



[Pre-print version 2010]

[D. Berti, N. Jaoul, P. Kanungo (eds.) **Cultural Entrenchment of Hindutva. Local Mediations and Forms of Resistance, Delhi, Manohar, 2011**]

## *Introduction*

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Over the last few years, works on Hindutva have shifted their focus from the more visible forms of Hindu nationalist mobilisation and violence to the more daily and imperceptible infiltrations of a 'soft' Hindutva culture which has supposedly normalised certain Hindutva clichés in contemporary Indian society. More nuanced works covering diverse areas now show how Hindutva seeps through various spheres of social and cultural life. This may be seen, for instance, in the increasing number of studies showing how a diffuse, so-called metropolitan Hindutva is penetrating popular culture. One example is the work of Sheena Malhotra and Tavishi. Alagh (2004), which analyses how post-1990 films in the domestic drama genre have shifted from an inclusive, 'ideal' Indian family to one of Hinduness, 'wherein Hindu symbols are all-pervasive and colour the lives of both Hindu and non-Hindu characters'. Similarly, Murty (2009) examines how in box-office hits some Hindutva middle-class values of discipline, order and *swadeshi*<sup>1</sup> combine with the fervour for liberalisation and globalisation. Cricket and the business of producing sport celebrities (Nalapat and Parker 2005) as well as popular music (Manuel 2008) have also recently been seen by scholars as areas where, through a market strategy, an exclusive (Hindu) definition of the nation is forged.

These works are part of the growing number of studies inspired by Michael Billig's concept of 'banal nationalism', an expression used by the author to study how informal national feelings are constantly reproduced in daily life through routine symbols and speech habits (Billig 1995).<sup>2</sup>

The present volume, still pursuing this general line of inquiry, intends to

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reconsider how Hindutva is affecting a wide range of social, cultural and religious milieus in contemporary India by starting with the notion of entrenchment. Though close to Billig's concept of banalisation or normalisation, the notion of entrenchment is used here to address a multiplicity of processes, mechanisms and even paradoxical dynamics of assimilation by way of which Hindutva penetrates different regional contexts, both at the urban and rural levels, thanks to the mediation of different social actors. Notwithstanding the choice of word, the notion of entrenchment does not necessarily refer to an unconscious attachment of the individual to his/her cultural or linguistic roots — which is often included in notions such as everyday or banal nationalism. In fact, the different Hindutva local entrenchment scenarios described here are not just routinised in daily life, since they are rather the outcome — whether programmatic, circumstantial or even involuntary — of actors or dynamics which are in one way or another related to or confronted with some Hindutva mediators. Nevertheless, the notion of entrenchment is not reduced to the mere notion of mobilisation, largely used in works where Hindutva has been conceptualised as the *fi rst agent* in cultural transformations. In most of the cases analysed here, those involved in a local Hindutva enterprise are not always monitored by Hindutva organisations and, when they are, they are not necessarily motivated, as Hindutva leaders are, by the promotion of any sort of national identity. Indeed, the aim of this volume is to show how Hindutva influence may work through the mediation of people who deny any strong commitment to the Hindutva programme or who may even be radically opposed to it.

In order to explore the existence of these blurred, ambiguous zones of cultural and political transformations, in 2004 a research team was set up consisting mostly of anthropologists whose fieldwork focuses on different aspects of regional culture as well as on local social and political dynamics.<sup>3</sup> The idea was not to look for 'exemplary Hindutva fields' by choosing places where the presence of Hindutva is readily visible and ascertainable. We particularly wanted to investigate the non-ideological and non-committed zones of Hindutva influence.

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<sup>3</sup> This two-year project, financed by the 'Atip-Jeunes Chercheurs' at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and by the *Fondation de la Maison de Sciences de l'Homme*, and the research team met on a regular basis from 2004–2007.

The contributions included in the volume will show three different dynamics of Hindutva's cultural entrenchment. The first concerns cases where the initial move comes from RSS-affiliated organisations.<sup>4</sup> The leaders of these organisations, who often belong to the RSS<sup>4</sup>, elaborate their discourse in relation to a specific cultural or artistic programme. This is then enacted at the regional level by local mediators who may become interested in participating in the programme for their own cultural interest, without necessarily endorsing all aspects of the Hindutva agenda. Although the activity of these local mediators may lead to an ambiguous, if not contradictory, outcome compared to the ambitions of central leaders, there is indeed a strategy here from above, which provides them with some theoretical or practical directives.

The second dynamic is that of convergence. This refers to cases where people operate in a more or less organised way, in religious groups or associations, which also often have a spiritualistic dimension. Contrary to the scenario evoked above, the sometimes very strong affinities between these people's discourse and Hindutva-based views are not at all monitored by a Hindutva organisation. Instead, people appear to gather around the figure of a guru or a federative figure (who may himself sometimes have a Hindutva link) and may share or may end up sharing some personal sympathies with the Hindutva programme. This overlap between a social and cultural milieu and Hindutva discourses is not therefore the result of a strategy, and sometimes appears to be purely circumstantial. However, due to its occurrence in many different linguistic and cultural milieus it appears to correspond to a contemporary trend which needs to be analysed.

A third kind of Hindutva entrenchment which will be considered here occurs within a context of resistance. This trend can also be observed in different regional milieus, where people who consciously oppose militant Hinduism — either individually or in a well organised and activist way — may in fact paradoxically, and even inadvertently, adopt some aspects of its rhetoric in order to put forward their social claims.

Before further detailing these three dynamics in the light of the

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<sup>4</sup> Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a militant organisation, was established for the propagation/diffusion of Hindutva ('Hinduness'). The aim of the organisation is to build a new (and strong) Hindu people/nation. Its members get paramilitary training. The RSS is the real core of the other organisations that together form the Sangh Parivar, which designates the entire body of the organisations formed around the RSS. Among these, one is a political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and another is a religious organisation, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP).

contributions presented by our research team, we will carry out a brief overview of some ethnographic works on Hindutva. These works will allow at identifying different modalities of Hindutva entrenchment in local society, along with some of the main questions they have raised. Without at all attempting to be exhaustive, we will consider here only those studies that have particularly insisted on the existence of non-ideological and ambiguous zones of Hindutva's impact in local society along with some of the main questions they have raised.

## **Hindutva in the Locality**

Authors working on Hindutva realised quite early on the need to study this movement not just in relation to political and electoral success (or failure) of the BJP but to the way Hindutva ideas have become acceptable among large strata of the population. Until the late 1990s, however, Hindutva studies were mainly concerned with analysing the ideological and emotional messages conveyed by the more ideological and anti-Muslim forms of the movement. Though some of these works also investigate the historical roots of the movement, the general trend at this period, as noted by Simpson, is to study Hindutva in its urban form, and in some cases 'by reifying and homogenising it (Simpson 2004).

In most studies, emphasis has been laid on the Hindutva iconographic and narrative 'construction' or 'invention' of mythical, cultural and ritual themes which are part of the more 'official' or conventional Hindutva ideology. Examples are the use of maps or ritual processions highlighting the Hindu character of the Indian nation (Assayag 1997, 2001; Davis 1996), the transformation of gods' iconography in posters or in propaganda videos (Brosius 2005; Kapur 1993; Lutgendorf 1995; Pinney 2004; Smith 1995) or the rewriting of history in school textbooks stressing the opposition between 'Hindu' to the Muslim Otherness (SAHMAT 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Sundar 2004; Thapar 1999).

Other studies have focused less on the Hindutva general programme and more on grass-roots activities of Hindu mobilisation in its local and regional dynamics (Copley 2003; Hansen 1996; Zavos et al. 2004). In anthropology, one aspect which has been highlighted by these regionalised studies is the way local Hindutva organisations try to become accepted in a place by starting the local promotion of specific festivals. Christopher Fuller's study on Vinayaka Chaturthi in Tamil Nadu (2001) shows, for example, how due to the increasingly important role the Hindu nationalist holds in the public space within this state, the festival — which was previously performed at the local and family level — has been promoted to

a national festival celebrated on a grand scale and aimed at disseminating Hindutva ideology (ibid.). According to the author, this promotion has played a significant part in helping to normalise Hindu nationalism within Tamil Nadu, so that Hindutva ideas can ‘percolate into the common sense of the people’ (ibid.: 134). Yet, as the author notes, it would be misleading to think that all those who participate in it and look favourably upon Hindu revivalism, are ideologically committed (ibid.).

While Vinayaka Chaturthi shows a politicisation of what was previously a private festival, James G. Lochfeld’s study of the Kumbha Mela (2004) is a case where Hindutva has adopted a local religious practice which, in the past, had already proved its pertinence in legitimating political power. This festival, which in the early 20th century served to compete with the colonial government, was used in the mid-1980s by the VHP and other Hindutva organisations ‘as a stage to contest the secular government running the festival’ (ibid.: 116). Although, as the author points out, VHP people claim that the Kumbha Mela is their own, most pilgrims undertaking the pilgrimage do not necessarily sympathise with Hindutva ideology.

This political versatility of public spaces where Hindutva may be found to interact has also been put forward by Kaur (2003) in relation to the Ganapati festival in Maharashtra. This festival also has an anti-colonial past, which since the 19th century has led to the emergence of martial representations of Ganapati fighting against a demoniacal representation of the ‘outsider’. The author highlights how, even when the public space of the festival later fell under Shiv Sena’s control, it continued to be used by different political forces and by various interest groups, which could counteract and contest the Hindu nationalist discourse. Even today, when around two-thirds of festival committees are run by the Shiv Sena, devotees take part in the festival with no overt political affiliation, so that this ‘multifaceted’ festival is neither completely controlled by religious nationalists nor totally dominated by communal politics (ibid.: 18).

A further aspect put forward by some authors is the way in which Hindutva local activities may converge with different and more neutral forms of social action in order to conquer new loyalties among different strata of the local population. One example is in the realm of social services (*seva*) which has proved to be a successful way of laying local roots and of facilitating an ‘approach to families whose political culture is not Hindu nationalist’ (Jaffrelot 2005b: 221). In some cases, the RSS or some of its Hindutva leaders officially show personal sympathy for these kinds of religious movements which, on their own, may not be concerned with Hindutva national objectives. One example is the case of the modern sect of the Amritanandamayi. During the festivities to celebrate the Mata’s 50th birthday, L. K. Advani publicly manifested his sympathy towards her by

offering her a garland of roses and touching her feet in front of thousands of devotees.<sup>5</sup> However, as Warriar (2003) reports in her work on the sect, Mata devotees whom she met on the field were not that concerned about Hindutva and did not show much enthusiasm when questioned on the topic. The author also shows how the devotees' intensive provision of *seva* is due not so much to their personal motivations but to their love of and devotion to the Mata — which makes the notion of *seva*, in their case, quite different from the RSS's 'welfare strategy'. Nevertheless, the similarities between the two activities — although only apparent<sup>6</sup> — may create a blurred area (or in some cases a bridge) between the two activities.

Another example of this possible overlapping has been studied by Alter (1994) in his analysis of the relationship between Hindu nationalism and paramilitary lathi drills, and Indian wrestling exercises. The author notes that although from a superficial point of view it would be easy to confuse these two forms of 'regimented training' and to see them as part and parcel of the same ideology, they are in many ways fundamentally different (ibid.: 559). As the author points out, the confusion is also amplified by the fact that some Hindu fundamentalists have tried to appropriate wrestling for their own militant discourse.

A similar but reversed movement emerges in the case studied by Véronique Bénéï (2001) in relation to the possible interplay between Hindu and Indian nationalism in Maharashtra schools. According to the author, what is passed on in these schools is not isolated 'nationalist propaganda' but 'a nationalism that is totally integrated into school life and knowledge'. It then becomes 'banal nationalism' (ibid.: 212). This makes any study at the grassroots level difficult since, as the author notes, 'many people — even those *not* belonging to the Hindu fold — conceive of Indian culture and the Indian nation as being essentially Hindu, without this conception *necessarily* being accompanied by any communalist claim or politically militant Hindu identity' (ibid.). Similarly, Peggy Froerer (2007) notes how 'more routinised aspects of Hindu nationalism are being inculcated in government and other non-RSS educational institutions'. In her study in central India, she also shows how, by contrast, children attending Shishu

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. 'Advani Inaugurates Amritanandamayi's Birthday Celebrations', <http://in.rediff.com/news/2003/sep/24amma2.htm>. Accessed 21 December 2010.

<sup>6</sup> In this respect, it should be said that although it may be misleading to identify the RSS *seva* with the *seva* of religious movements, the post-Independence RSS model of welfare, as Berckerlegge notes, 'was elaborated on the basis of symbols and a concept that would be meaningful to those already familiar with neo-Hindu philosophies of service' (2004: 130).

Mandir are motivated more by the prospect of achieving success in their education than by the idea of creating a Hindu nation.

Another issue which emerges from these regional studies is that Hindutva's relations with a specific class, caste or religious movement are not univocal and may vary according to regional political and cultural contexts. Staffan Lindberg's study (1995) shows, for example, how farmers' movements in Punjab, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh display great variations in their response to the Hindu nationalist movement, which goes from identification, via various kinds of accommodation, to clear-cut confrontation. The author notes how, from an ideological point of view, although any compromise between the farmers' movements and Hindu nationalism would be unexpected or unlikely, on a practical level their possible interaction depends on a multitude of factors, such as the cultural origins of the farmers' movements, negotiation between the different groups, and local leaders' political alliances.<sup>7</sup> These works highlight the need to study how Hindutva may affect social, religious and intellectual milieus where its institutional presence is relatively soft. This is in keeping with David Ludden's suggestion that research on Hindutva needs to focus not only on the 'Sangh Parivar' but also on 'everyday environs that imbue Hindutva with diffuse meaning and substance' (Ludden [1996] 2005).

### **Hindutva Entanglements**

One methodological difficulty in studying Hindutva's cultural impact on local society is to discern what may be identified as Hindutva from overlapping cultural trends which either preceded it or partake of more global and similar cultural trends. Two of the issues immediately associated nowadays with the Hindutva programme — the anti-Muslim feelings and the homogenisation of cultural diversity — are not in fact specific to Hindutva. Today the Sangh Parivar prints its own mark, style and purposes on these issues, but it has not been substantially innovative in the matter.

With regard to the first issue, some historians have recently shown that the perception of a Muslim 'otherness', and even their 'demonisation' goes back much further than colonisation (cf. Pandey 1990; Pollock 1993). As Talbot (1995) points out, however, this does not mean to say that a pre-colonial existence of Hindu and Muslim identities and confrontations

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<sup>7</sup> On this topic see also Michelutti (2008).

implied a unified religious 'Hindu' consciousness, such is the case in the current Hindu nationalist view.

Similarly, the efforts to homogenise Hindu cults and practices and to reform those considered immoral or primitive are not new. As Antony Copley (2003) argues, this attitude is also part of an older and larger movement that aimed at reforming social and ritual practices that were not in keeping with the high castes' orthopraxy.<sup>8</sup> It is a well-established movement, dating back to the 19th century, which brought about a reduction in particularisms and which itself took place in the frame of broader changes in society. For instance, the Lalbegi ritual in a community of Dalits, the Chuhras, which combined elements of Sufism and Hinduism, was replaced by the worship of Sant Valmiki thanks to the efforts of an Arya Samaj activist in the 1930s (Jaffrelot 1996; Jaoul in this volume; Prashad 2000).

These efforts toward homogenisation could also have had a nationalistic (although not Hindutva) dimension. Ramaswamy (1999) points out how advocates of the Sanskrit Commission appointed by the Government of India up until 1956, echoed 'what many a (Hindu) nationalist had claimed for Hinduism in late colonial India' (Ramaswamy op. cit.: 374). The Commission defended the idea, already anticipated by the orientalisation of education under colonial rule, that since Sanskrit had always projected a pan-Indian image it would have been likely to consolidate the country's territorial unity. One of the members of the Commission also guaranteed that 'some of the sciences, in their origins in the West, had their roots in or were intimately connected with Sanskrit', a formulation which today has a very strong Hindutva connotation (Ramaswamy 1999: 371; see also Gould 2005). Similar observations may be made by referring to a more previous period. As Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (1995) suggest, using Srinivas terminology, centripetal Sanskritising tendencies were prominent in the past and were promoted to various ends by rajas and feudal landlords, and later by colonial ethnography and historiography (Dalmia and von Stietencron op. cit.: 22). Similarly Diana Eck (1999), in her study on places of pilgrimage and in what she calls an 'imaginary landscape' or a 'living geography',<sup>9</sup> analyses the process of localising what is considered to belong to a pan-Indian tradition. According to her, there is a 'lack of singularity' of sacred places in India, as shown by the fact that all the rivers can be assimilated to the Ganges and all the mountains to the

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Frykenberg (1988); Gold (1991); Thapar (1999).

<sup>9</sup> This consists in producing, duplicating or multiplying ad infinitum the places where the story of Indian gods or heroes is considered to have taken place (Eck 1999).

Himalayas. She demonstrates how even the Pandavas's exile in the jungle (or Rama's exile) is ascribed to a multiplicity of localities, functioning as a meta-narration to which many regional or tribal traditions have subscribed. She characterises this tendency as a form of 'geographical sanskritisation', where local places or local gods are 'attached' to epics and to Sanskrit cosmological stories. Eck points out how this attitude has also been used in the construction of an indigenous Hindu sense of nationhood (and nowadays of Hindu nationalism), and how it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two trends Eck (op. cit.: 27).<sup>10</sup>

The existence of Hindutva-like themes in previous processes of pan-Indianisation of specific geographical regions also emerges from what Antje Linkenbach (2002) has written about recent regional historiographies in the Garhwal and Kumaon Himalayan region. One of the examples he takes is the work of Ram Bhadur, a retired surgeon from Garhwal, who had been in the British Army and whose book (1916) on the history and culture of Garhwal set out to commemorate 100 years of British rule in this region. His praise of British rule in Garhwal, which he represents as Ram Raj, coexists with his aim of showing the 'ancient greatness of the country', its pan-Indian significance and of exposing the links between the region and the country. While emphasising the particularity of the region and its 'sacredness', his main attempt is to present Garhwal not as a separate marginal place in the remote Himalayan hills but as a religious centre, the cradle of Aryan and Hindu culture and civilisation (ibid.). Today these themes lie at the heart of Hindutva regional historiography and national rhetoric and, as Linkenbach notes, it is only by taking into account other important assumptions in the book (such as the absence of any anti-colonial feelings and references to the outside origin of Aryan culture) that divergences clearly come to light. A similar case will be discussed regarding Himachal Pradesh's historiography in one of the contributions (see Berti in this volume), where Hindutva theory on Aryan

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<sup>10</sup> A. M. Shah (2005), taking a more explicit stance with regard to the Srinivas's concept of Sanskritisation, has more recently discussed the multiple sources of Sanskritisation which are simultaneously found at the village level. He stresses the importance of not reducing this term to the cultural emulation of higher castes by lower castes (or tribes) in the caste hierarchy, and the fact that Srinivas himself considers Sanskritisation as a many-sided cultural process, not necessarily connected with the caste system. Among the many 'Sanskritisation agencies' he mentions how sanyasis and sadhus, anti-untouchability laws, the press, television, the demand for Hinduism from abroad, have led 'to greater sanskritisation of society as a whole, including the dalits and the adivasis' (op. cit.: 243).

autochthony is found in exactly the same terms among writers who are explicitly against what they themselves define as the Hindutva saffronisation of History.

Not only has Hindutva to be seen in the light of a long-standing cultural process in India, but also by taking into account similar processes occurring in different parts of the world. This will help to avoid considering some crucial points of the Hindutva rhetoric as a merely Indian/Hindutva cultural process, while at the same time it will contribute to achieving a better understanding of its specificity. For example, the concept, described by Eck and Linkenbach, of ascribing a pan-Indian significance to a regional place may be compared to what Axel Harneit-Seivers (2002: 15) defines as a way for postcolonial historiography to 'transcend the local', placing it within a broader framework. Indeed, in a collective volume on what the author calls 'new local historiographies' in Africa and South Asia, he shows how in both cases the 'new local historians'<sup>11</sup> try to construct a homogenous community not only by defining it in opposition to groups in the immediate neighbourhoods, but also by searching for prestigious origins (ibid.). Although local African historians look for prestige in distant, non-autochthonous places (in the Middle East, in Egypt or in Israel) in the cases reported in Harneit-Seivers's volume, we also find some African writers today who — like the Hindutva discourse on Harappa and Mohenjodaro — want to show the 'black African origin' of Egyptian civilisation (Falola [2001] 2004: 224). Similarly, the insistence demonstrated by Hindutva writers in denouncing the West for deforming national history and their appeal for an indigenous historiography apt at producing a feeling of national unity, is found in exactly the same terms in the African nationalistic discourse (op. cit.: Ch. 6).

History-writing and the use of archaeology to support the claim to a prestigious past is indeed another aspect which Hindutva shares with both Western and other post-colonial societies. Scholars have shown this to be directly linked to the emergence of nation-states (Thiesse 2001). What has particularly been put forward recently is not only the relationship between archaeology and nationalism — the way archaeologists in the 19th and 20th centuries helped underwrite many nationalist programmes (Anderson 1991:

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<sup>11</sup> With this expression, Axel Harneit-Seivers (2002: 3) refers to members of the local educated elite who have a 'strong *biographical connection* to the locality or community they deal with; most of them are *non-professional* historians operating outside of academia'.

163–85) — but also how archaeological data is manipulated for nationalist and especially religious nationalist purposes (Dever 1998; Diaz-Andreu and Champion 1996; Kohl and Fawcett 1995).

These ‘techniques for the production of locality’ (Appadurai 1996: 182) are not only present in post-colonial societies or ‘in situations where the older sense of the local community has become problematic’ (Harneit-Severs 2002: 13). Alban Bensa (2001) reports on a similar process in French rural areas where the recently developed ‘history mania’ is also associated with a ‘redefinition and valorisation of places’ and with the transformation of these places into ‘remarkable sites’. As Bensa wrote, ‘From one corner of the country to the other, people are forever adopting age-old traditions, ancestries and roots, which ensure the thriving continuity of regions, towns or villages with ancient and glorious times’ (op. cit.: 1; my translation). Daniel Fabre also remarks how the people of the small French village of Minot claim to descend from the Gauls and support their claim with archaeological evidence (Fabre, op. cit.). The recourse to archaeology, history and science to prove the pan-Indian character of a regional caste or ‘ethnic’ identity is a common attitude today found in different regions of India (cfr. Michelutti and Berti in this volume).

The similarities that some elements of Hindutva ideology have with the cultural dynamics which either precede this movement or which are part of more global and contemporary contexts of transformations must be considered if we wish to study Hindutva’s cultural impact at the local level. Indeed, as soon as we move away from the more ideological and aggressive forms of the movement and conduct through investigations in the field, we often find a very complicated and entangled mix of similar yet not identical individual attitudes which are difficult yet essential to identify.

The following section lays out an overview of the contributions to the volume, which have been organised according to three different dynamics they reveal in relation to Hindutva entrenchment — mediation, convergence and resistance. However, some contributions will present more blurred situations where the dynamics exposed in these three sections may coexist and overlap.

## **Hindutva and Local Mediators**

The first dynamic focuses on cases where the initial move comes from RSS-affiliated organisations. Indeed, in order to implement their ideological programme, RSS cadres have increased the number of their affiliates to

cover specific cultural domains, social milieus or interest groups. Many of their branches have been set up at the regional, district or village level in an attempt to secure a local network. The leaders of these organisations, who often belong to the RSS, elaborate their discourse in relation to a specific cultural or artistic programme.

The effort of Hindutva organisations to entrench their programme in local society is not specific to Hindutva, but is common to other extreme nationalist movements. To take just one example, the French radical right-wing party, the *Front national*, has been trying since the 1980s to develop a 'wide network of satellite organisations and of peripheral circles of mobilisation' in order to promote new forms of sociability and to increase the visibility of the movement (Martin *et al.* 1999: 170, my translation). However, contrary to the Sangh Parivar, the *Front national's* social mobilisation is more the outcome of an individual initiative rather than a strategy conceived at central level, and it has therefore not succeeded in making inroads in French culture and creating the 'front society' it hopes to achieve (op. cit.: 180). An opposite dynamic seems to be at work for the Sangh Parivar, where a highly centralised modus operandi is often strategically dissimulated to 'attract[ing] in its new members who do not adhere to its ideology but may join one of its affiliates without any problem' (Jaffrelot 2005a: 11).<sup>12</sup>

The present volume begins by developing this point in the light of four ethnographic cases taken from different regions and milieus. These cases show different ways in which Hindutva organisations have enacted their programme at the regional level by the mediation of people who are not necessarily committed to the Hindutva ideology.

The first three chapters investigate how the Hindutva discourse on regional culture partly merges into the discourse on cultural heritage which the post-independence politicians sponsored with the help of local folklorists in order to promote a regional identity while instilling the awareness of national unity. The activity that Hindutva cultural organisations carry out today throughout the country has to somehow adapt

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<sup>12</sup> One recent example of the necessity to keep this 'constellation' unified, along with the need to mobilise non-committed people, is the BJP plan to adopt Obama's campaign by adding IP capabilities in its Unified Messaging Platform. Over the last few months, a small team of political strategists, computer specialists and management graduates in New Delhi has been studying Obama's speeches and slogans, website, campus outreach and rhetoric of change. <http://www.watblog.com/2008/06/11/from-hindutva-to-technology-bjp-surely-has-come-a-long-way/>. Accessed 21 December 2010.

its approach and methodology to the specific form that this discourse on heritage assumes in each state.

Guillebaud's contribution shows how in Kerala Malayali folklorists, sympathising with Marxists in the region, have been collaborating with the communist government since the 1950s in studying, recording and publishing works about Kerala history, arts and literature. From a non-Brahmin milieu, these folklorists have been more concerned with valorising a 'Dravidian culture' than with showing the cultural belonging of Malayali artistic and literary traditions to the 'Sanskrit-pan-Indian' tradition (which was never really challenged). The prolific activity of this intellectual milieu has not prevented Hindutva organisations dedicated to the arts and literature from finding a place in this specific cultural field. The author shows, however, that contrary to Marxist-oriented Malayali folklorists who are in regular contact with folk artists and who even deal with all the practical and preparatory aspects of their performance, Hindutva leaders are completely cut off from this folk milieu, and rely on what has already been collected and documented by leftist folklorists for their study. Moreover, while Malayali folklorists have been concerned with putting forward the specificity of regional folklore without bothering about linking it to national unity, Hindutva leaders have developed a specific theory and vocabulary for combining, unifying and simplifying classical and folk forms of art, further emphasising the universal, spiritual dimension that arts are supposed to convey rather than the expressive variations and aesthetic diversity of the performance itself.

Things went differently in Himachal Pradesh, as observed by Daniela Berti in Chapter 2. Here, the lack of a classical artistic or literary production along with the geographical remoteness of the Himalayan state prompted post-Independence politicians to constantly recall the place that the Himalayas occupy in Sanskrit texts and to culturally link the region to the rest of the country. Consequently, Congress-oriented folklorists of the post-colonial period also tried, as Hindutva leaders do today, to show the pan-Indian substratum of the Himachali culture. Berti focuses on the way a Hindutva organisation is implementing a programme to collect stories and ritual practices related to local village deities. In this region, the absence of any large-scale research programme on the study of regional culture has lent more space to a Hindutva organisation to impose their presence in the intellectual milieu. This Hindutva organisation's approach to regional culture then appears to move away from previous Himachal folk studies and to rely on a well detailed fieldwork programme whose aim is also to involve and instruct village people in small-scale data collection. The author shows how, although the data collected are simply considered rough material in the eyes of the organisation's central leaders and will be used

later by specialists to ‘decode’ a more homogenous Hinduism from behind the village specificities, the Hindutva organisation becomes the promoter of a project whose aim is to put cultural diversity into writing. Paradoxically, and contrary to the Kerala context, in Himachal Pradesh the very credibility of the Hindutva organisation relies on its field-oriented approach, which is appreciated and recognised even among intellectuals who are not sympathisers.

A yet more different scenario of Hindutva encroachment on the former process of building a regional/national heritage is described in Chapter 3 by Pralay Kanungo in relation to Arunachal Pradesh. From the 1960s onwards, the leader of the tribal communities of Adi and Nyishi started a process of institutionalisation and uniformisation of faith, aimed at constructing an Arunachal-Hindu cultural identity. The author interprets this process partly as a reaction to Christian activity in the area, which was negatively perceived by Adi and Nyishi intellectuals even before Hindutva organisations appeared in the region. The author also discusses how one of the crucial figures of the Arunachal Pradesh state apparatus mobilised local leaders to take on Christianity and encouraged RSS leaders to open schools and other cultural institutions in Arunachal Pradesh. In turn, these Hindutva institutions established alliances with local intellectuals and collaborated with them in the process of institutionalising and unifying regional cults. One example analysed by Kanungo is the cult of Donyipolo, which was already regarded as an icon of regional identity first by Adi intellectuals, then later by the RSS. This example shows how, in Arunachal Pradesh, Hindutva leaders have disseminated their ideology by strengthening the ongoing local processes of regional cultural unification instead of following the more conventional Hindutva route.

Another context where Hindutva had to adjust to a well-established (though much more compatible) form of regionalism, is presented in Chapter 4, with Djallal G. Heuzé’s study on the Shiv Sena’s influence over youth clubs in Bombay. Differently from the rural/tribal context of Himachal and Arunachal, where Hindutva organisations needed to create centres of interests to convey people in a common public space, in the big urban towns of Maharashtra there were already numbers of meeting points where the Hindutva influence could embed. From the perspective of political sociology, Heuzé analyses the many types of association these clubs have set up alongside Shiv Sena. Some of them are run entirely by Shiv Sainiks, while others are more autonomous. The author analyses the cultural and historical context which led to the emergence of these forms of popular association and the impact they have on Shiv Sena milieus. He highlights the differences but also the links between working-class and lower middle-class associations (*mandal*), and middle-classes clubs. He

shows how clubs, focusing more on multiple activities (culture, sport, religion, social services) are able to influence different kinds of set-ups independently of political views. Here clubs emerge as bridge-like structures whereby the Shiv Sena, on the one hand, tries to infiltrate clubs with its own emblems and values and, on the other hand, also ends up influenced by these clubs.

Whether or not the cultural programme implemented at the local level by the Hindutva organisations comply with the national Hindutva ideology, the main impetus behind it comes from the highest RSS spheres, from leaders and organisations which strategically make use of local people in order to carry through their own ideological programme.

### **Convergence, Gurus and Sects**

The following set of four chapters focuses on groups or movements which are not directly related to the RSS network, yet whose members may have developed a similar discourse or point of view. Contrary to the scenario evoked above, the sometimes very strong affinities between these people's discourse and Hindutva-based views are not the result of a Hindutva-driven strategy and sometimes appears to be purely circumstantial. The chapters refer to cases where people operate in a more or less organised way, in religious groups or associations, which also often have a spiritualistic dimension. The main feature of this type of association is the existence of a guru or a charismatic figure endowed with federative qualities (who may himself sometimes have a Hindutva link) and who may end up sharing some personal sympathies with the Hindutva programme. It is not so much a structured bureaucratic and administrative organisation which renders this federative figure effective, but rather a network of people in charge of particular activities (social services, yoga therapy, religious proselytism) who recognise themselves as bound to the figure of this guru. These organisations may take part in an affinity game with common Hindutva views (social services, an anti-Muslim discourse), which may occasionally create bridges with them. The possible leaning these milieus may show towards Hindutva is above all due to the fact that in the past the guru of these organisations may have had a privileged link with the Hindu right wing and may encourage what he presents as a traditionalist vision.

This is what emerges from the case described by Anne-Cécile Hoyez (Chapter 5) regarding a yoga therapy centre in Pune called Kabir Baug. The founder of this centre, 'Dr Karandikar', proposes a very personal vision of yoga which, though defined as 'traditional' as opposed to 'Westernised', is very much based on medical therapy, relying on a pseudoscientific discourse on cellular medicine and on the use of sophisticated machines. He also presents himself as a guru, seeking national and international

recognition, although paradoxically he organises his centre around a very regional and local system of recruitment. His profile would not be very different from many other figures we may find in contemporary India had he not had long-standing personal links with the RSS. This personal affiliation with the RSS is in no way apparent to the members of the centre, nor does the RSS particularly try to impose its authority on the centre. The centre, therefore, seems no more Hindutva-oriented than any other centre, though many of Karandikar's ideas about yoga and tradition closely converge with the general Hindutva rhetoric. What the case demonstrates is that the close tie between Karandikar and the RSS, though conjectural or circumstantial, may lead to possible developments in that direction. The next two chapters illustrate how some Hindutva discourses or stereotypes and various dynamics of religious or cultural identity overlap each other. However, differently from the cases presented in the first section, these identitarian mechanisms are not those forged by local politicians and intellectual for the construction of regional states but are used to define religious groups boundaries.

In Chapter 6, Gerard Toffin studies the Krishna Pranâmîs sect in India and Nepal and shows how the Pranâmîs, from being considered by upper-caste Hindus as close to the Muslims, undertook important transformations in their practices and religious attitudes in the second half of the 20th century in order to adhere to a more conventional form of Hinduism. The author also highlights how although the Pranamîs' precepts and values today are fully consistent with those of Hindutva organisations, the members of this sect belong to very different political parties, ranging from the Hindu right wing to communists and even Maoists. He argues that the sect's current communalist components, and above all their anti-Muslim and anti-Christian tendencies, do not have quite the same connotations as in the Hindutva discourse, since they are more exclusively concerned with defying and affirming the identity of the group by opposing its boundaries with other similar but rival sectarian groups.

A similar shift from syncretism versus Hinduisation may be observed in the case described by Frédérique Pagani (Chapter 7). This concerns a Sindhi benevolent association, the Jeev Sewa Sansthan (the Institute for the Service of Life) in Bairagarh, a Sindhi township near Bhopal. Like other contemporary guru-headed movements, the Jeev Sewa Sansthan is a combination of a search for a Sindhi (Hindu) identity, a strong belief in a nation-building mission, along with a mild form of universalism (which also enables the organisation to be registered as a charitable trust). It also joins the ranks of other movements in associating different areas like education, health, social service and moral preaching. However, contrary to more orthodox sectarian affiliations, this kind of movement allows a more fl

exible participation since it relies on individual networks rather than a homogenous bureaucratic organisation. Consequently, the association may attract people from very different backgrounds, some of whom may be Hindutva sympathisers without necessarily being activists.

The author also analyses the progressive redefinition of the association (and of Sindhi in Bhopal) towards a Hindu-Gujarat identity given their post-Partition migration from Pakistan to India. Indeed, in such kinds of setup, which lie outside a strictly orthodox milieu, there is nothing to indicate which direction the association will take over time, both as a result of a new leadership and/or of changes in the specific political and social context in which the sect operates.

A more contrasting and ambiguous case in which Hindutva-like stereotypes are adopted for affirming a sectarian identity emerges in the case studied by Raphaël Voix (Chapter 8) of the Bharata Sevasramasanga 'Community of Service to India', founded in Bengal at the beginning of the 19th century. The author demonstrates how, while provocative, masculine anti-Muslim speeches may appear to have brought BSS close to Hindi-Hindu nationalism, they were also attempting to promote a Bengali, linguistic and regional, variety of macho Hinduism. Paradoxically, the West Bengali secularist government, as well as central government, was backing the sect's ritual and social activities by making public donations and even entrusting the sect with the running of public health projects in remote areas. The author shows also how the extent to which BSS's links and affinity with Hindutva are or not publicly asserted by their members depends on the political context of the state. As in the case of the Pranâmis studied by Toffin, it is important here to consider the specific political context in which the sect has developed in order to assess its Hindutva commitment.

### **Entrenchment amidst Resistance**

A third kind of Hindutva entrenchment which will be considered here occurs within a context of resistance. Contrary to the previous section, where the connection with Hindutva involves groups or milieus which are not overtly hostile to Hindutva views, this last section shows cases where people who consciously oppose militant Hinduism — either individually or in a well organised and activist way — may in fact paradoxically, or inadvertently, adopt some aspects of its rhetoric in order to put forward their social claims.

This trend can also be observed in different regional milieus, and partly

recalls the logic of 'strategic mimetism' which refers to the attitude of reform movements to assimilate certain cultural traits and practices of the Other in order to better resist him (Jaffrelot 1992).

This also takes Hindutva cultural entrenchment a little further than the idea of its normalisation in an everyday context, presenting it as an effective cultural tool which may be adopted to support opposing political struggles and various identity claims. The similarities between the arguments put forward by these movements and those propagated by Hindutva organisations may indeed be the direct outcome of the latter's efforts to take root in these different milieus.

This is the case with Dalit movements. Not only do they refuse to be involved in Hindutva discourses, they even contest the idea of being identified as Hindu. Nevertheless, this does not prevent them from opting for other forms of cultural or religious standardisation, since they actually promote the 'Dalitisation' of Indian society as opposed to 'Hinduisation' — Hinduisation and Brahminisation are generally lumped together (Ilaiah 1996). The case of the Dalit opposition to the Hindutva organisation for 'social service', Seva Bharti, is even more significant in this perspective. Indeed, Seva Bharti's attempts to take root among Dalits face opposition by Dalit militants. Yet, at the same time, its action leads Dalit militants to take up a position where arguments are expressed in terms of 'race' (a favourite Hindutva issue) and 'culture', while economic and political analyses are overlooked.

The similarity of cultural concepts and arguments used by the two opposite groups in representing their respective identity has been recently put forwarded by Rohit Chopra (2006) in his work on Dalit and Hindu nationalist websites. The author shows how both types of online discourses let emerge a new mode of representing collective identity, which he calls 'global primordiality', both groups presenting their respective history in a historical narrative frame of domination and resistance (Hindu nationalists by Muslims and Dalits by Brahmins) and each asserting that Dalits/Hindus are ur-communities of the subcontinent and the original inhabitants of the Indus Valley.

In Chapter 9, Lucia Michelutti contributes to these discussions by studying the contemporary transformations taking place amongst pastoral low castes in the town of Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. These pastoral castes are undergoing a process of social and cultural fusion under a Yadav label. Today, the cultural construction of this 'Yadavisation' dating back to the end of the 19th century, presents a number of affinities with the Hindutva discourse though it is adapted to defending a Yadava identity: the importance attributed to the re-establishment of a 'pure' Yadava race; the

search for an ancient prestigious historical origin and for a Yadava-Aryan pedigree; the necessity to prove their arguments with ‘historical facts’ and to provide a scientific methodology of history-writing. This kind of issues, which today has an immediate Hindutva connotation, is not only to be seen as a sort of ‘Yadava version’ of Hindutva discourse. The author demonstrates how they are part of a wider process of Yadava ethnicisation and social mobility which goes back to the British period and to Hindu reformers and which, even in the contemporary period is influenced by different factors, such as the broader process of local printing and the formation of a local intellectual milieu.

The same kind of dynamics has been put forward by Nicolas Jaoul’s chapter on Valmiki in Kanpur, a main industrial centre in Uttar Pradesh. The author shows how the rhetoric of Ambedkarite leaders, although violently opposed to Hindutva, presents several parallels with it. Some of these leaders have even created propaganda organisations very similar to the RSS *shakhas*, emphasising the same ideals of self-improvement and physical strength. He also put forward how the idea of unifying different low-caste groups under a Ramayan/Sanskrit label was not a Hindutva monopoly but has been fuelled over the course of time by political groups opposed to Hindutva. For Congress politicians, this identification strategy was aimed at keeping the ‘sweepers’ dissociated from the Dalit emancipation movement and avoid possible strikes by the sanitation labour. Even the Ambedkarite leaders, contrary to any Brahminical identification, encouraged their candidates to rely on their Valmiki name to fight the election. In spite of changing their name because of its Sanskrit/Brahminical connotation, Ambedkarist leaders ended up to find some caste relation between Valmiki and Ambedkar to such a degree that Ambedkar is now said to be a Valmiki in popular discourse.

The volume ends with Christine Moliner’s study on Hindutva activities in the Sikh-majority state of Punjab (Chapter 10). The author analyses how both Hindutva and Sikh organisations are engaged in a debate on the Sikh identity and how this debate is reminiscent of the late 19th century’s Arya Samaj–Singh Sabha controversy. She also considers how Hindutva activities in Punjab may be taken by some Sikh groups as a way of consolidating the Sikh identity.

Most of the articles presented in this volume testify to a sort of reconfiguration of a general process that is taking place in different milieus within Indian society, particularly outside orthodox circles. This concerns the relationship to rituals and deities, the definition of identities, the relationship to history and to regional culture which may or may not be a direct outcome of Hindutva, but which progressively or through different

elements appear likely to mark this kind of affiliation. Yet, what also emerges from all these ethnographic studies is the ambiguous interplay between Hindutva and a 'national', 'Vedic', 'Hindu' or 'pan-Indian' aspiration, or merely local people's emotional attachment to their community, their language and their locality.

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