Ayodhyā: A Hindu Jerusalem*

An Investigation of 'Holy War' as a Religious Idea
in the Light of Communal Unrest in India

INTRODUCTION

Since the cultural discovery of India in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Indian culture and society have been widely regarded as more than ordinarily pacifistic and moral. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), for example, speaks of the brahmins as a 'gentle race of men', 'happy lambs' whose idea of God is 'great and beautiful' and whose 'morals are pure and lofty' (Bakker 1988, 99). This idealized image was enhanced in the twentieth century by the manner in which India freed itself from colonial rule; the non-violent resistance that Mahatma Gandhi both preached and practised. On the other hand, as every student of India knows, there have been few periods, even up to the present century, during which the South-Asian subcontinent has been free of war. And this fact seems to have been accepted by the Indians themselves as more or less in the natural order of things. Until the establishment and enforcement of the *Pax Britannica*, the waging of wars against rival rulers was generally regarded as one of the natural political tasks of kings and the aristocracy.¹

How is this contradiction to be explained, and how has the image of a peaceful and peace-loving India managed to remain prevalent in the face of the historical facts? The answers to these questions should probably be sought in the first place in the ambivalent attitude towards violence and the use of force found in India's own culture and world-view. This ambivalence may be seen as an inevitable product of the tension between conflicting traditional values,² which on the one hand sanctioned countless armed conflicts yet on the other

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1 In the famous Indian handbook on policy, the *Arthaśāstra*, the king is regularly referred to as *vijigīṣu*, 'he who wishes to conquer', an epithet which is not given a religious justification. The duty of the nobility (*kṣatriya*) is defined as: 'Studying (the Vedas), performing sacrifices (with the help of brahmin priests), dotation, living by arms (*śāstrā-jīvana*), and protection of beings' (AS 1.3.6).

2 Heesterman 1985 has traced the origin of this conflict in the Indian tradition to the opposition between the Hindu ideal of world-renunciation and the reality of social conditions.

hand never seems to have directly involved Hinduism in the start of a war.³ Not surprisingly then, several scholars have excluded India from the scope of their investigations into 'holy war'. These scholars regard the pluriformity of polytheism as the main reason that Hinduism appears to differ fundamentally from the monotheistic (Abrahamic) religions as to the legitimization of the use of force for religious aims.⁴ We shall refer to this theory as the 'polytheism thesis'.

HOLY WAR AS A RELIGIOUS IDEA

On the eve of the deadline of the UN's ultimatum to Irak (15 January 1991) the British prime minister John Major declared in the House of Commons that the now inevitable war is a 'just' one. At the same time Saddam Hussein calls on all Muslims to fight under Irak's banner, as it leads them on to a holy war, *jihād*, to be fought by 'believers' against 'infidels'.

It cannot but be noted that both speeches make use of concepts developed during the early Middle Ages in the two great monotheistic traditions, which apparently still retain some currency, and indeed evocative force. In the predominantly secular society of late twentieth century England a summons to a 'holy war' would hardly have an effect, except to provoke ridicule and suspicion. Instead, we find an appeal to a concept first developed by St. Augustine, namely that of a *bellum justum* ('just war'), which can be shown to be the source of the idea of a crusade.⁵ Saddam Hussein's proclamation of a *jihād* has almost equally venerable precedents. The aim of summoning 'believers' to a holy war against 'infidels' is to mobilize the strength and motivation of the faithful in a military enterprise, to suppress fear of physical danger, and to encourage actions which frequently are opposed to the direct personal interests of the individual.

Such declarations and exhortations on both sides are clearly primarily intended to raise morale among both soldiers and civilians. In other words, their value is chiefly propagandistic, and this is certainly an important aspect of the phenomenon of holy war. It would however be a serious mistake to imagine that this alone could provide a full or adequate explanation of the phenomenon.

3 Cf. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (ERE) s.v. 'War' (XII, 677): 'While the Vedas are sufficiently war-like, and Brahmanism gives a consecration to the military caste, the mild spirit of Hindu religion tended to view war under the repugnant aspect of murder.'

4 Burkert 1986, 81 ff.; Colpe 1984; Kippenberg 1991a. Cf. also Bruce Lawrence's (1990, 107) restriction of the fundamentalist world-view to monotheistic traditions (cf. Kippenberg 1991b).

5 ERE s.v. 'War' (XII, 682): '[Augustine] had no difficulty in deciding that there are unjust and just wars [...]. Just wars are those which are waged to inflict punishment, or to secure reparation for injury or (as in OT) by express commandment of God' (ref. to *Quæstiones in Josue* III², 584f.). For a study of the development of the idea of a crusade from this concept cf. Vanderjagt 1991.

It is necessary to ask a more fundamental question: why is it that the call to a holy war has any stimulating or propaganda effect in the first place? To answer this we will have to investigate problems in the field of religious studies: what are the religious ideas and beliefs of the 'believer' to whom such a call is directed, and what framework of action is directly associated with them?

When a modern researcher of war and peace, the polemologist Hylke Tromp, concludes that we should forget about 'the faith, ideology and sacred fire' of soldiers on the field of battle because they only go forward because they have no alternative, if they do not want to lose the respect of others and their own self-respect' (Tromp 1991), this may seem to suggest that cultural anthropological questions and questions such as posed in the previous paragraph are irrelevant. However, the self-image which determines the content and force of this 'respect of others and self-respect' is in fact the product of the individualization of the cultural and religious values of the society which the soldier is called upon to fight for.⁶ It is this self-image that war-propaganda aims at building up and strengthening, in order to break down any innate repugnance against killing fellow men.⁷ To understand what ultimately motivates the individual soldier to place his duty as soldier above personal safety it is necessary to focus on the social, cultural and—in the case of holy wars—particularly the religious values and symbols which constitute this self-image.

Fear and violence are universal basic experiences and thus important constituents of all religions (von Stietencron 1979). But this has not always resulted in them giving rise to collective violence sanctioned by religion. What then specifically distinguishes holy wars from war in general?

As has been noted above, some scholars have seen the answer to this question in some common element of the three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Significantly, Colpe does not consider Hinduism at all in his two articles *Zur Bezeichnung und Bezeugung des Heiligen Krieges* (1984), while as to the polytheism thesis he remarks with reference to ancient Greek history that:

Da, wo innerhalb eines polytheistischen Systems Götter Kriege führen, [...], da verbleibt der Heiligkeitscharakter ausschließlich ihnen und teilt sich dem Kriege nicht mit; wo dies nicht der Fall ist, kann der Krieg heilig genannt werden. (Colpe 1984, 199)

Similarly, in his *Krieg, Sieg und die olympischen Götter der Griechen*, Burkert has stated with regard to the polytheistic structure of Greek religion:

6 Cf. Mead 1964, 244 f.:

The individual enters as such into his own experience only as an object, not as a subject. [...] Existence of private or 'subjective' contents of experience does not alter the fact that self-consciousness involves the individual's becoming an object to himself by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within an organized setting of social relationships, and that unless the individual had thus become an object to himself he would not be self-conscious or have a self at all.

7 Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1975, 146; Gladigow 1986, 151 ff.; Kippenberg 1991a.

Auch wenn die Städte je ihre Stadtgottheit haben, so sind diese Götter doch 'vielverehrt', haben an vielen Orten ihre Heiligtümer; keine Stadt kann sich auch auf die Götter ganz verlassen; ein Gott behält es sich vor, für welche Seite im Krieg er Stellung nimmt [...] man sieht nicht sich selbst als die allein Bestätigten, Bevorzugten, die Auserwählten eines 'heiligen Kriegs'.⁸

Although the term 'holy war' (ἱερὸς πόλεμος) seems to have been used first by the Greeks, they appear to have meant something quite different from the phenomena we are concerned with here (Brodersen 1991).

As is clear from a glance at the literature on this subject, especially Colpe's work, the definition of 'holy war' itself is considerably problematic. Agreement may be reached easily enough on the meaning of the word 'war' but 'holy' and the idea of 'holiness' have been understood in very different ways by various scholars. Kippenberg (1991a) has pointed out that 'the word "holy" should be freed from its connotations of irrationality, with which especially R. Otto has associated it, and should rather be connected with "the uncommon" ("nicht-alltägliche") in contrast with "the common" ("alltägliche") (M. Weber), and with "collective" in contrast with "individual" (E. Durkheim)'. By such a definition all wars are 'holy', and in view of the large number of wars which have taken place on the South-Asian subcontinent, the polytheism thesis would have to be considered to be directly refuted. On the other hand, the historical material definitely suggests that holy wars form a separate category, and for heuristic reasons too it seems desirable to narrow the scope of our definition in some way.

The narrowest definition of a 'holy war' would be a war waged in the name of God by people who believe that by doing so they fulfil His will and carry out His plan. Some of the Christian crusades may be taken as examples of such wars. The *deus vult* of Pope Urban II's address in Clermont in AD 1095, and the consequence of this 'will' are well known. However, it seems questionable whether the Islamic *jihād* can in all circumstances be comprised within this definition.⁹ A compromise, which comes close to the ordinary usage of the

8 Burkert 1986, 82 f. See also Brodersen 1991.

9 Noth remarks in his *Heiliger Krieg und Heiliger Kampf in Christentum und Islam* (1966, 21 f.):

Fassen wir als 'heilige Kriege' bewaffnete Unternehmungen auf, bei denen die Religion allein das Gesetz des Handelns bestimmte und nicht zugleich Volkswohl, Landesverteidigung, Staatsinteresse oder nationale Ehre mit im Spiel waren, dann hat es 'heilige Kriege' im Islam auf staatlicher Ebene nie gegeben. Missionskriege, die als heilige Kriege angesprochen werden können, waren die Kämpfe der Muslims noch nicht einmal zu Lebzeiten des Propheten. In der Folgezeit wurde der Missionskrieg zwar theoretisch konzipiert, aber nicht in die Tat umgesetzt.

Cf. also Weippert 1972, 490:

Der 'Heilige Krieg' als eine von 'profanen' Kriegen unterschiedene Institution ist weder im Alten Testament noch in außer-biblichen altorientalischen Texten nachweisbar. Es empfiehlt sich, den—auch sonst problematischen—Terminus zu vermeiden, wenn auf den von G. v. Rad und seinen Vorgängern und Nachfolgern damit bezeichneten Themenkreis Bezug genommen wird.

term and seems at least to provide a working definition with some heuristic value, is to define those wars as ‘holy’ in which religious or pseudo-religious concepts play a dominant role; i.e. armed conflicts in which a major appeal is made to the religious convictions of the combatants, in which (at least) one side claims possession of absolute theological truth and which is fought with the conviction that this truth must be victorious, for the greater glory of God and for the weal of mankind.

Five conditions of ‘holy war’

In this connection five conditions for religiously motivated violence formulated by H. von Stietencron (1974, 334) appear to be relevant. The first of these is the belief of the side that knows God to be with it in its own superiority—frequently this may apply to both parties. An extreme case of such a conviction is the idea of a ‘chosen people’ as found for instance in the school of the *Deuteronomium* (7:1-5, 20:16). Research carried out since von Rad’s *Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (1952) has, however, demonstrated that the kinds of warfare, including the ‘ban-practice’ preached in the Laws of War (Deut. 20), were also known in Assyria, and in fact were common practices of war in ancient times.¹⁰ The notion of being ‘the Lord’s chosen people’ too is found not only in Judaism; it was used, for instance, in Calvinistic propaganda during the Dutch–Spanish Eighty Years War (Huussen 1991).

One condition for holy wars thus would appear to be the notion of exclusivity which attributes absolute status to one’s own beliefs. At the same time the opponent, who is fighting against the good, is demonized, that is, seen as a threatening embodiment of evil. Religions which develop such dyadic concepts and can sanction wars as ‘holy’, are in consequence confronted with the problem of the theodicy; the vindication of the existence of evil in the world.

Two of the conditions formulated by von Stietencron do not appear to be necessary conditions for a holy war: namely the belief that there is no second earthly existence (‘Einmaligkeit des Lebens’), and the ‘close connection between religion and secular violence’. The latter should probably be regarded as concomitant rather than conditional.¹¹ Another condition should however

10 Weippert 1972, 485 ff.:

Wichtig erscheint mir jedoch die Erkenntnis, daß diese Motive in den assyrischen Königsinschriften eine legitimierende Funktion haben. Sie sollen zeigen, daß in den Kriegen des Königs und seiner Truppen der Wille des Reichsgottes Assur und der anderen großen Götter vollstreckt wird, daß der König als *vicarius deorum* auf die Weisung und mit dem Beistand seiner ‘Herren’ handelt. [...] Die Legitimation kann auch propagandistisch verwendet werden, etwa bei öffentlich zugänglichen Siegesstellen. Auch in Israel läßt sich die legitimierende Funktion der Motive vom göttlichen Eingreifen in Kampfhandlungen mit einiger Sicherheit feststellen (*op. cit.* 487 f.).

The ‘polytheism thesis’ should be examined further with respect to this historical material. This is, however, beyond the competence of the present author.

11 The papal proclamation of crusade can, on the contrary, not be regarded separately from attempts to bring complete power (*plenitudo potestatis*) into the hands of the

be mentioned, which undoubtedly plays a central role; namely that of 'community'. The importance of this factor can only be realized when we consider religions such as Hinduism which place little explicit emphasis on the 'community of believers' and do not have the kind of organisational structure necessary to form such a single community.

The common acceptance of an exclusive truth unites believers into a community. Each member of such a community considers himself as taking part in a *summum bonum* that transcends the individual. In situations of crisis, such as a war, this can lead to the member of the community giving up his life for the common good. Martyrdom is always founded on such feelings of community.¹² Kippenberg has rightly emphasized that martyrdom and holy war are related themes; the concept of a 'holy war' would not be complete without the idea of meritorious and exemplary suffering of the just (Kippenberg 1991a). On the other hand, it must be noted that the presence of these conditions does not necessarily lead to 'holy' wars, as is shown for instance by the fact that the crusades were legitimized by the Roman Catholic but not by the Orthodox Church (Palmer 1991).

THE HINDU RELIGION AND THE SOCIAL REALITY OF WAR

To pursue our investigation into collective religious violence in the historical and contemporary reality of South Asia in relation to Hinduism, it is necessary to introduce a chronological differentiation. Early Hinduism, before Muslim dominance (c. AD 1200), unquestionably taught an absolute truth as the basis of the entire universe and the final aim of all living beings. However, as argued by Hacker (1983), this truth had a diffuse, all pervasive, inclusive ('inklusive') nature and was thus the opposite of exclusive. God transcends the world but is simultaneously omnipresent in it. Such a world-view can have no fundamental opposition between good and evil. This characteristic of early Indian thought can be illustrated by a passage from *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 3.1.

Indra said to him: Know me alone; for I hold this alone to be the most beneficial thing for a man, that he should know me. I slew the three-headed son of Tvaṣṭar.

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church. Cf. Noth 1966, 21 f.: 'Der Charakter des islamischen Staates (oder später der islamischen Staaten) als Gemeinschaft, in der Religion und Politik untrennbar miteinander verbunden waren, [...] verhinderte es, daß der Kampf gegen Ungläubige ein reiner Religionskrieg wurde.'

- 12 Cf. Mead 1982, 173: 'The individual may indeed sacrifice the physiological organism for the benefit of the group; man as an organism may go down and give his life for the group which persists. Body and mind thus have different unities.' Though Noth (1966, 135 ff.) emphasizes the personal character of both the Islamic duty of *jihād* and the Christian vow to take up the cross—which both promised the individual the fruits of martyrdom in the hereafter—we should not lose sight of the fact that in both cases the individual was strongly reminded of his holy duty by a collective body, either the Church of Rome or the Islamic state, the avowed beneficiaries of the individual's sacrifice.

I gave the Arunmukha ascetics to the hyenas. After breaking many promises, in heaven I crushed the Prahādīyas, in the sky the Paulomas and on earth the Kālakhāñjas. Yet not one hair of mine (having done this) was destroyed. And no hair will be destroyed of him who knows me, by any deed; not because of theft, not because of infanticide, not because of matricide and not because of patricide. Even if he commits evil, the colour does not leave his face.¹³

This viewpoint is connected with a concept of time different from that found in the Abrahamic religions. The infinity of time is regarded as cyclic, and the notion of a final period in which the highest divine aim shall be realized and towards which the history of mankind tends (a *civitas dei*) is practically absent. From a divine standpoint, *sub specie æternitatis*, worldly activity is a spectacle (*tamāśā*), a drama, the play (*līlā*) of God. In such a view there is no place for martyrdom. Individual self-sacrifice, which is of course as common in India as elsewhere, in the first place yields benefits for the same individual in an ensuing existence.

The hypocrisy of martyrdom (described by von Stietenron (1979, 330) as ‘besondere Raffinesse’), which conceals the egotistical desire for the martyr’s crown in the hereafter under altruistical motives of self-sacrifice for a common goal, the weal of all, is not found in Hinduism, at least not in the early period. Hinduism is a religion that aims at individual liberation, and only to a far lesser extent than the Abrahamic religions unites believers into a single community with a common goal.¹⁴ This may perhaps be connected with the fact that a plurality of deities is worshipped, but this connection does not appear to me to be intrinsic. It is clear that, also in the early period, a deep con-

13 Cf. *Bhagavadgītā* 10.3.6,38:

I am the gambling of cheaters, the energy of the energetic ones. I am conquest, I am resolve, I am the vigour of the vigorous. [...] I am the rule of the subduers, the policy of those ‘who wish to conquer’, I am the silence of things hidden, I am the knowledge of those who know.

Agastyaśaṃhitā 5.47 (Barkhuis 1995 II, 27): ‘For those who live, having realized that the self is eternal Rāma, there is no misdeed and no misfortune arising from a misdeed.’

14 This is not to say, of course, that community did not exist in South Asia. But communities were basically founded in the social ramifications of caste and village. Though Stein rightly attributes a significant role to religion (worship) in the formation of communities on local and regional level (see below, p. 165), the postulated ‘segmentary state’ testifies *eo ipso* to the limitedness of the communities involved. Stein 1991:

Community must be understood according to the usual English signification of being simultaneously a people and a place, rather than in its limited and debased usage as sub-caste or religious group. [...] However, in addition to the sharing of sentiments and values, community is also about shared rights or entitlements over human and material resources. Thus, in its particularities and under conditions of premodern technology, community pertains to smaller, local spatial entities.

The picture becomes more complicated when we take Buddhism into consideration. Already in an early stage Buddhism tended to extend the community of monks (*saṅgha*) to the community of all followers of the Buddhist faith. Consequently in that community the concept of the Bodhisattva, the one who temporarily sacrifices his own salvation for the benefit of all, could arise.

viction of a single, all-compassing and absolute divinity underlies this outward polytheism.¹⁵

We shall investigate whether a change has recently been taking place in regard to this last point. For it appears that a tendency can be detected among the Hindu population today to define itself as the community of Hindus, and this tendency seems to be connected with a shift in emphasis which has brought the monotheistic aspect of Hinduism to the fore and given it tangible form.

The advent of Islam

Such tendencies generally have a long history. As has been shown in Lorenzen's study (1978), *Warrior Ascetics in Indian History*, before the Muslim conquests India did not have any holy wars, either in the sense defined above or in the sense of 'wars fought by holy men'. But with the introduction of Muslim rule in North India, a change takes place, although this does not directly result in a holy war. Hindus are obstructed in the observance of their religious practices, and the religious interests vested in temples and monasteries are threatened with confiscation or destruction. At the same time the advent of Islam leads to conflicts between Hindu Yogis and Muslim *faḳīrs* (see above, p.11), and the system of traditional education, which ensured the continuity of cultural and religious values, was seriously undermined. The state of affairs may be illustrated by a description of the razzia of Maḥmūd of Ghazni, who destroyed the great temple in Somnāth (Gujarat) in AD 1024–25.

In the year 414 AH Maḥmūd captured several forts and cities in Hind, and he also took the idol called Somnāt. The idol was the greatest of all the idols of Hind. Every night that there was an eclipse the Hindus went on pilgrimage to the temple, and there congregated to the number of a hundred thousand persons. [...] One thousand Brahmans attended every day to perform the worship of the idol, and to introduce the visitors. Three hundred persons were employed in shaving the heads and beards of the pilgrims. Three hundred and fifty persons sang and danced at the gate of the temple. Every one of these received a settled allowance daily. [...] He reached Somnāt on a Thursday in the middle of Zí-l Ka'da, and there he beheld a strong fortress built upon the seashore, so that it was washed by the waves. [...] Next morning, early, the Muhammadans renewed the battle, and made great havoc

15 For instance expressed in the *Bhagavadgītā*: 'There is nothing transcending me, O Dhanamjaya: this universe is strung on me like pearls on a string' (BhG 7.7). 'I know all beings, past, present and those to come, O Arjuna, but no one knows me' (BhG 7.26). 'But there is another, Highest Person, who is referred to as the Supreme Soul: He is the eternal Lord who pervades this universe and sustains it.' Cf. Chaudhuri 1980, 148 f.:

In the foreground stands one object of faith for all Hindus. It is a genuine, monotheistic, personal God. [...] Though he is a personal God, he is never thought of or spoken about as an anthropomorphic God in a physical form. [...] Nevertheless, this Bhagavan has never been worshipped, nor has he ever been an object of regular prayer. [...] Below this God there was the specific world of the Hindu gods [...].

Cf. below, pp. 443 f.

among the Hindus, till they drove them from the town to the house of their idol, Somnát.¹⁶

It is a well-authenticated fact that when Mahmúd was about to destroy the idol, a crowd of Brahmans represented (to his nobles) that if he would desist from the mutilation they would pay several crores of gold coins into the treasury. [...] Mahmúd replied: 'I know this, but I desire that on the day of resurrection I should be summoned with the words, 'Where is that Mahmúd who broke the greatest of the heathen idols?' rather than by these: 'Where is that Mahmúd who sold the greatest of the idols to the infidels for gold?''¹⁷

A dreadful slaughter followed at the gate of the temple. Band after band of the defenders entered the temple to Somnát, and with their hands clasped round their necks, wept and passionately entreated him. Then again they issued forth to fight until they were slain, and but few were left alive. [...] This temple of Somnát was built upon fifty-six pillars of teak wood covered with lead. The idol itself was in a chamber. [Mahmúd] seized it, part of it he burnt, and part of it he carried away with him to Ghazní, where he made it a step at the entrance of the Jámī'-masjid. The worth of what was found in the temple exceeded two millions of dinars, all of which was taken. The number of slain exceeded fifty thousand.¹⁸

It is therefore hardly surprising that in the following centuries a number of groups of Hindus formed military organizations to defend such religious interests. However, significantly enough this process only appears to have taken place among groups which already formed a religious community, namely various orders of ascetics or monastic orders. Of course these were also the groups whose direct interests were particularly threatened. Resistance was naturally also offered by the Hindu kingdoms, but the resultant conflicts did not essentially differ from early wars between Hindu rulers themselves, as may also be illustrated by the fact that many Hindus served in the armies commanded by and fighting for Muslims. It is important to note that there never was a popular Hindu uprising against the new Muslim rule.

The lack of unity within the Hindu world is even more apparent from the reports that have come down to us of the actions of these militarized orders (*akhārās*). The earliest battle known to us in which armed religious ascetics took part, in Thanesar, AD 1567, was between two Hindu orders (*akhārās*), and was motivated not by a desire to protect Hindu religious values but rather to secure the interests of one order against claims of a rival group. Abu 'l-Faẓl has given us an eyewitness account in his *Akbar Nāma*.

There are two parties among the Sanyāsīs (i.e. Śaiva ascetics): one is called Kur, and the other Pūrī. A quarrel arose among these two about the place of sitting. The asceticism of most of these men arises from the world's having turned its back on them, and not from their having become coldhearted to the world. Consequently they are continually distressed and are overcome of lust and wrath, and

16 Ibn Asīr's *Kāmilu-t Tawārīkh*, Elliot and Dowson 1867–77 II, 468 f.

17 Mulla Ahmad Tattawī's *Tārīkh-i Alfī*, Elliot and Dowson 1867–77 II, 471 f.

18 *Kāmilu-t Tawārīkh*, Elliot and Dowson 1867–77 II, 470 f.

covetousness. The cause of the quarrel was that the Pūrī sect had a fixed place on the bank of the tank where they sate and spread the net of begging. The pilgrims from the various parts of India who came there to bathe in the tank used to give them alms. On that day the Kur faction had come there in a tyrannical way and taken the place of the Pūrīs, and the latter were unable to maintain their position against them. [...] The two sides drew up in line, and first one man on each side advanced in a braggart fashion, and engaged with swords. Afterwards bows and arrows were used. After that the Pūrīs attacked the Kurs with stones. [...] The Kurs could not withstand them and fled. The Pūrīs pursued them and sent a number of the wretches to annihilation.¹⁹

It is therefore clear that the case of these militarized ascetic orders (*akhārās*) falls under the first type of movement differentiated by Lorenzen (1978, 63), namely 'a movement concerned with the protection of specific, local economic and social interests and privileges'. A larger framework which could have mobilized the Hindus as a single community against the new Muslim rule simply did not exist.

THE SEGREGATION OF THE HINDU AND MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

The idea of the Rāma rājya

To trace developments further we will now turn to a particular religious centre, situated centrally in northern India: the city of Ayodhyā. The sacredness of this town was (and is) founded on the belief that in the distant past the god Viṣṇu was born there as the son of King Daśaratha. This particular incarnation of Viṣṇu is named Rāma. This belief belongs to the cultural heritage of every Hindu. The story of Viṣṇu's *avatāra* as Rāma is told in the ancient Sanskrit epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, as well as in countless later, vernacular versions of that story.

The figure of Rāma has developed into the archetype of the just king in Indian culture, the ruler who brings happiness and prosperity to all his subjects. He is introduced in the *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.1.2–4 as follows.

Who is there in this world today who is virtuous? Who is mighty (heroic), knows the *dharma*, is grateful (*kṛtajña*), speaks the truth and firmly keeps his vows? Who is possessed of good conduct, and who is well-disposed towards all living beings? Who is wise, who is skilful, and who alone is beautiful to behold? Who is self-controlled and has conquered (his) wrath; who is wise and free from envy? For whom do (even) the gods feel fear when his fury is roused in battle?

The answer to all these questions is of course King Rāma. His rule, popularly called *Rāma rājya*, as depicted in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and later literature, represents the ideal society, and Rāma himself personifies simultaneously the ideal king and God. The sixteenth century *Rāmacaritamānasa* describes his divine reign thus:

19 Abu ḏ-l-Faḏl's *Akbar Nāma* (transl. Beveridge), Vol. II, 423. Cf. Lorenzen 1978, 68 f.; Pinch 2006, 28 ff.; Clark 2006, 62.

When Rāma sat upon his sovereign throne, the three spheres rejoiced and there was no more sorrow. No man was any other's enemy, and under Rāma's royal influence all ill-feeling was laid aside. Everyone devoted himself to his duty in accordance with his caste and stage of life, and ever found happiness in treading the Vedic path. Fear and sorrow and sickness were no more. [...] Sole monarch of the land engirdled by seven seas was Raghupati (i.e. Rāma) in Kosala—no great dominion for him in each of whose several hairs dwelt many a universe. [...] The bliss and prosperity of Rāma's realm neither Serpent King nor Sarasvatī can describe. All who dwelt therein were generous and charitable and did humble service to the Brāhmans. Each husband was true to one wife, and each wife was loyal to her husband in thought and word and deed.²⁰

As I have attempted to demonstrate elsewhere, the religious cult of this incarnation of Viṣṇu only assumes significant proportions in the period that saw the forces of Islam threatening to destroy Hindu society, many centuries after the formation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself (Bakker 1986; 1987). It is only in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that Ayodhyā develops into a pilgrimage centre in which the spot where Rāma was born, the Rāmajanmabhūmi, is the main attraction. A coincidence? Or is there some intrinsic connection between the Muslim invasions and the rise in importance of this god-king as a symbol for traditional Hindu values? In any case, there can be no doubt that as the time-honoured model of justice (*dharma*) and of regal fame and power (*kṣatra*), Rāma was remarkably well suited to develop into a symbol of the struggle against the forces that undermined traditional Hindu society and its values.²¹ It is not possible to go further into this problem here; for our present purpose it is sufficient to remark that in the course of the second millennium Rāma, together with his birth-place Ayodhyā, came to occupy an increasingly important and central role in Hinduism.

Until the end of Great Moghul rule, that is to say till the beginning of the eighteenth century, Ayodhyā was the capital of one of the provinces of the Muslim empire in northern India. In consequence, Hindu sects had few rights to defend in the city. Pilgrimage was tolerated, but the cream of the profits from it was taken by the Muslim rulers in the form of a tax on pilgrims. It was forbidden to build temples or monasteries of more than a certain dimension in the city, and the existing temples fell into decay and disappeared or were replaced by mosques. The latter happened to the temple on the alleged spot of Rāma's birth, which dated to the early eleventh century. This small temple was replaced by a mosque, the so-called Babri Masjid, in AD 1528, during the reign of the first Moghul emperor, Bābur,²² a deed of far-reaching consequences.

20 Tulsī Dās, *Rāmācaritamānasa* (Uttarakhandā Cau. 18.4–Cau. 21.4), transl. W. Douglas P. Hill.

21 See also Freitag 1989, 30 f.

22 Bakker 1986 I, 44 f., 133 f., II, 146 f.

The Kingdom of Avadh

After the death of Aurangzeb in AD 1707, central Muslim rule in northern India was weakened to such an extent that regional and local rulers could found small independent kingdoms. Ayodhyā became the capital of the virtually independent kingdom of Avadh, ruled by the former governor of the Moghul province, the nawāb Sa'ādat Khān, a Shiite Muslim of Persian descent. However, the power of the rulers of Avadh had been weakened so much that the execution of their authority came to lie more and more in the hands of allied Hindu leaders and landowners. Even the military power of the Islamic nawābs of Avadh was partly dependent on the services of Hindu ascetics.²³ The logical outcome of this situation was that Muslim authority lost its control over the activities in and around the Hindu holy places. The organization and management of the birth-city of Rāma came into the hands of Hindu monastic orders, who did not hesitate to use force in order to drive one another from economically lucrative spots. A Vaiṣṇava source describes the situation as follows.

At that time [...] when the occasion of Rāma's birth came, people went to Kosala-pur (i.e. Ayodhyā) and assembled there—who can describe the enormous crowd? At that place there was an unlimited (number of) strong warriors in *saṃnyāsīn* garb, carrying weapons, with matted hair and ashes smeared on every limb—an unlimited army of soldiers taking pleasure in battle. Fighting with the *vairāgīns* broke out. This fight was of no avail (to the *vairāgīns*), owing to lack of strategy. [...] They made a mistake by going there towards them; the *vairāgīn* garb became a source of misery. All people dressed in *vairāgīn* garb fled—through fear of them (scil. *saṃnyāsīns*) Avadhpur was abandoned. Wherever they (scil. *saṃnyāsīns*) happened to find people in *vairāgīn* garb, there they struck great fear into them. Through fear of them everyone was frightened and wherever they could they took shelter in a secret place and hid themselves. They changed their dress and hid their sectarian markings—no one showed his proper identity.²⁴

Inevitably, the Vaiṣṇava orders armed themselves too. The evolving military orders were organized on the model of their Śaiva counterparts, into *akhārās*, 'wrestling-schools', and during the eighteenth century their fort-like monasteries appeared throughout North India. One of these orders succeeded in wresting the control over some of the important holy places in Ayodhyā from their Śaiva adversaries. And as a reward for services rendered to the Nawāb of Avadh—a Shiite, as remarked above—the Vaiṣṇavas were even granted permission to build a fort-monastery at a mere 700 meters distance from the Babri Masjid. This so-called 'Fort of Hanumān', the Hanumāngarhī, has remained the most important and frequently visited monastery-cum-temple in Ayodhyā until today (Bakker 1990c).

23 Sarkar 1958, 123 ff.; Barnett 1980, 56 f.

24 *Śrīmahārājacaritra* of Raghunātha Prasāda, pp. 42 f.

Plate 2
Ayodhyā: Hanumāngarhī (before 1870)

Plate 3
Ayodhyā: Monks of the Hanumāngarhī (before 1870)

For our subject, it is important to keep in mind that even in this period of religious turmoil and anarchy the conflict still remained internal, and is limited to certain local centres. There still was no common Hindu attack on the strongholds of Islam, as represented for instance by the Babri Masjid at the Rāmājanmabhūmi. It is true that religious interests and emotions played a major part in these conflicts, but the fight was hardly, if at all, inspired by religious ideology. Nor was there as yet any mobilization of the Hindu masses which did not belong to any organisation of ascetics or monks.

The emerging conflict around the Babri Masjid in Ayodhyā

It is interesting to observe that while official Muslim authority in North India continued to weaken during the nineteenth century and became more and more dependent on the support of the Hindu aristocracy, the political contrast between Muslim rulers and Hindu subjects changed in character and focus and began to take the form of a religious conflict which both sides attempted to decide in their favour by all means, including the use of force. It should of course be remembered that by that time the Muslim segment of the population was no longer confined to the ruling classes, since large groups from lower strata of the Hindu society had converted to Islam. This new development, the religious conflict that was to take such a threatening form in the twentieth century, both under British Rule and in the post-colonial period, can be traced and illustrated with reference to the events in Ayodhyā.

On the eve of Britain's annexation of Avadh, while the ruler of Avadh, Wājid ʿAlī Shāh, was already no more than a puppet of the British, groups of Sunnis rose in protest against the permissive attitude of their Islamic government. They demanded to be allowed to build a mosque on the site of the Hanumān-garhī.²⁵ Inevitably, this resulted in a direct conflict with the ascetics of the fort-monastery. Despite attempts by British troops, with the sanction of Wājid ʿAlī Shāh, to separate the combatants, fighting broke out between Hindus and Muslims, and the Muslims were forced to retreat into the Babri Masjid on Rāma's Birthplace. The Hindus stormed the mosque and seventy Muslims were killed, after which Hindu wrath turned against the Muslim population of the city and led to large-scale plundering.

A considerable number of Muslims, led by militant mullahs, gathered from all parts of Avadh and proclaimed *jihād* against the Hindus of Ayodhyā. Feelings ran high, and the situation grew ever more explosive—partly because Hindus slaughtered a number of pigs on the day of the burial of the Muslims who died in the Babri Masjid—and this resulted in the first direct confrontation between Hindu and Muslim populations as such.

The Islamic campaign set out from Lucknow, the new capital of Avadh, under command of the Maulvi Amīr ud-Dīn alias Amīr ʿAlī, who was hailed

²⁵ Bhatnagar 1968, 117 ff.

as the fifth imām. Despite desperate attempts on the part of Wājid ʿAlī Shāh, who had the *jihād* pronounced unlawful by both a Shiite and a Sunna court, Amīr ʿAlī continued his march, leaving a wake of destruction. But before this mob reached Ayodhyā, they were intercepted by government troops under British command. Consultations ensued with the lawful Muslim authorities in Lucknow, in the course of which the British far-sightedly pointed out that if the rebellious Muslims were permitted to build their mosque on the site of the Hanumān-gaṛhī, chaos would immediately result, with the Hindus in their turn claiming their rights to the holy places now occupied by mosques in Ayodhyā, Benares etc. But the consultations and all attempts at negotiation yielded no result, and finally the *jihād* of Amīr ʿAlī ended before the British cannons of Captain Barlow. Four or five hundred Muslims perished, Amīr ʿAlī among them. Two months later, in February 1857, Avadh was annexed by the English, who eventually ‘put up a railing around the Babri Masjid to prevent disputes’.²⁶

Plate 4
Ayodhyā: Babri Masjid (before 1870)

This harrowing episode clearly shows that large-scale conflicts between Hindus and Muslims did not directly spring from the historical situation of an Islamic

²⁶ Carnegie 1870, 21; for this episode see also Bhatnagar 1968; Bakker 1986 II, 147 f.

ruling class and an oppressed Hindu population. The religious conflict only took the form of popular movements when Muslim authority was about to topple and both segments of the population attempted to take the law into their own hands. With the restoration of government control and the emergence of the modern state, these movements subsequently became increasingly directed against public authority, which they tried to undermine, no matter whether this authority was exercised by British colonial power or the democratically chosen government of the Republic of India.²⁷

From a core of a small number of Sunni mullahs and trained Hindu ascetics, the awareness of being a group with common religious beliefs that differ fundamentally from those of the opposing group spreaded out among both the Hindu and Muslim population during the nineteenth and twentieth century. In other words, the feeling of 'community' arose also within the Hindu population, stimulated, among other things, by the regularly recurrent conflicts around the spot of Rāma's birth, the Babri Masjid. An additional factor was that in accordance with British colonial policy the Hindus were now officially defined as a separate category from the Muslim segment of the population. In connection with the colonial census reports, the individual citizen was compelled, for the first time in the history of India, to explicitly state whether he was of the Hindu or Muslim faith. The combination of such factors meant that Hindus of all castes and sects were forced to reflect on what made them Hindus and distinguished them from their Islamic fellow citizens.²⁸

With the restoration of central rule by the colonial authorities, the role of the armed Hindu ascetics was greatly diminished. Some of them served as mercenaries in the colonial army, and some were of assistance to the authorities in times of crisis, such as the Rebellion of 1857,²⁹ but they played no further important role as a military power. Instead one could say that their militant character gradually spread over the Hindu population in general. The most gruesome consequence of this development (so far at least) took place during the period of de-colonization, when British India fell apart into two states: the secular state of India and the Islamic Pakistan. This 'partition' was accompanied by massacres, carried out by both sides, which are estimated to have cost half a million lives. But even after the secession of Pakistan some 40 million Muslims remained inhabitants of the state of India, a number which had already doubled in 1981.³⁰ Since the secession India has fought two wars with Pakistan, and the present unrest in Kashmir could be the prelude of a third.

27 On similar processes in Islam, cf. Lawrence 1990, 240.

28 In this connexion it is significant that the term (and concept) 'Hinduism' was first introduced by the missionaries of the Baptist Missionary Society in Bengal at the beginning of the 19th century (Ward 1817, 348, 427), for lack of an adequate indigenous term. See van den Bosch 1990, 18.

29 Especially the descendants of Gosāin Umrāvgiri (Pinch 2006, 2290; Fyz. Gaz. 163).

30 According to the 2011 *Census of India* Muslims comprise about 14% of the total population of India.

Nonetheless such wars between states, fought over territorial disputes, should not be called ‘holy wars’, also because Hindus, Muslims and even Sikhs have fought on both sides in them.

AYODHYĀ: A HINDU JERUSALEM

For our present subject it is more fruitful to look at the current situation in India—which, it must not be forgotten, is a secular state. This situation is characterized by the disintegration of the population into several sections whose identity is chiefly based on religious beliefs. This is generally referred to as ‘communalism’. In regard to the Muslim segment, a world-wide tendency towards fundamentalism has undoubtedly played a role in India too. Numerous accusations have been made by Hindus that Islamic organizations in India are being financially supported by the Arab oil-producing nations. Another danger is of course seen in Pakistan, which is said to aim at destabilizing India via the Islamic population; particularly by fanning the flames of Sikh violence in the Panjab and, most recently, by causing the turmoil in Kashmir.

These geo-political factors have no doubt strengthened the self-awareness of the Hindus as forming one community. A common ideology, which could (and increasingly does) unite the still largely fragmented Hindu population under a single banner, has been developed on the basis of the mythology of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In this ideology, Rāma is the deity who in the past created and ruled the ideal state here on earth. Through the inevitable process of historical decline, this state has since disappeared, but can, if all Hindus were to unite in working towards it, be recreated in the future. This new utopic reign, the *Rāma rājya*, which will of course encompass only the Hindu faithful, may be compared with the eschatological ideal of the *civitas dei* reified in the reconquered earthly Jerusalem.³¹

For the Hindu believer of the present, a holy place like Ayodhyā or Braj (associated with Viṣṇu’s incarnation as Kṛṣṇa) is more than a sacred remembrance of the past; it is an actual hierophany of the paradise of Viṣṇu/Rāma/Kṛṣṇa. The holy spots in Ayodhyā represent the manifest (*prakaṭa*) forms of transcendent (*apraṭa*) archetypes in the paradise Vaikuṇṭha (see above, p. 19). The occupation of the central and most holy site by a mosque is therefore a direct encroachment on the holy or divine itself. From such a point of view, the fight for control of Rāma’s Birthplace can be seen as a divine fight. A historical, religious ideal is transformed into a political programme.³²

31 For St. Augustine the New Jerusalem was not a historical geographic reality, but the City of God situated at the end of time. In the eleventh century, however, when Pope Urban II proclaimed the First Crusade, this idea became reified in the actual Jerusalem that only awaited emancipation from its desecration by the Gentiles (i.e. Muslims). (Robertus Monachus 1866, 729).

32 Cf. Riesebrodt 1990, 243.

The ideology which aims at restoring Rāma's rule in its pure form by eliminating the profane encroachments on it has become a politic factor of increasing importance, particularly in North India, where the oppositions between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are most deeply felt, and where, as we have seen, the historical developments took place which gave the Hindu community its cohesion. This ideology is connected with the attempts on the part of fundamentalist Hindu groups, such as the Rastriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS), to make India a national Hindu state (*Hindū Rāṣṭra*), just as Pakistan is an Islamic state and Khalistan a wished-for Sikh state.³³ On the religious level this ideology has led to the monotheistic aspect of Hinduism being articulated and assuming tangible, personal form, embodied by Rāma. It is in this light that the exorbitant success of the *Rāmāyaṇa* television series should be seen. This series enthralled the Hindu population to such an extent that riots broke out when power-failures interrupted television-reception, and a television-station was stormed when the series (already stretched as far as human ingenuity could manage) finally came to an end without a sequel, 'the later deeds of Rāma' (a kind of *Uttararāmacarita*) being announced.

As the re-capture of Jerusalem was the central theme in the ideology of the Christian crusades, so the re-possessing of Rāma's Birthplace, the Rāmājanmabhūmi, gradually came to be central in this newly developed Hindu ideology.³⁴

As we have seen, after the annexation of Avadh the English erected a fence around the Babri Masjid to prevent Hindus and Muslims from fighting over the spot. This policy was continued by the government of independent India. Hindus and Muslims alike were prohibited from entering the mosque. It is neither possible nor necessary to discuss all the incidents that took place around this holy spot in the last hundred years. It should however be mentioned that in 1949, in the aftermath of the partition, the Hindus succeeded in installing an

33 For more information on the history and background of the RSS see Anderson and Damle 1987. Though it is not the aim of the present paper to depict the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, several tendencies indicated here are evidently at the core of the fundamentalist world-view as described by Riesebrodt 1990, 214 ff. Cf. also Freitag 1989.

34 In the early phase of Hindu fundamentalism (as embodied in the RSS) the 'liberation' of Rāma's Birthplace in Ayodhyā did not yet take a special place. Gradually it was realized however, that to combine fundamentalist aims with a pilgrim's goal like Ayodhyā had unparalleled mass-mobilizing potential. A similar process seems to have taken place in the history of the crusades:

Der Einfluß des Pilgerwesens, wenn nicht auf die Entstehung, so doch auf den Character schon der ersten kriegerischen Orientfahrten der Abendländer ist bekanntlich sehr stark gewesen, und die Verbindung von Wallfahrt und Heidenkrieg kann geradezu als typisch für die gesamte Kreuzzugbewegung gelten. Den Anstoß dazu hat wiederum Urban II. gegeben, indem er das Wallfahrerziel Jerusalem zum Marschziel der geplanten Orientexpedition bestimmte. Daß Urban Jerusalem in seinen Kreuzzugplan aufnahm, ist wahrscheinlich aus Gründen der Werbung geschehen, denn—wie Erdmann überzeugend hat nachweisen können—sah Urban den Zweck der Orientexpedition nicht in der Eroberung Jerusalems, sondern allgemeiner in der Befreiung der Orientalischen Kirchen. (Noth 1966, 128)

image of Rāma and his wife Sītā inside the mosque. As may be understood, this again led to serious riots between the Muslims and Hindus, and numerous legal actions were undertaken by both sides. The judge finally decreed that during the lengthy process of legal settlement the mosque should remain closed.

The fight for the Rāmājanmabhūmi/Babri Masjid

In this way all went relatively well until 1984. In that year the fundamentalist Hindu organization Visva Hindu Parisad (VHP), a sister organization of the RSS, starts a new campaign to ‘liberate’ the Birthplace of Rāma, that is to say, to pull down the mosque and replace it by a large Hindu temple.³⁵ This movement scores its first success in 1986, when a lawyer from the neighbouring city of Faizabad procures a court judgement which declares the closure of the mosque to be legally unfounded. The gate of the fence is opened, and a stream of Hindus enters the mosque to worship the idol of Rāma which has remained there all these years.

As may be imagined, with the VHP growing more and more successful and winning more and more adherents, a large number of politicians seek to connect themselves with this popular movement. In particular, right-wing Hindu politicians united in the Indian People’s Party (BJP) expect—rightly, as has since emerged—to be swept to political power on the shoulders of this mass-movement. On the Muslim side, a national action committee is started to protect the Babri Masjid. The ruling Congress Party of Rajiv Gandhi, which traditionally is dependent to a high degree on votes of the Islamic section of the population, desperately tries to avoid the looming Scylla and Charybdis by portraying itself as the defender of India as a secular and united state. This tight-rope feat becomes increasingly difficult, however, as the polarization of Hindus and Muslims continues.

In the election-year 1989 the VHP, supported by the politicians of the BJP, make a brilliant move. In order to mobilise as large a mass of Hindus as possible for the ‘liberation’ of Rāma’s Birthplace, a new campaign to replace the mosque by a temple is launched. The model for this was Somnāth, where, after the destruction of the Hindu temple by Maḥmūd of Ghazni, and despite the razing of later rebuildings by Muslim rulers, a large Hindu temple had recently been erected. The idea behind the campaign was that action committees should be formed in all cities and villages with more than two thousand inhabitants, to consecrate a number of bricks in accordance with Vedic ritual. These bricks, consecrated in long and elaborate ceremonies (always something capable of rousing Hindu enthusiasm), should then be brought in procession to Ayodhyā, and, after much orthodox ceremony surrounding the laying of the first stone on the site of the mosque, should then be used to build the new temple. This campaign may be said to have been largely successful.

35 As described in van der Veer 1987, this campaign found little support from the monasteries and temples in Ayodhyā itself, which feared that the turmoil involved would endanger their own income.

When I visited India in the autumn of 1989, the election-campaign was in full swing, and the disputed Babri Masjid in Ayodhyā had become its central and dominant theme. The leaders of the Indian People's Party openly backed the brick-campaign of the VHP. All over the country bricks were being consecrated with much pomp and ceremony.

Plate 5

Nasik: Consecration of bricks for the Rāmājanmabhūmi Temple

The processions bearing the consecrated bricks often passed through districts and villages inhabited by Muslims, and this frequently led to bloody riots. Rajiv Gandhi's ruling Congress Party was put under so much pressure that it finally gave in and gave permission for the first stone of the planned temple to be laid on 9 November 1989, 60 meters in front of the gate of the mosque. A total of 300,000 consecrated bricks streamed into Ayodhyā, and hundreds of people died, frequently in horrific fashion, in the ensuing violence. A curfew was imposed in many places, including Benares. Hindu youths marched provocatively through the streets, chanting slogans like the following:

THAT Hindu whose blood does not boil has water in his veins,
youth that does not serve Rāmājanmabhūmi is youth lived in vain.³⁶

An illustration of the clashes that resulted is provided by the occurrences in Bhagalpur, a fairly ordinary village in Bihar, as reported in the Indian press (*Hitavada* 19-11-1989).

It was Friday, October 27: the Muslims had just said their prayers in the newly built makeshift mosque when they found themselves surrounded from all sides by fierce mobs. One pretext trotted up by them was the presence of a Rajpur imām to read the *namāz*. ‘Why bring an outsider’, they asked. The Muslims explained there was nobody educated enough in the village to preside over the Friday prayers, but the mob wouldn’t listen. The scared Muslims gathered in the house of Minnat Mian, the only building without a thatched roof that would not collapse when torched. Later in the afternoon, the local head of police along with some policemen made their appearance and assured them safety.

Meanwhile, houses in the Muslim quarter had begun being set ablaze with both sides exchanging brickbats. ‘My hands were aching, we had hurled so many stones’, recalled Suleiman.

When night fell, the stone throwing stopped but the houses continued to burn. Suleiman and a few others managed to escape to Rajpur but the rest stayed put in Minnat Mian’s house. One escapee was killed, but late in the evening an army contingent arrived. The army officer personally counted the number of people sheltering in the house and handed over charge to the local policemen, leaving word that he would return next morning to remove them elsewhere. When he did, almost all of them were dead. It was the silence of the graveyard.

Fundamentalist organizations sanction the use of force on the part of the Hindus. A statement is issued saying that (*Hitavada* 13-11-1989):

[The laying of the foundation stone] is the result of sacrifices made by hundreds of thousands of Hindus over centuries to redeem Ramājanmabhūmi and establish the temple. ‘The restoration of the Birthplace of Rama’ is symbolic of re-establishment of our national pride just as the reconstruction of the great Somnāth temple was.

Nor are any scruples felt about annexing and misusing, not to say abusing, the spiritual legacy of Mahatma Gandhi in support of the new ideology (*Hitavada*): ‘When Mahatma Gandhi envisaged freedom, he dreamt of and defined the independence as “Rama rajya.” His whole life was inspired by Lord Rama.’³⁷ The *Times of India* (7-11-1989) rightly remarks in a commentary that:

36 *jis hindū kā khūn na khaule, khūn nahīm vah pānī hai | janmabhūmi ke kām na aye, vah bekār javānī hai ||* (*India Today* October 31, 1989, 29).

37 The nature of this ‘abuse’ can be illustrated when we apply the typology of ‘religious revivalist movements’ proposed by M. Riesebrodt 1990, 18 ff. Riesebrodt reduces this type of movements to a ‘Krisenbewußtsein’ as a result of ‘rapider sozialer Wandel’, but he distinguishes two types of response. In search of authenticity both responses make an appeal to a ‘göttliches Gesetz, eine Offenbarung oder auf eine ideale Urgemeinde’ (e.g. the *Rāma rājya*).

Doch kann dieses Anknüpfen an eine ursprüngliche ideale Ordnung *mythisch* oder

There is hardly a village where the consecration of bricks for Rama's temple has not been held. And almost everywhere the ceremony has evoked a popular response. Lord Rama and his controversial Birthplace is fast becoming a Hindu symbol, as no previous ones, uniting co-religionists across caste barriers.

In the elections of late November 1989 the Congress Party is defeated. Particularly in North India, where the new Hindu movement was most successful, the opposition inflicts a crushing defeat on Rajiv Gandhi's party. The Indian People's Party BJP rockets from 2 to 88 seats in the newly elected Lok Sabha (parliament). This trend is continued in the state-elections in early March 1990: the BJP even acquires an absolute majority in the state-parliaments of Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

A year after the first stone of the temple on Rāma's Birthplace was laid, the question flares up again. Hundreds of thousands of 'temple-builders' (*kār sevaks*) are called upon by the VHP and other fundamentalist Hindu groups to march on Ayodhyā. The leader of the BJP, Lal Advani, places himself at the head of this procession in 'Rāma's Vehicle' (*Rām rāth*) and is promptly arrested. Tens of thousands of soldiers seal off Ayodhyā. Photos of inflamed Hindus waving flags on the domes of the Babri Masjid make the front pages of newspapers all over the world. The whole country is in the grip of the struggle around the mosque in Ayodhyā. The secular and unitary state of India seems about to founder; the population, incited by religious emotions, seems deaf to reason, and the minority-government of the People's Front (Janata Dal)—together with the BJP the main winners of the 1989 election—seems helpless and at a loss.

The BJP withdraws its support from the minority-cabinet of V.P. Singh and precipitates yet another government crisis. Like his predecessor Rajiv Gandhi, V.P. Singh had endeavoured to remain neutral in this conflict between members of two faiths, but he too is brought down by the new Hindu fundamentalism.

In December 1990 communal disturbances and riots claim hundreds of lives. Noteworthy is the fact that the disturbances clearly are spreading to the south as well. 'Temple-builders' are arrested in large numbers. Ayodhyā becomes a military fortress, and new fortifications in the shape of a wire-fence and barbed wire are placed around the mosque. The new minority-government, led by

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utopisch ausgerichtet sein. Als Mythos hat sie die Funktion einer restaurativen Krisenbewältigung. Das 'Goldene Zeitalter' soll durch Rückkehr zu seinen wörtlich tradierten Ordnungsprinzipien wiederhergestellt werden. Als Utopie dagegen dient die ideale Ordnung zu einer 'progressiven' sozialreformerischen oder sozialrevolutionären Krisenbewältigung. Nicht den Buchstaben, sondern den 'Geist' der in der Vergangenheit einmal verwirklichten idealen Ordnung gilt es unter neuen Bedingungen zu realisieren. Demzufolge ist das 'mythische' Denken tendenziell durch eine rigide Gesetzethik, das 'utopische' Denken dagegen durch eine radikale Gesinnungsethik gekennzeichnet. (*op. cit.* 20)

It is clear that Mahatma Gandhi exemplifies the 'utopic' type of movement, whereas the movement described here should be classified as 'mythic'. Riesebrodt proposes to restrict the use of the term 'fundamentalism' to the latter type of movement.

prime minister Chandra Shekhar and formed out of a faction of the Janata Dal, is completely dependent on the support of the Congress Party and seems about to fall at any moment. The idealized image referred to at the beginning of this article of a country and culture in which peace-loving tendencies are stronger than elsewhere, seems more than ever to be a mirage.³⁸

EPILOGUE

Our conclusions may be summarized as follows.

During a process of interaction with Islam, a new Hindu self-awareness gradually emerges, particularly in North India. This self-awareness draws heavily on the mythological material of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The worship of Rāma as the highest, personal God becomes ever more prominent. Hindus of other sects also increasingly partake in this movement, so that a shift in emphasis appears to take place towards the more monotheistic aspects of Hinduism. Related to this, the feeling of belonging to a single (religious) community spreads during the nineteenth and twentieth century from the militant monastery orders to large sections of the population. The myth of King Rāma provides a new utopic ideal of a *summum bonum* here on earth: the *Rāma rājya*. The first step towards the realization of this ideal is seen in a very concrete action, which inspires violent emotions: the ‘liberation’ of Rāma’s Birthplace in Ayodhyā. This goal not only unites Hindus of all castes all over the country, but also provides an effective instrument to harass the Muslim population, which is regarded as the major hindrance with regard to the realization of this ideal, and as an encroachment on the holy order. The result is large-scale disturbances which result in the death of large numbers of Hindus and Muslims. By imposing strict measures the state-authorities and the central government in Delhi just manage to prevent an outright civil war.

India has known countless wars, but none of them can be called ‘holy war’ in the sense defined here. The developments sketched above, however, have led to the incorporation into Hinduism of a number of elements which have been associated with the idea of a ‘holy war’. These elements are: 1 The formation of an exclusive community of Hindus who share the desire for a common good. 2 A shift in religious emphasis towards a single, personal, God, Rāma. 3 A tendency to see Islam and its adherents as agents of evil (which may be described as demonization of the enemy). 4 The regarding of Hindus who perish during conflicts with Muslims as victims for the common weal.

The question may be asked whether Hinduism is developing into a monotheistic-like religion. As a rule historians rightly refrain from making

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³⁸ The Babri Masjid was eventually destroyed on December 6, 1992, provoking another round of acrimonious Muslim–Hindu antagonism. Cf. also below, p.485.

predictions about the future, and I too will not attempt to answer this question. We may conclude then merely by remarking that, though Hinduism has proved in the past to be a religion not prone to holy wars, recent developments in Indian society unfortunately have made the prospect of a holy war between Hindus and Muslims seem only too real and close.