williams, 1998, p. 2). Writing on its intellectual legacy, Kenneth J. Gergen traces contemporary social constructionism to the movements of ideological critique, literary-rhetorical critique, and social critique of the late 20th century (Gergen, 1998). According to Gergen, what these movements share is a critical stance towards the modern belief in the capacity of language to represent reality. As they question the correspondence between language and the real world, they pose a challenge to the belief in objective knowledge. In consequence, they challenge all kinds of authority in modern, Western societies, as the claim to objective knowledge is the basis of authority in such societies (Gergen, 1998, p. 34-35).

Gergen connects each of the three movements to a political base. Ideological critique is seen to stem from politically active scholars of the 1960ies and 70ies (Gergen, 1998, p. 35-37). As the belief in neutral and value-free science deteriorated in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, it gave place to politically motivated scholarship, he explains. Politicised scholarship gained further momentum by the Marxist critique of capitalist institutions which had established itself in scholarly circles at the time. The political agenda among radical scholars of the 1960ies and 70ies was to alter societal structures. Such a program made it necessary to undermine the authority of major institutions in Western societies, Gergen points out. This was done by shifting focus from the truth claims on which institutions build their legitimacy onto the motives that underlie such truth claims. Implying that language does not represent reality, the truth claims made by institutional authorities were presented as propaganda that covered motives of suppression, accumulation of wealth, power and the like.

In comparison, the movements of literary-rhetoric and social critique are presented as less political, or political in a more restricted sense. Literary-rhetorical critique primarily functioned to alter power structures within scholarly circles, Gergen argues, pointing to that Jacques Derrida and other deconstructionists challenged the dominant positions of

structuralism in linguistics and elsewhere (Gergen, 1998, p. 37-40). The movement of social critique is traced to scholars like Max Weber, Max Scheler, and Karl Mannheim, who were concerned with the cultural basis from which scientific thoughts emerge (Gergen, 1998, p. 40-42). The movement of social critique is described as liberal in orientation and politically allied with the middle class. It is contrasted with the movement of ideological critique, whose main concern was the lower classes.

Following the argument of Gergen, social constructionism came about as part of political projects of unmasking and disclosure, whose intentions were to undermine the legitimacy of political or scientific authorities. In these projects, social constructionism contributed to reveal the relative nature of the truth claims on which authorities built their legitimacy. Returning to *The saffron wave*, that book is also a project of unmasking and disclosure, whose intention it is to throw doubt upon the veracity of the authoritative knowledge of India. Resembling the ideological critique that Gergen describes, *The saffron wave* moves attention from the content of the authoritative knowledge, onto its underlying motives. Like the ideological critique, *The saffron wave* unmasks motives of power, suppression, and wealth. As a consequence, the truth claims on which political actors like the colonial authorities, the government of independent India, and Hindu nationalism successively have based their legitimacy appear as propaganda. Like in the ideological critique, the social constructionist perspective in *The saffron wave* functions to disclose the relative character of the truth claims on which political actors have built their legitimacy.

The many points of resemblance offered by *The saffron wave* and the ideological critique give reason to ask if the former resembles the latter also in that it is politically motivated. As the author never explicated any political program, conclusions might be drawn from what are the effects of his social constructionist perspective. In those effects lie the political potential of his analysis. In those effects lie also, I will suggest, some of the challenges that his social constructionist perspective faces. With no further hesitation I move on to discuss those effects and the challenges that they represent.

Arguably, the emphasis in *The saffron wave* on the constructed character of Hindu, Muslim, and cast identities tends to deprive these identities of religious significance. As mentioned in paragraphs 3.1 and 4.1 above, the author suggests that there were few religious motives behind the construction and use of Hindu, Muslim, and cast identities. According to him, these identities were constructed by political authorities for political reasons, they were internalised by the Indian subjects for political reasons, and they were used by national authorities, political parties, and various interest groups for political reasons. The question

arises if, from Hansen's point of view, these identities are to be understood as political rather than religious identities. Is the conclusion to Hansen's argument that apparent religious identities in fact are political identities with little, if any, religious significance to those who inhabit them? According to my judgement, *The saffron wave* provides no explicit answers to these questions, leaving room for speculation. Considering that a central aim in that book was to reduce the explanatory power of religion, it is likely that its analysis of Hindu, Muslim, and cast identities was meant to reveal the non-religious character of the latter. In this way Hansen could acknowledge the importance of such identities without implicitly attributing any importance to religion.

The impetus in *The saffron wave* to expose the political character of apparent religious identities provides a stimulus to reflection upon the process whereby reality is socially constructed. Certainly, it appears naïve to neglect that religion, as any other social construction, both results from and is subjected to political forces, power struggle, cynical manipulation and other forces that are not, perhaps, commonly associated with religion. As mentioned in paragraph 4.1, to isolate religion from the social and political context within which it grows, is to lose sight of its historical dimension. Having said that, it appears equally naïve to neglect that however constructed, manipulated, and used, social identities may still carry a religious dimension as they are integrated into peoples' lives. To recapitulate Berger's and Luckmann's model of social construction, there is a point where social constructions are internalised in the individual members of society. In this process social constructions become active and integrated parts of peoples' lives. Hence, social constructions contribute to shape the individual experience of self and of the world. If we agree, however, that humans are not passive receptors of culture, but that they actively interpret, add meaning, and re-create the society into which they are integrated, we must acknowledge that social constructions might take on new meanings as new individuals get acquainted with them. From this perspective, internalisation is a creative process of mutual influence between social constructions and individuals, rather than a static imprint of the former onto the latter.

The point I want to make is that however constructed, social constructions are subjected to creative interpretation by those individuals in whom such constructions are internalised. Translated into the present context of Indian religion, we might say that even if Hindu, Muslim, and cast identities were constructed for political purposes and internalised by the Indian subjects for political reasons, these identities might still have attained a religious meaning to the people who inhabit them. Independent of political authorities and scholarly explanations, people may or may not add religious significance to a name, a symbol, a ritual,

or a community. Hence, explanations of how and why identities are constructed do not necessarily account for the meanings that such identities carry within a given context.

In *The saffron wave* there is little discussion of meaning. The emphasis is on political function. From one side, Hindu, Muslim, and cast identities appear as ideological¹¹ constructions that were created and maintained in order to serve political purposes for the colonial authorities, the government of independent India, and the Hindu nationalist movement respectively. Hence, the focus in *The saffron wave* on political function leaves the impression that Hindu, Muslim, and cast identities are instruments used by political actors in their struggle for power. They appear as products of politics rather than as something which in themselves motivate for political action. From another side, the focus on political function makes the identities of Hindu, Muslim, and cast appear as administrative categories through which ordinary Indians have learnt the rules of modern democracy. As Indians came to participate in the democratic system of India, they did so by virtue of these identities. Hence, Hindu, Muslim, and cast identities appear to serve as official channels through which Indians have communicated their political will. As such, these identities seem to have little value in themselves. They appear ornamental, constituting the formal shape rather than the actual content of Indian politics. As mentioned in paragraphs 3.2 and 4.1 above, *The saffron wave* intimates that the real force in Indian politics is related to class. Thus, the focus in *The saffron wave* on political function tends not only to strip apparent, religious identities of their religious significance. It tends to strip them of significance whatsoever.

Hence, the effects of Hansen's political functionalism present us with a problem of contradiction. Can identities like Hindu, Muslim, and cast have instrumental value if they do not also have some other kind of value? Can socially constructed identities function as political instruments if they do not mean something, that is, if they are of no significance to people? Arguably, the answer is no. Arguably, function and meaning are related. Arguably, the kind of instrumentality that identities hold is dependent upon the meaning that they have within the context of operation. Consequentially, in order to understand the instrumental value of Hindu, Muslim, and cast identities in contemporary India, knowledge is required of the meaning that these identities have. By avoiding the issue of meaning, *The saffron wave* limits our understanding of how Hindu, Muslim, and cast identities operate in contemporary India. Admittedly, the author does note that the Hindu identity fills a need in the middle class for a stable identity in times of societal change. There is little discussion, however, of how or why

¹¹ In this Marxist sense of the word, ideology refers to that which hides one's true, possibly material, interests.

the Hindu identity functions in this way. Undoubtedly, the Hindu identity as promoted by contemporary Hindu nationalism has many references to the Indian history of religion. To venture into the actual content of that Hindu identity is, perhaps, too delicate a matter if one's objective is to reduce the explanatory power of religion.

To conclude this section I will suggest that if social constructionism has pioneered in directing attention to the motives that underlie the social construction of reality, it is perhaps time to redirect some attention to the actual content of that socially constructed reality. In the case of India, that means asking what it means for a Hindu to be a Hindu, and for a Muslim to be a Muslim. It means asking what the significance is of cast to ordinary Indians. By combining an instrumentalist perspective on the social construction of reality with awareness of the content and meaning of that reality, the understanding of Hindu nationalism as a contemporary phenomenon in India is, arguably, improved.

4.3 LEAVING OUT THE RELIGIOUS FRAMEWORK

So far I have argued that in *The saffron wave* religion is not attributed any explanatory force in the analysis of contemporary Hindu nationalism. I have suggested that this choice made by the author is informed by the broader discourses of orientalism critique and anti-essentialism that prevailed in western scholarship by the late 20th century. In this paragraph I will, first, discuss what might be yet another reason for this choice made by the author by way of contextualising *The saffron wave* in the scholarly discourse on modernity. Second, I will discuss the alternative, class based analysis that *The saffron wave* presents, with a particular view to the relation between class and cast in India.

The incompatibility of a religious modernity

Five years before the publishing of *The saffron wave* the Dutch historian of religion, Peter van der Veer, wrote a book on Hindu nationalism (Van der Veer, 1994). Whereas *The saffron wave* focuses upon the cultural essentialism inherent in orientalism, in *Religious nationalism* attention is brought to how cultural essentialism has dominated the scholarly discourse on nationalism. *Religious nationalism* can be read as a post-modern criticism of the progressive

modernisation theory that has prevailed in Western scholarship in the 20th century.¹²

According to this modernisation theory, the development of modern industry, capitalism, technology, science, nation states, and democracy brings with it a marginalisation of religion's authority in society. Hence, the process of modernisation is seen as a process of secularisation (Hefner, 1998, p. 150-152). As nationalism is thought to be part of modernity, it has been conceived of as secular, Van der Veer argues.

In *Religious nationalism* secularism is presented as a Western idea that developed in connection with European Protestantism and individualism (Van der Veer, 1994, p. 12). According to that book, the progressive modernisation theory has mistakenly elevated this particular, European development into a universal theory of the transition from traditional to modern societies. The progressive modernisation theory presents the secular nation state as the inevitable outcome of the spread and growth of capitalism. By so doing it reveals a deterministic and mechanical understanding of historical processes, Van der Veer argues (Van der Veer, 1994, p. 14). For him, the main problem with the progressive modernisation theory is the essential gap it conceptualises between traditional and modern culture. This gap places the two in a stereotyped and a-historical opposition to each other in which traditional culture is religious and modern culture is secular. The transition of a society from traditional to modern is thought to be premised upon the decline of the religious culture that pervades traditional society. The coming of a modern phenomenon like nationalism is hence thought to depend on the secularisation of culture (Van der Veer, 1994, p. 13-18). By using the example of India, Van der Veer deems the progressive modernisation theory wrong. Despite the fact that Indian society must be characterised as modern, religion still plays an important part in the political life of India, his argument runs. Modernity has hence not brought with it the process of secularisation that the progressive modernisation theory prescribes.

The saffron wave expresses the same, critical stance that we find in *Religious nationalism* towards western ethnocentrism hiding in scholarship on the non-western world. Its central theme being the institution of democracy, *The saffron wave* can also be placed within the broader discourse on modernity. Like Van der Veer, Hansen objects to a mechanical understanding of modernity, in which western societies represent a norm against which developments in the non-western world are measured. Hansen's point is that the idealised course of western democracies should not be made a universal standard against

¹² The early Peter Berger (Berger, 1967) and Brian Wilson (Wilson, 1985) are two well known exponents for this theory.

which democratic developments in the postcolonial world are deemed more or less unsuccessful (Hansen, 1998, p. 6). According to him, democracies in the post-colonial world follow their own course of development, and so they can only be understood in relation to their own, historical context and the particular ““vernacularization” of democratic discourses and procedures in the postcolonial world” (Hansen, 1998, p. 9). His focus being on India, Hansen argues that the success of Hindu nationalism shows that democracy not only produces forces of tolerance and pluralism, as it is generally believed. Hindu nationalism demonstrates how a well-functioning democracy also produces forces of an anti-liberal and authoritarian kind (Hansen, 1998, p. 6-7).

Thus, it seems that both Van der Veer and Hansen object to what they consider to be authoritative discourses on modernity, and the mechanical understanding of history that such discourses imply. Beyond that, the two authors seem to have a common interest in defending India’s position as a modern society that is no less developed, or less well-functioning, or less advanced than western societies. They follow the same strategy in order to reach this aim in that they both try to rationalise, that is, to make reasonable and explicable the place of religion in Indian society. In so doing, they seem to agree that religion is what makes India appear pre-modern in light of the standards set by the authoritative discourse on modernity. This is how far the agreement goes, however. While Van der Veer objects to equating modernity with secularism, Hansen seems to agree to such arithmetic.

Van der Veer points to the indigenous, Indian history of religion in order to explain the position of religion in present day India. His argument is that in India, religion has been a central force in identity making and group formation since pre-colonial times. What is more, religion has contributed to the emergence of the modern phenomenon of nationalism in India (Van der Veer, 1994, p. 25-78). Hence, according to Van der Veer, the relation between religion and modernity is not necessarily one of opposition. Using Indian for empirical support, Van der Veer objects to equating modernity with secularism. By so doing he rejects the progressive modernisation theory.

Contrary to Van der Veer, Hansen points to the political history of colonial and post-colonial India in order to explain the position of religion in present day India. His argument is that the particular governance of colonial and post-colonial India is what has made religion important in Indian society. According to Hansen, politics explains the strong presence of religion in contemporary India. What is more, Hansen suggests that what appear as religion in fact are colonial constructions internalised by the Indians for political reasons. The message in *The saffron wave* is that religion is not as important in India as it seems. Hence, Hansen’s

strategy for advocating India's candidateship as a modern society is to reduce the significance of religion in that country. By so doing he appears, indirectly, to endorse the progressive modernisation theory in which modernity is equated with secularism.

Hence, we might ask if the impetus in *The saffron wave* to limit the explanatory force of religion reflects the enduring power of the progressive modernisation theory in Western scholarship at that time. Was it by the end of the 20th century still difficult to imagine the confluence of religion and modernity, so that in order for Hansen to present India as a modern democracy, it was mandatory to reduce the significance of religion in India? Writing on secularisation theories, Robert W. Hefner notes that in the 1980ies scholars leaned more heavily than before on the strong secularisation theory, perceiving of secularism as the inevitable outcome of modernisation. Hefner further notes that in the early 1990ies there was a wave of sociological and anthropological research, including the work of Van der Veer, which rejected the strong secularisation theory. According to Hefner, this wave of alternative research did not, however, manage to establish a new consensus on the nature of modern religious change (Hefner, 1998, p. 151). If I understand Hefner correctly, he thus implies that the progressive modernisation theory continued to dominate mainstream research on modernity in the 1990ies. If this is so, it might contribute to explain the impetus in *The saffron wave* to reduce the explanatory force of religion in the context of India.

Discussing Islam in Indonesia, Hefner is himself critical of the strong secularisation theory that sees religious privatisation or decline as the inevitable outcome of modernisation (Hefner, 1998, p. 154-165). Since the 1990ies more scholarly voices have been raised against the progressive modernisation theory on the basis of empirical studies from around the world, suggesting that the confluence of modernity and secularism is a tendency peculiar to European societies.¹³ In the field of nationalism studies a prominent scholar like Anthony D. Smith has found it timely to stress that even in Europe religion has influenced upon the modern phenomenon of nationalism (Smith, 2003). Considering such perspectives, it appears like an idealised kind of Eurocentrism to measure modernisation according to degrees of secularism. To the extent that *The saffron wave* tends to endorse the progressive modernisation theory, there is reason to ask if that book has fallen pray to the mechanical understanding of history from which it intended to escape.

¹³ See for instance *Religion in global politics* (Haynes, 1998), *Europe: the exceptional case* (Davie, 2002), *Politics & religion* (Bruce, 2003), and *Religion and politics in the international system today* (Hanson, 2006).

Class analysis and the obstacle of cast

As should be clear by now, a central objective in *The saffron wave* is to avoid religious essentialism in the study of Indian politics. As I have argued so far, this objective may be informed by various broader scholarly debates of its time. No doubt, *The saffron wave* is influenced by the orientalist criticism associated with Edward Said amongst others. What is more, the exclusion in *The saffron wave* of religion as an analytical tool may indicate affinity to the progressive modernisation theory, as discussed in the section above. No matter wherefrom inspiration has flowed, in *The saffron wave* the author sets himself to propose an alternative explanation to the advent of Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies. As I have argued in paragraphs 3.2 and 4.1 above, he did so by applying a class based analysis.

There is much ambiguity attached to the category of class. The term is used in different contexts, and so there may be a need to distinguish between various concepts of class (Wright, 2005, p. 1-4). The class concept is seen to have originated with Karl Marx, later to have been revised by Max Weber. From there, class analysis is seen to have developed into one neo-Marxist and one neo-Weberian branch (Sørensen, 2000, p. 16). However, scholars in the field tend to downplay the difference between the class analyses of Marx and Weber (Hindess, 1987, p. 46-51; Wright, 1997, p. 29-30; Sørensen, 2000, p. 16-17). Hence the description by Jan Pakulski of all contemporary class analyses as “grandchildren of Marxism” (Pakulski, 2005, p. 152). Pakulski argues that contemporary class analyses share with their predecessor a broad explanatory aspiration. Class analyses intend to explain the structure of inequality by connecting it to patterns of property and employment relations. They also intend to identify the economic cleavages that are vital in generating conflict. Class analyses hence compete with non-class explanations of societal stratification, the latter group explaining stratification according to patterns of occupation, status, political power, or organisational hierarchies of authority. Pakulski notes that the competition has become more complicated as the analytical distinctions between the categories of class, occupation, status, political power, and organisational hierarchies increasingly are blurred (Pakulski, 2005, p. 152).

A central problem associated with class analysis is the lacking correspondence between its core concept and the ever-changing, historical realities. Pakulski suggests that the capacity of class analysis to highlight central features of contemporary patterns of social stratification is declining. This is due to the fact that the importance of class formation is declining as other forms of social inequality and conflicts have come to the fore, he argues (Pakulski, 2005, p. 152-153). From such point of view, class analysis is so strongly connected

to a particular phase in the history of Europe that it has little value outside of that particular context. Other critics strike even harder. Roland N. Stromberg suggests that the concept of class never has had any root in, or relevance to social reality, not even in Victorian England which is generally perceived of as class society per se. Stromberg suggests that “Class was a creation of Marx’s imagination, a logical deduction, not an observed reality” (Stromberg, 1994, p. 94). From this point of view, class analysis remains a theoretical abstraction with little ability to reflect social reality.

If the class concept is difficult to apply to the European societies that in themselves have fostered the concept, how much more difficult is it not to apply that concept onto the Indian society. And yet, this is exactly what is done in *The saffron wave*. With no justification, Hansen claims Hindu nationalism to be a middle class phenomenon. By so doing he tend to imply that Indian society is a class based society in which social stratification is caused by economic relations, and in which class identity is the basis for political action. Hansen’s use of a theoretical concept that is so heavily burdened with connotations appears particularly complicated in the context of India. When discussing social stratification and formation in India there is no way around the much disputed, Indian cast system.

The Indian cast system is the subject of much controversy among scholars in the field. There are disputes regarding its history, its internal dynamics, and its significance in society. What history is concerned, the view presented in *The saffron wave* that cast is a social construction of colonial making, meets resistance. In a relatively recent anthology on cast in India, the editor states that “While it is true that identity, including cast identity, changes over time, it would be incorrect to go to the extreme of asserting that cast itself is a colonial creation” (Gupta, 2004, p. xi-xii). The editor is close to characterising such perspective as yet another orientalism: “Such a point of view not only makes the Hindus appear bigoted, which they are, but also stupid, which may not always be the case. It is as if the inhabitants of India had no identity worth the name prior to colonialism, and were one large, undifferentiated mass” (Gupta, 2004, p. xi-xii). Gupta hence intimates that it is time to reconsider the kind of orientalism critique on which the argument in *The saffron wave* leans.

What internal dynamics are concerned, in yet another anthology we learn that most sociologists in the field consider “homo hierarchicus” to be the kernel of the cast system (Shah, 2004, p. 6). Apparently, the theory on cast proposed by Louis Dumont in the 1960ies prevails, in parts at least. In his famous book *Homo hierarchicus* from 1966, Dumont argues that casts in India are hierarchically structured according to shared notions of purity and pollution (Dumont, 1980). Dumont’s emphasis on the purity/pollution dichotomy has not

passed undisputed, however. In brief, there is controversy as to whether the hierarchical principle of the cast system is of economical, political, or ritual character, or perhaps a combination of all.¹⁴ Forty years after *Homo hierarchicus*, Ghanshyam Shah suggests that while the traditional concern with ritual purity has lost much of its significance, the notion of hierarchy remains at the root of the cast system (Shah, 2004, p. 8). Another scholar in the field, Dipankar Gupta, tend to see not one, but many hierarchical principles in action, favouring a view that sees casts as competing equals rather than ranked allies whose inequality is reciprocally agreed upon. His point is that there is no one, shared ideology to set the parameters for the ranking of casts. Rather, all casts compete for status and in so doing they tend reciprocally to devalue each other by whatever means available (Gupta, 2004).

If scholars disagree as to how the cast system should be understood, they seem to agree that cast has been, and still is operational in India (Gupta, 2004, p. xix; Shah, 2004, p. 20-23). Thus, it appears difficult to speak of classes in India without taking the cast system into consideration. While it is widely acknowledged that the cast system has contributed to determine occupational and economic relations, strong voices object to translating casts into economic classes (Béteille, 2002, p. 185-225; Gupta, 2004, p. viii; Shah, 2004, p. 9-14). Having said that, what is the relation between cast and class in contemporary India? Or, to keep the focus on *The saffron wave*, who is that middle class to which the phenomenon of Hindu nationalism purportedly applies? In an article on cast and class in modern India, D. L. Sheth contributes to illuminate the matter (Sheth, 2004). In that article Sheth discusses how structural and ideological changes in the cast system have led to a new system of stratification in India throughout the 20th century. Of particular interest is that the article stresses the impact of cast on the formation and functioning of the new, middle class of 20th century India.

Sheth notes that throughout the 20th century the principle of ritual hierarchy lost its legitimacy in the face of modern, democratic principles and institutions. While cast identity continued to live on, the ritual hierarchy that embraced the cast system disintegrated. In the process, the ritual status of the upper casts was transformed into political power, Sheth argues. The upper casts came to form the educated, urbane, ruling elite of the new, democratic state of India. Taking to modern education, occupations, and lifestyle, the upper casts constituted the new, middle class of post-colonial India. Even if detached from their traditional occupations related to cast, the upper casts who now constituted a middle class, still benefited from their

¹⁴ For a note on disputed issues in the scholarly debate on cast, see the introductory chapter in *Cast in Question: Identity or hierarchy?* (Gupta, 2004).

traditional, high status that the cast system provided (Sheth, 2004, p. 165). As the ritual hierarchy increasingly has disintegrated and the nexus between cast and occupation has dissolved, lower casts have begun to enter the middle class, Sheth notes. However, the figures of a national survey from 1996 confirms that upper cast Hindus still dominate the Indian middle class, constituting almost its half (Sheth, 2004, p. 171-175). Unsurprisingly then, Sheth warns against seeing the Indian middle class as a pure class category: “It is important to recognise that the Indian middle class carries with it some elements of the antecedent hierarchy and ethnic division that exist in the larger society” (Sheth, 2004, p. 170). Thus viewed, there has been and still is an upper cast dominance of the Indian middle class.

When Hansen describes Hindu nationalism as a middle class phenomenon, he avoids mentioning the cast aspect of the Indian middle class. Why? From the perspective of knowledge, such doing appears inadequate. The cast aspect of the Indian middle class might contribute to widen our understanding of the relationship between Hindu nationalism and middle class Indians. As already mentioned, Hindu nationalism has itself an upper cast dimension to it. In other words, portions of the Indian middle class originate from the same socio-cultural base as does Hindu nationalism. Hence, it can not be ruled out that the cast aspect contributes to explain the attraction among middle class Indians towards Hindu nationalism. From the perspective of strategy, however, it appears adequate to leave out the issue of cast. As we know, Hansen intended to reduce the explanatory force of religion. To focus on the cast aspect of the relation between Hindu nationalism and the Indian middle class would be like reintroducing religion as an explanation to Indian politics. That is, to the extent that cast is associated with religion, of course. To focus on the cast aspect of the Indian middle class is also a way of emptying the class concept of significance. I mean, if the class concept is to have explanatory force, it must be presumed that the class acts uniformly according to a common, class interest. If that common class interest is founded on a common, cast background the class analysis is, in fact, reduced to a cast analysis.

Obviously, there are no simple answers to questions regarding class and cast in contemporary India. The national survey of 1996 indicates that the composition of the middle class is changing as members of lower casts increasingly are entering the middle class (Shah, 2004, p. 172, table 9:1). Whether middle class members acquire a common political and cultural orientation despite their varying cast backgrounds remains an open, if plausible, hypothesis for future scholars to investigate, Shah concludes (Shah, 2004, p. 175). I for my part will conclude this section and this paragraph by arguing that, based on the figures in the national survey of 1996 it still appeared, by the turn of the 20th century, like a weighty

simplification to apply the concept of class onto Indian society without bringing in the issue of cast. This is not to claim that the concept of cast ought to replace that of class. However, there is reason to suggest that when applied onto Indian society, the concept of class is somewhat tentative unless related to the concept of cast.

4.4 INCORPORATING THE RELIGIOUS FRAMEWORK

Having explored some of the obstacles that occur as religion is excluded from the analysis of Hindu nationalism, I shall move on to discuss how the category religion might contribute to shed light upon the phenomenon. In the first section of this paragraph I discuss the workability of religion as an analytical category, suggesting that the term has much to commend it, also in the context of India. In the second section I comment upon the instrumentalist approach to religion, arguing that such an approach only makes sense if and when religion is ascribed societal importance. In the last section I comment upon the relation between Hindu nationalism, Hindu tradition, and orientalism.

Religion as an analytical category

In paragraph 4.1 above, I discussed the arguments behind the anti-essentialist criticism and the implications that these arguments have for studies of religion. Based on the premise that religion must be dealt with as a human construction, I found that studies of religion face certain challenges that are connected to the historical perspective. First, there is a tension between the universalising aspirations of the concept religion and the methodological commitment to historical particularity. Second, there is a tension between the ambition to distinguish religion from non-religion and the ambition to see religion in relation to its broader context. Third, there is a tension between the ideal of non-reductionism and the recognition that reductionism inevitably enters into any interpretation or explanation. I find it timely to emphasise that these challenges are not particular to studies of religion. Rather, they are methodological problems relevant to any study of human activity, whether the focus is on politics, law, culture, or other.

In so far as these methodological problems can be solved, there is reason to support the view that, in itself, awareness contributes to do so (see Flood, 1999). Critical reflection upon scholarly methods and conceptualisations functions to reveal the presumptions on which

scholarly analyses are based. Attention is hence brought to the limits within which scholarly analyses operate, and outside of which they have no mandate. Scholarly reflexivity also generates sensitivity towards the many intricacies and ambiguities inherent in the empirical material that, in the end, is the basis for and measurement of any scholarly analysis. Such sensitivity is likely to limit the scope of scholarship. Hence, scholarly reflexivity contributes to yield a more nuanced, if less ambitious, scholarship.

The analytical usefulness of the category religion is ultimately dependent upon its ability to connect with, or relate to the empirical world of human activity. I will suggest that when used critically, religion is a useful category that contributes to shed light upon certain aspects of human expressions. However, let me start by claiming that in itself, the term religion is empty. That is, the term has no meaning or content in and by itself. It can only be given meaning by way of charging it with, or relating it to, or dichotomising it by other terms. Hence, the term religion can only be defined in relation to other terms, and its potential strength lies in its richness of associations. The more associations the term brings about, the more easily it is given meaning and content. The more meanings the term is given, the more empirical material the term might be applied onto, and hence the greater its utility.

Thus seen, what contributes to the analytical usefulness of the category religion is its conventional actuality and use. As religion is a well established term, it brings about strong and multiple associations. Put differently, many people associate a lot of things with the term religion. This being so, the term is in fact heavily loaded with meaning. As discussed in paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2, the historical perspective makes it difficult to abstract religion from particular, historical contexts. I will argue that due to its richness of associations, the term religion can be applied to a great many historical and cultural contexts, all in which the term brings about certain associations. From the particular associations that the term brings about within particular contexts, the term is charged with meaning and content that is particular to those contexts.

Being rich in meaning, religion is best characterised as an umbrella category under which a great many subcategories like cult, ritual, symbol, believes, practices, monotheism, polytheism, etc. are subsumed. Hence, in its application the category religion must be defined over and again in relation to the particular, empirical material with which it engages. From this point of view, the lack of a clear and consistent definition of religion is not a sign of weakness. Rather, it indicates that the term religion captures different kinds of human activities, all of which are relative to time and place. Thus understood, religion is not one but many things, hence the need for an open-ended category.

And yet, for religion to function as a universal category there must be a certain degree of cross-cultural and cross-temporal family resemblance among those human expressions to which the term refers. As suggested by Gavin Flood: “(...) religions are certain kinds of value-laden narratives and actions that can be distinguished from other kinds of cultural forms (going to church is different from going to the supermarket) but which are only given life within specific cultures“ (Flood, 1999, p. 2). In a modest attempt to be constructive, I will add to this that the term religion relates to human expressions that deal with questions of meaning and purpose, moral and truth.

At this point, it is difficult to ignore the question of ethnocentrism. By ethnocentrism is meant the act of understanding or judging the beliefs and practices of other societies according to standards set by ones own society. With regard to religion, it has been objected that the Western origin and genealogy of the term has invested it with a certain Western-oriented meaning that makes it badly equipped for cross-cultural usage (see Smith, 1978). Even if one takes a less radical stand, one is likely to find many instances where Western conceptualisations of religion differ from Indian conceptualisations, for instance. Western conceptualisations tend to be informed by Western religious traditions, and by historical developments in the West that have informed the way in which religion is perceived. I think here of the process of secularisation, for instance, that has contributed to privatise religion in the West. Hence, the Western student of India might find his or her own conceptualisation of religion to be individually and dogmatically oriented, whereas the Indian conceptualisation of religion is more collectively and pragmatically oriented (see Gupta, 2002).

The anthropologist Benson Saler notes that ethnocentrism becomes a problem in scholarship when it leads to misjudging and misunderstanding of the other, or to insensitivity towards that which may be of importance to the other (Salser, 1993, p. 9). Saler acknowledges, however, that a certain degree of ethnocentrism probably is unavoidable as a cognitive starting point for cross-cultural understanding. He suggests that ethnocentrism can and should be used productively, “for it enables us initially to identify problems that we deem interesting, and it furnishes us start-up categories with which to embark on a journey toward greater understanding” (Salser, 1993, p. 9). Saler’s notes on ethnocentrism is a reminder that the utility of the category religion lays not necessarily in its capacity for detecting cross-cultural similarities, but just as much, perhaps, in its capacity for detecting cultural differences.

The debate on ethnocentrism has been particularly strong in the discipline of anthropology. The term is a pejorative, classifying scholarship that is coloured or prejudiced due to the ethnic background of the scholar who has produced it. In one sense, of course, all

scholars are formed by their ethnic background. Hence, in principle all scholarship is prone to ethnocentrism. I will suggest, however, that in the global world of contemporary scholarship, ethnicity influences less upon scholarship than do the methodological choices made by scholars. The field of scholarship hosts a number of paradigms, each accommodating particular methods and theories. Each paradigm has its own language, so to speak, which follows its own logic, and which produces its particular kind of scholarship. Scholarly paradigms might be connected to certain disciplines, or their influence may cut across disciplinary barriers. Research is always the result of methodological choices made by scholars. Put differently, scholars place themselves within particular scholarly paradigms, which in turn affect the research that is produced. It must be remembered that the methodological preferences of scholars are consciously made choices. Ethnicity is of little significance to this process of selection. Rather, it has to do with scholarly training, disciplinary belonging, and ideological conviction. Hence, I will contend that there are other and more important conditions than that of ethnicity which contribute to furnish scholarship. In extension, the way in which religion is perceived in scholarship has more to do with conscious, methodological choices than with ethnic background.

To conclude this section, I will suggest that the category religion is a useful, analytical tool also in the context of India. There are a number of activities in India which testify to the ways in which many Indians relate to a spiritual dimension of life, a relation which, in lack of a better word, is best captured by the category religion. I think here of activities like *puja*, which literally means worship in Sanskrit (“Puja”, 1995), pilgrimage, asceticism, and astrology. It might be added that much of the intellectual tradition in India is born out of, and should hence be understood in light of, religious motives. There are, for instance, long traditions of philosophy, logic, linguistics, psychology, and physics whose justification lies in the religious goals to which they are meant to lead (see Klostermaier, 1994, p. 377-407). The category religion might also be used to shed light upon broader, structural relations in Indian society. As discussed in the previous paragraph, group formations in India may fruitfully be viewed in light of the cast system. The cast system has many aspects to it. One of them is, arguably, related to religion. A religious perspective may also be fruitfully applied in order to analyse for instance Indian mentalities, or economic developments. We need not use the category in an absolutist way, that is, to denote something as either falling within or without the category. Rather, we may start our investigation by asking if there are certain religious aspects to the phenomenon in question.

On the instrumentality of religious symbols and rituals

As noted in paragraph 1.2, Hindu nationalists have successfully made use of religious symbols and rituals. In a highly innovative fashion, the movement has placed old symbols and rituals within new contexts and thus, in fact, recharged and reshaped these symbols and rituals, adding new meanings to them and providing them with new areas of applications. We might say that Hindu nationalism has given older religious expressions new meanings and usages within a new discourse on nationalism and national identity.

The social constructionist perspective in *The saffron wave* has, with much justification, placed this innovative use of religion as a political strategy whose aims extend beyond religion. From this point of view, religion is a tool in the hands of power-seeking politicians and visionaries. While this instrumentalist perspective probably has much to commend it, it stumbles when combined with a perspective that denies religion societal influence. For the instrumentalist perspective to make sense, religion must be attributed power. To the extent that Hindu nationalists are political strategists, they have not made religion an instrument for no reason. The popular response to the campaigns that were launched by Hindu nationalists in the 1980ies and 90ies demonstrates the simple point I want to make that religion is used as an instrument because it is effective as such. Put differently, the successful use by Hindu nationalists of religious symbols and rituals brings testimony to the power that these symbols and rituals are in command of. To fully appreciate the instrumentalist perspective on religion, we might want to know what it is that empowers it.

If seen from the classical, sociological perspective associated with Emile Durkheim, the power of religion lies in the way in which it mirrors society (Durkheim, 1995). The logic of the argument is that society has all the characteristics of the divine. Society is vast, it has an immense influence over the life of the individual, it represents power, authority, and something greater than the individual self. The conclusion to the argument is that society and the divine are the same. From this point of view, religious symbols are representations of the divine, which in turn is a representation of society. In religious rituals, society worships the divine, which in turn represents society. Hence, ritual activity is a kind of activity in which society becomes aware of itself. In ritual activity societal bonds and loyalties are strengthened, and existing conventions are expressed and reinforced. Hence, what ultimately explains the power of religious symbols and rituals is the way in which they contribute to the identity, unity, stability and preservation of society. The meaning of religious symbols and rituals is that they signify society as a whole.

From such a functionalist perspective, the use that Hindu nationalists have made of religious symbols and rituals is effective due to the way in which it corresponds to a need in society for reinforcing internal unity, stability and identity. Arguably, *The saffron wave* moves close to this kind of sociological perspective as it suggests that the focus in Hindu nationalism on Hindu identity meets a need in the middle class for a stable identity in the face of societal change. There might be much sense in such an interpretation. It does not exhaust the subject matter, however. It does not help us in understanding why certain symbols and rituals are used, while others are left untouched. It does not help us in understanding why some symbols apparently are more powerful or important than others.

In an article on the meaning of symbols and the function of rituals, Jens Braarvig suggests that the key to understanding the meaning and power of symbols lies in investigating the tension they live in between meaninglessness and meaningfulness (Braarvig, 1997). His argument is that symbols partly attain their power from the fact that they express powerful, human experiences produced by marginal situations. The most powerful experiences are those of suffering, Braarvig argues, noting that the great cultural symbols very often originate in human experiences of suffering. He also notes that the suffering from which symbols are born often is meaningless. Hence, symbols tend to originate in human experiences that lack in particular meaning, but that are powerful experiences, nevertheless. Being expressions of such powerful yet meaningless experiences, symbols are open spaces with no definite meaning. Particular meaning is given to them retrospectively as they are interpreted and cultivated by the traditions that follow from them. Collective symbols must be communicated in order to remain alive and powerful, Braarvig argues. This mostly happens in religious ritual, where the original experience of suffering is recreated and re-experienced while particular meaning is given to that experience through interpretation. Even when symbols are given new meaning, the original “meaning” of suffering remains intact, Braarvig argues. Only the interpretation and the reception of the suffering are changed according to circumstances.

What I find useful about this perspective is that it points to a dialectic in symbols between continuity and change. Thus seen, there is a kind of indefinite meaning in symbols that relates to powerful, human experiences. These experiences are mediated and interpreted in ritual activity. Braarvig points out that the ritual repetition of the experiences to which symbols refer, is important for keeping symbols powerful. I will add to this that the process of interpretation also plays an important part in maintaining the power of symbols. Interpretation is necessary for symbols to remain meaningful under the ever-changing conditions of human existence. The point is that there is both a continuity of indefinite meaning attached to

symbols, and there is a continuous flow of interpretations of that indefinite meaning. For symbols to survive and remain meaningful, the original experiences to which they refer must be recreated, re-experienced, interpreted, and reinterpreted. Religious rituals are effective means by which this is done.

If we apply this perspective onto Hindu nationalism, we might say that its campaigns in the 1980ies and 1990ies were successful because they built upon well established symbols that were already powerful. That is, the symbols that Hindu nationalism used were meaningful to many Indians. They were meaningful because they expressed powerful experiences, kept alive in religious rituals. They were meaningful also because they are the objects of long traditions of interpretation. That is, the experiences that the symbols express have been given meaning as they have been interpreted over and again. Hence, the symbols have a rich history of particular meanings attached to them. Making for instance the god-king Rama their central symbol, Hindu nationalists have used a symbol whose potentiality rests in the fact that it has a long history of use in India (see Fuller, 1992, p. 120-125, 163-169). The survival of the symbol indicates that the original experience, to which the symbol refers, has been kept alive. The symbol is thus a powerful symbol which is open for interpretation of Hindu nationalists or anyone else who is in the power to do so.

However, for a given interpretation to be successful it must relate to, or converge with the existing traditions of indefinite meaning that is attached to the symbol in question. Attempts at recharging old symbols with new meanings must, in other words, be done in dialectic with the tradition of meanings that already exists in connection with those symbols. Hence, the successful use of established symbols lies in the balancing act between continuity and change. It seems that in the 1980ies and 90ies, Hindu nationalism succeeded in this task. It did so by its innovative use of established, religious rituals. Hence, my argument is that in order to understand the relative success of Hindu nationalism, we need to know something about the power and meaning that are attached to the symbols and rituals with which the movement has engaged. As it is, the symbols and rituals associated with Hindu nationalism are parts of long lived, religious traditions in India. Hence, in order to understand the power and meaning of these symbols and rituals, we need to know something about the history of religion in India. From that history we might also learn how different symbols are used by different social groups. Thus, I shall make it a last point to suggest that the religious demography in India might contribute to explain the potential of Hindu nationalism. Due to the religious plurality of India, the particular selection of symbols used by Hindu nationalism might contribute to limit the resonance of the movement in the Indian population.

4.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

I shall conclude my reflections by returning to the debate on essentialism. The way I see it, it is the essentialism argument which has been posed as the main argument against the religious framework of analysis, and so I find it natural to conclude this chapter and this thesis by returning to that argument.

The essentialism debate revisited

The wave of anti-essentialism that prevailed in the late 20th century also found its way into various discourses on religion at that time. Anti-essentialism was reflected in the field of theorising on religion, where phenomenology was subjected to severe criticism on the grounds that it contains elements of essentialism. Anti-essentialism was also reflected in scholarship on religion in India, in which there has been a strong impetus to revise much of the authoritative knowledge on similar grounds. Thus, the debate on essentialism may possibly have contributed to occasion critical reflections on issues of methodology and epistemology among scholars on religion. Indeed, reflexivity is a virtue of necessity in all kinds of scholarship. To the extent that the debate on essentialism contributes to such reflexivity, it is all to the good.

However, there is another side to the debate on essentialism which makes it less appealing in the context of scholarship. As I have suggested, in *The saffron wave* one essence is substituted for another as the author replaces a religious framework of analysis by a political framework of analysis. The book hence points to a fundamental, methodological problem in scholarship. While rejecting what one claims to be one kind of essentialism, one easily and perhaps inevitably slips into another kind of essentialism. Most explanations are, in the end, reductions of sorts, and as such they contain elements of essentialism. This is a reminder that the debate on essentialism is not necessarily a debate on essentialism as such. It may just as well function as a rhetorical device.

The history of science might be seen as an intellectual process in which established knowledge is under constant consideration and criticism. From the critical engagement with established positions, new scholarly positions emerge that attempt to gain authority. Hence, a great part of the scholarly activity has to do with criticising established concepts and analytical models, while attempting to establish new concepts and analytical models. What ultimately gives legitimacy to this scholarly enterprise is the common, scientific aim of

advancing the human understanding of self and its surrounding world. New, scholarly positions might attempt to establish themselves in opposition to earlier positions, like post-modernists oppose modernism and post-structuralists oppose structuralism. One way to distance oneself from opposing scholarship and claim legitimacy for one's own position is to make the latter appear rigid and deadlocked, and hence no longer a contribution to the advancement of human understanding.

There are probably many instances in the history of science that the suffix –ism is used rhetorically in order to impair the positions of one's opponents, while claiming legitimacy for one's own position. We need only think of terms like progressivism, conservatism, naturalism, evolutionism, ethnocentrism, and orientalism to be reminded that the suffix -ism is not necessarily a label of honour. On the contrary, the suffix –ism can function to characterise a position as ideologically founded, prejudiced, biased, untrue, or outmoded. These are characteristics which are considered detrimental to science. To suggest that a perspective belongs to any kind of –ism can hence be an effective way to dethrone that perspective.

Few will disagree that in contemporary scholarship essentialism has become a label to which merely negative connotations apply. What contemporary critics of essentialism appear to be criticising is the naïve kind of realism that attributes to the human senses the ability to discover directly the objective reality. This kind of criticism might hold for much scientific thinking, but not for all. To present Western science from antiquity up till the present as naïve realism is to present an inaccurate description of the history of science, to say it least.¹⁵ To the extent that contemporary critics of essentialism are haunted by such inaccuracies, their criticisms appear like polemics rather than sincere efforts to discuss essentialism as such.

In that part of the orientalism discourse which concerns scholarship on India, the argument of essentialism has been used forcefully to criticise the religious framework of analysis. Religion has been attributed too great an explanatory force in the context of India, the argument runs. No doubt, Western understanding of religion in India is far from exhaustive. It might even be erroneous and in need of revision. Nevertheless, going to the extreme of rejecting the explanatory force of religion on the grounds that it is a reduction to

¹⁵ For instance, in his doctoral thesis in philosophy on the topic of realism and antirealism, Søren Harnow Clausen strongly modifies the view that epistemological relativism is of modern origin (Harnow Clausen, 2004, p. 115-164). Harnow Clausen claims antirealist ideas to be as old as philosophy itself, pointing to the Indian *Upanishads* that were put down in Sanskrit between 800 and 400 BC, and to the Greek philosopher Xenophanes, who proclaimed the relativity of human knowledge as early as the 6th century BC.

essence, appears highly unreasonable and in itself a weighty kind of reductionism. In principle, a religious framework of analysis is no more or less prone to essentialism as is any other kind of analytical framework. As anyone knows who is familiar with the discipline, the religious framework of analysis can be several things, depending on how religion is conceptualised. Hence, the essentialist argument may easily assume the character of oversimplified polemics, the intention behind which is to cut off opponent views rather than to engage in a serious debate concerning those views.

SUMMARY

The objective in this thesis has been to discuss how broader, contemporary debates on religion were reflected in Western scholarship on Hindu nationalism in the 1990ies. In order to do so, I have selected one book from the period which has made Hindu nationalism its central object of inquiry. Hence, *The saffron wave*, written by Thomas Blom Hansen in 1999, has been a starting point from which I have inquired into scholarly debates of the late 20th century. My intention has been to discuss how these debates might have contributed to structure the way in which religion is dealt with in scholarship on Hindu nationalism, exemplified by *The saffron wave*. Further, I have intended to discuss the kind of challenges that these scholarly debates pose to the study of religion, and the kind of challenges that the issue of religion poses to them. Starting with the issue of essentialism, I have reflected upon the arguments behind the anti-essentialist approach to religion, and the implications of such arguments for the study of religion. By holding the ideals of anti-essentialism up against the political analysis in *The saffron wave*, I have found that the political explanation in that book falls pray to the very essentialism from which its author intended to escape. Next, I have discussed how the wave of anti-essentialism has been expressed in theoretical discourses on religion. Seeing social constructionism as an attempt to overcome the methodological problem associated with essentialism, I have discussed the alternative approach to religion that social constructionism represents. Next, I have contextualised *The saffron wave* in the discourse on modernity, suggesting that a progressive modernisation theory may have informed the approach to religion in that book. Further, I have discussed the class analysis on which the argument in the *The saffron wave* is base, with a particular view to the relation between class and cast. Lastly, I have discussed the workability of the concept of religion, arguing that it is a useful analytical tool that may contribute fruitfully to shed light upon the phenomenon of Hindu nationalism.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Andersen, W.K. and Damle, S.D. 1987, *The brotherhood in saffron. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sang and Hindu revivalism*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi.
- Anderson, R.J., J.A. Hughes and W.W. Sharrock (1996) 1988, *Philosophy and the human sciences*, Routledge, London.
- Asher, C.B. 2001, *Architecture of Mughal India (The new Cambridge history of India, 1:4)*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Barker, C. 2003, *Cultural studies: Theory and practice*, 2. ed., Sage Publications, London.
- Berger, P.L. 1967, *The sacred canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion*, Doubleday, Garden City.
- Berger, P.L. and T. Luckman 1966, *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, Penguin Books, London, reprinted 1991.
- Béteille, A. (1965) 2002, *Cast, class and power. Changing patterns of stratification in a Tanjore village*, 2. ed., Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Bhatt, C. 2001, *Hindu nationalism: origins, ideologies and modern myths*, Berg, Oxford.
- Braarvig, J. 1997, "The function of religious rites in creating and sustaining the "meaning" of symbols", in Braarvig, J. and T. Krogh (eds.), *In search of symbols. An explorative study*, Novus Forlag, Oslo, p. 44-67.
- Brockington, J.L. (1981) 1993. *The sacred thread*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.
- Brown, W. 2000, "Religion", in Brown, W and R.T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Guide to the study of religion*, Cassell, London, p. 3-18.
- Bruce, S. 2003, *Politics & religion*, Polity Press, Cambridge, reprinted 2005.
- Burr, V. 1995, *An introduction to social constructionism*, Routledge, London.
- Clark, E.A. 2004, *History, theory, text: Historians and the linguistic turn*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Copac, *About Copac*, [online], Victoria University of Manchester. Accessible from: <http://copac.ac.uk/copac/about.html> [18.07.2004].
- Davie, G. 2002, *Europe: the exceptional case. Parameters of faith in the modern world*, Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, London.
- Detel, W. 2006, "Aristotle's logic and theory of science", in Gill, M.L. and P. Pellegrin (eds.), *A companion to ancient philosophy*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, p. 245-269.
- Dirks, N.B. 2001, *Casts of mind: Colonialism and the making of modern India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Dumont, L. (1966) 1980, *Homo hierarchicus. The cast system and its implications*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Durkheim, E. (1912) 1995, *The elementary forms of religious life*, The Free Press, New York.
- Eliade, M. (1957) 1959, *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, San Diego, reprinted 1987.
- Eliade, M. (1969) 1984, *The quest: History and meaning in religion*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

- Eliade, M. (1958) 1996, *Patterns in comparative religion*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.
- Erricker, C. 2002, "Phenomenological approaches", in Connolly, P. (ed.), *Approaches to the study of religion*, 2. ed., Continuum, London, p. 73-104.
- "Essens", 1996, *Filosofileksikon*, København, Politikens Forlag.
- Flood, G. 1999, *Beyond phenomenology. Rethinking the study of religion*, Cassell, London.
- Frykenberg, R. E. 1997, "The emergence of modern "Hinduism" as a concept and as an institution: a reappraisal with special reference to India", in Sontheimer, Günter-Dietz and Hermann Kulke (eds.), *Hinduism reconsidered*, 4. ed., Manohar Publishers & Distribution, New Delhi, p. 82-107.
- Fuller, C.L. 1992. *The camphor flame*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Furseth, I. and P. Repstad 2003, *Innføring i religionssociologi*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo.
- Gellner, D. N. 2002, "Anthropological approaches", in Connolly, P. (ed.), *Approaches to the study of religion*, 2. ed., Continuum, London, p. 10-41.
- Gergen, K. J. 1998, "Constructionist dialogue and the vicissitudes of the political", in Velody, I. and R. Williams (eds.), *The politics of constructionism*, Sage Publications, London, p. 33-48.
- Gilhus, I.S. and L. Mikaelsson 2001, *Nytt blikk på religion. Studiet av religion i dag*, Pax Forlag, Oslo.
- Graham, B.D. 1990, *Hindu nationalism and Indian politics. The origins and development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Gregersen, F. and S. Køppe 1985, *Videnskab & lidenskap*, Tiderne skifter, København.
- Gupta, D. 2004, "Introduction: The certitudes of cast: When identity trumps hierarchy", in Gupta, D. (ed.), *Cast in question: Identity or hierarchy? Contributions to Indian sociology, occasional studies 12*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, p. ix-xxii.
- Gupta, R.E. 2002, "A shift in dharma. Changes in conceptualisations of faith among second-generation Hindus in Oslo", hovedoppgave, University of Oslo.
- Hansen, T.B. 1999, *The Saffron Wave. Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey.
- Hanson, E.O. 2006, *Religion and politics in the international system today*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Harnow Clausen, S. 2004, *Reality lost and found. An essay on the realism-antirealism controversy*, University Press of Southern Denmark, Odense.
- Haynes, J. 1998, *Religion in global politics*, Pearson Education Limited, Essex.
- Heehs, P. 2003, "Shades of orientalism: Paradoxes and problems in Indian historiography", in *History and Theory*, 42 (May 2003), p. 169-195.
- Hefner, R. W. 1998, "Secularization and citizenship in Muslim Indonesia", in Heelas, P. (ed.), *Religion, modernity and postmodernity*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, p. 147-169.
- Hellman, E. 1993, "Political Hinduism. The challenge of the Viśva Hindū Pariṣad", Doctoral dissertation, Uppsala University.
- Henriksen, J.O. and O. Krogseth (eds.), 2001, *Pluralisme og identitet. Kulturanalytiske perspektiver på nordiske nasjonalkirker i møte med religiøs og moralsk pluralisme*, Gyldendal, Oslo.
- Hindess, B. 1987, *Politics and class analysis*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- Hjelde, S. 1998, "Forspill, forutsetninger, fremvekst", in Ruud, I.M. and S. Hjelde (eds.), *Enhet i mangfold? 100 år med religionshistorie i Norge*, Tano Aschehoug, Oslo, p. 25-46.
- Holt, J.C. 1996, Introduction to Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in comparative religion*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.

- Inden, R. 1990, *Imagining India*, Basil Blackwell Ltd, Oxford.
- Jaffrelot, C. 1993, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics. 1925 to the 1990s*, C. Hurst & Company, London.
- Kenny, A. 2004, *Ancient Philosophy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Klostermaier, K.K. 1994, *A survey of Hinduism*, State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Kuhn, T.S. 1996, *The structure of scientific revolutions*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Larson, G.J. 1995, *India's agony over religion*, State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Lawrence, B.B. (1989) 1995, *Defenders of god. The fundamentalist revolt against the modern age*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, South Carolina.
- Library of Congress, *Legal notices*, [online], Library of Congress. Accessible from: <http://www.loc.gov/homepage/legal.html> [04.08.2004].
- Ludden, D. (ed.) 1997, *Making India Hindu. Religion, Community and the Politics of Democracy in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- McCutcheon, R.T. 1997. *Manufacturing religion. The discourse on sui generis religion and the politics of nostalgia*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Nordenstam, T. 1996, *Fra kunst til vitenskap. Humanvitenskapenes grunnlag i et historisk Perspektiv*, Sigma Forlag.
- Pakulski, J. 2005, "Foundation of a post-class analysis", in Wright, E.O. (ed.), *Approaches to class analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 152-179.
- Peabody, N. 2003, *Hindu kingship and polity in precolonial India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Pinch, W.R. 2006, *Warrior ascetics and Indian empires*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Popper, K.R. 1965, *Conjectures and refutations. The growth of scientific knowledge*, 2. ed., Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- "Puja", 1995, *The Harper Collins dictionary of religion*, San Francisco, Harper Collins Publishers Inc.
- Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, (2003), *Sangh: A dynamic power-house*, [online], Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Accessible from: http://www.rss.org/New_RSS/History/Evolution.jsp [20.10.2003].
- Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, (2003), *Sangh: Unique and evergreen*, [online], Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Accessible from: http://www.rss.org/New_RSS/History/Evolution.jsp [20.10.2003]).
- Rudolph, K. 1989, "Mircea Eliade and the "history" of religions", in *Religion* 19, p. 101-127.
- Said, E.W. (1978) 1991, *Orientalism. Western conceptions of the Orient*, Penguin Books, London.
- Saler, B. 1993, *Conceptualizing religion. Immanent anthropologists, transcendent natives, and unbounded categories*, E.J. Brill, Leiden.
- Segal, R.A. (1983) 1999, "In defence of reductionism", in McCutcheon, R.T. (ed.), *The insider/outsider problem in the study of religion*, Cassell, London/New York, p. 139-163.
- Shah, G. (2002) 2004, "Introduction: Caste and democratic politics", in Shah, G. (ed.), *Cast and democratic politics in India*, Anthem Press, London, p. 1-24.
- Sharma, A. 1994, "What is reductionism?", in Indinopulos T.A. and E.A. Yonan (eds.), *Religion and reductionism. Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the challenge of the social sciences for the study of religion*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, p. 127-143.

- Sheth, D.L. (2002) 2004, "Cast and class: social reality and political representation", in Shah, G. (ed.), *Cast and democratic politics in India*, Anthem Press, London, p. 158-176.
- Siddharth, G. (30.04.96), *The eternal religion's defining movement in time*, [online], The Pioneer. Accessible from: <<http://bjp.org/history/htvgs-6.html>> [20.10.2003].
- Smith, A.D. 2003, *Chosen peoples. Sacred sources of national identity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Smith, J.Z. 1978, *Map is not territory. Studies in the history of religions*, E. J. Brill, Leiden.
- Smith, M.J. 1998. *Social science in question*. Sage, London.
- Smith, W.C. (1962) 1978, *The meaning and end of religion. A revolutionary approach to the great religious traditions*, SPCK, London.
- Strenski, I. (1973) 2006, "Mircea Eliade: some theoretical problems", in Rennie, B. (ed.), *Mircea Eliade. A critical reader*, Equinox, London, p. 302-310.
- Strenski, I. 1989, *Four theories of myth in the twentieth-century history. Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi Strauss and Malinowski*, MacMillan Press, Houndmills.
- Stromberg, R.N. 1994, *European intellectual history since 1789*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey.
- "Sui generis", 1995, *The Harper Collins dictionary of religion*, San Francisco, Harper Collins Publishers Inc.
- Sørensen, A.B. 2000, "Employment relations and class structure", in Crompton, R., F. Devine, M. Savage and J. Scott, *Renewing class analysis*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, p. 16-43.
- The Fundamentalism project; a study conducted by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Marty, M.E. and R.S. Appleby (eds.), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991-1995, vol. 1-5.
- Van der Veer, P. 1994, *Religious nationalism. Hindus and Muslims in India*, The Chicago University Press, Chicago.
- Van der Veer, P. 1997, "The concept of the ideal Brahman as an indological constructs", in Sontheimer, G.D. and H. Kulke (eds.), *Hinduism reconsidered*, Manohar, New Delhi, p. 153-172.
- Velody, I. and R. Williams (eds.) 1998, *The politics of constructionism*, Sage Publications, London.
- Vishva Hindu Parishad, *Affiliated bodies within India & outside India*, [online], Vishva Hindu Parishad. Accessible from: <http://www.vhp.org/englishsite/a-origin_growth/organisationstrength.htm> [21.10.2003].
- Von Stietencron, H. 1997, "Hinduism: on the proper use of a deceptive term", in Sontheimer, G.D. and H. Kulke (eds.), *Hinduism reconsidered*, Manohar, New Delhi, p. 32-53.
- Wilson, B. 1985, "Secularization: the inherited model", in Hammond, Phillip E. (ed.), *The sacred in a secular age*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 9-20.
- Williams, J. 2005, *Understanding poststructuralism*, Acumen, Chesham, Bucks.
- Williams, M. and T. May 1996, *Introduction to the philosophy of social research*, UCL Press, London.
- Wright, E.O. 1997, *Class counts. Comparative studies in class analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Wright, E.O. (ed.) 2005, *Approaches to class analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.