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## RITUAL AS CONFRONTATION: THE AYODHYA CONFLICT<sup>1</sup>

### *Summary*

On 6 December 1992, Hindu devotees of the god Ram destroyed the Babri mosque<sup>2</sup> in Ayodhya,<sup>3</sup> because it stood on a spot they venerated as *Ramjanmabhumi*, 'Ram's birthplace'. That mosque had been built there in 1528 by Babur Shah, founder of the Muslim Moghul empire, after a Hindu temple dedicated to Ram had allegedly been torn down.<sup>4</sup> This article deals with the ritual elements in the conflict over *Ramjanmabhumi* in Ayodhya. It was the focal point in the nation-wide troubled political relationships between the Hindu and the Muslim 'communities' and the central government of India in the last decade. I deal first with Ayodhya as the dense symbolic complex with a primarily cultural and religious quality as it developed in the past one thousand years. I will then describe it as an arena of political strife, at first of local importance only, but with a national impact in the past decade, when it was made the focus of a nation-wide struggle for power. These events and their background are described because they serve as the historical data on which to test the heuristic utility and analytical clarity of the concepts for the analysis of ritual in religiously plural situations developed in another chapter in this volume. Their application to the Ayodhya rituals of confrontation leads me to bring this study to a close with an anti-Durkheimian conclusion. It will show that the emphases on the integrative functions of ritual in anthropological theories and on ritual as standardised sequences of behaviour, must be complemented by theory that is able to account for the different kinds of ethnographic data presented in this chapter.

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### *Ayodhya as a ritual complex*

Ayodhya is a small, picturesque temple town<sup>5</sup> on the river Sarayu in the state of Uttar Pradesh in North India. It is an important Hindu centre of pilgrimage with some 3000 temples. At the height of the pilgrimage season, its floating population may be well over one million. As a place of devotion, it has evolved slowly since 'the early second millennium AD',<sup>6</sup> and rapidly in the last three centuries,<sup>7</sup> into a mul-

<sup>1</sup> I thank Dr. A. Nugteren and Drs. N. Bonouvrié for their help.

<sup>2</sup> It is termed 'Babar mosque' by Van der Veer in his publications. Babri mosque seems, however, the more current designation.

<sup>3</sup> Ayodhya is a suburb of Faizabad, a major town in Uttar Pradesh (the 'United Provinces') in the northern part of India.

<sup>4</sup> That such a temple existed is asserted by Bakker (1986, I: 44sq., 133sq.; II: 146sq.; 1991: 91) and others but disputed by Panikkar (1992: 107; 1993: 27-33), Srivastava (1993: 47-49), Bhan (1993) and found 'far from conclusive' by Champakalakshmi (1993: 232); cf. also Muralidharan 1992b; 1992c.

<sup>5</sup> Ayodhya has some 4360 houses and a resident population of 30,000 (Van der Veer 1989: 468-469).

<sup>6</sup> Thapar 1993: 155; cf. also Bakker 1984/1986, part I: 1-150

<sup>7</sup> See Bakker 1984/1986, p. I: 150-153; van der Veer 1985: 308; 1988: 34-42, *passim*; Thapar 1993: 153-156

ti-layered consonant complex of dense religious symbols,<sup>8</sup> which holds a strong appeal to Hindus of many walks of life, particularly in Northern India. This place of pilgrimage is, however, of special significance to Hindus of the high, or 'twice-born' (*dvija*), castes who support 'cultural' movements like the RRS,<sup>9</sup> and political parties like the BJP.<sup>10</sup> Both belong to the *Sangh parivar*, the 'family' [189] of RSS affiliated organisations<sup>11</sup> that oppose the secular constitution of India<sup>12</sup> and strive after a Hinduisation of Indian society. The RSS does this at the ideological level by training Hindu cadres, and the BJP by carrying the RSS goals into the political arena in order to wrench political power from the Congress Party, the traditional defender of the secular order as laid down in the constitution adopted in 1952.<sup>13</sup>

Ayodhya combines, in a way that is both complex and consonant, and full of different religious and political options, at least three distinct, interlocked complexes of symbols that may be used in ritual behaviour. It is firstly a major *tirtha* (place of pilgrimage). Secondly, it is the centre, in terms of sacred history and sacred space, of the cult of Ram, the most popular god of North India. And thirdly, it is the seat of the one of the largest Indian orders of *sadhus* (ascetics), the Ramanandis. That religious order is

<sup>8</sup> On cultures as constituted by dense 'consonant' symbolic complexes, cf. Douglas 1982<sup>3</sup>: 38, 64-71, 80-81, 149

<sup>9</sup> The *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, or 'National Volunteer Corps', was founded in September 1925 by the Maharashtra *brahmin* and medical doctor Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889-1940) at Nagpur at a time when a wave of violent Hindu-Muslim riots was sweeping across India (Andersen & Damle 1987: 26). It was launched during the *Dasara* festival in which Rama's victory over Ravana is celebrated. The RSS made its first public appearance in April 1926 at the *Ram-Navami* festival in honour of Ram's birthday in a village near Nagpur. The RSS was meant to remove what Hedgewar considered to be the root cause of British colonial rule over the Indian sub-continent, to wit the lack of national consciousness and cohesion among Hindus. It was to serve as a cadre of dedicated *pracharakas*, 'missionaries' – most of them celibate, as was Hedgewar himself –, and laymen with a militant Hindu national consciousness through political and martial training in *akharas*, 'gymnasias', 'castles', 'military camps', and devotion to the god Maruti (= Hanuman, Rama's general). They were utterly devoted to the regeneration, redefinition, and defence of the 'ancient Hindu nation' on the sub-continent of India and opposed the modern state of India (Embree 1994: 619-628, 631). In the pre-colonial past when Maharashtra *brahmins* cultivated a martial tradition as rulers and soldiers, *Akharas* had been prominent institutes for them. *Akharas* became popular again during the communal violence of the 1920s (Andersen & Damle 1987: 34-35). In 1992, when the RSS was banned after the destruction of the Babri mosque, the RSS had 35,000 *shakhas*, local units, and two and a half million active members (Ghimire & Pathak 1992: 51; Embree 1994: 649). Cf. also Gold 1991a: 533-535, 540-542, 546-549, 553-555, 559-563, 566-569, 571-583; 1991b; Embree 1994, esp. 635-642; Van der Veer 1994a: 655; Frykenberg 1994: 603

<sup>10</sup> The *Bharatiya Janata* ('Indian People's') Party was founded in April 1980, when the RSS affiliated *Jana Sangh* section seceded from the Janata Party. The Janata Party itself was a merger, in May 1977, of the *Jana Sangh*, the 'political arm' of the RSS, which it had founded in 1951, and some other parties (Andersen & Damle 1987: 8, n.5, 224-237). On the relationship of the *Jana Sangh* and the BJP to the RSS, cf. also Embree 1994: 637-638.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Andersen & Damle 1987: 2-4, 37-38, 96, 116-117, 143, 250; Hansen 1993; Jaffrelot 1993: 521-523. The *Sangh parivar* is said to consist of 38 organisations by Janssen (1989: 15). Others give even larger numbers. Its other most important affiliates, apart from the BJP, are the *Rastriya Sevika Samiti* (National Women's Volunteer Corps), its female branch, founded in 1936; the BMS, *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh*, its trade union, founded in 1955; the VHP, *Vishwa Hindu Parisad* (Hindu World Alliance), its religious organisation, founded in 1964; the *Bajrang Dal*, the RSS youth movement, formed in 1985 (Sridhar 1993: 17); the *Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad*, its student wing; the *Krishak Sangh*, its farmers' union; its *Hindu Jagran Mach*, its lawyers' association; an *Adivasi* ('Aboriginals') wing; etc. To the *Sangh parivar* also belong more than thirty newspapers, published in twelve languages, which interpret the news from RSS perspectives. Cf. also Pande 1992; Thakur 1993: 657; Embree 1994: 635-642, esp. 638-642; Frykenberg 1994: 603.

<sup>12</sup> On the secularism of the Congress Party and India's constitution, cf. Embree (1994: 633): 'The Indian usage of "secularism" does not mean rejection of the transcendental values of religion; on the contrary, there is an insistence that all religions are true and that all have an equally valid place within the nation'. It is precisely this constitutional guarantee of equality entitling all religions to 'an equally valid place' within the Indian state to which the *Sangh parivar* vehemently objects and causes it to oppose the Hindu 'nation' (*rashtra*) to the 'state' (*raj*) of India (Embree 1994: 619-620, 622-623, 629-635, 637, 643). For a more Western interpretation of Indian secularism, cf. Becke 1994: 3, 22-24. Cf. also Baird 1975 for a discussion of the provisions for freedom of religion in the Constitution of India and the problems the Supreme Court [of India] has had in applying them.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Hiebert 1982: 301. Chatterjee 1993a, 1993b; Chengappa 1993; Ghimire 1993; Shridhar 1993; Yechury 1993

composed of three very different, and each very loosely organised, groups of *sadhus*: the *tyagis*, or peripatetic ‘abandoners’; the *nagas*, or ‘naked’ warriors, who live in *akharas*, military camps and castles; and the *rasiks*, who are the ‘enjoyers of the bliss’ of serving the divine royal couple, Rama and Sita. They dwell in the temples they beautify for them.<sup>14</sup>

[190] As a *tirtha*, ‘ford’ or ‘crossing’, on the river Sarayu, Ayodhya is a place of pilgrimage (*tirtha*), primarily because for Hindus every *tirtha* represents, and presents, a connection between heaven and earth, life and death, and the living and their ancestors. A *tirtha* is believed to allow humans to ‘cross over’ to spiritual realities by the performance of *tirtha* rituals. One reason for such belief is that sacred rivers, like the Ganges and Sarayu, are viewed as having their origin in heaven.<sup>15</sup> Another is that, like all sacred rivers, the Sarayu is viewed as a goddess whose life-giving waters purify the believers of all kinds of impurity. Its banks are, therefore, also a most appropriate place for the cremation of corpses, for feeding the ancestors, and for the nightly rituals by which the recent dead are assisted in the crossing of *Vaitarani*, the river of death. As that river is said to stink of blood and bones, it is believed that the deceased can cross it only by holding on to the tail of the cow that guides them to the opposite shore.<sup>16</sup> Two groups of *pandas*,<sup>17</sup> or *tirthpurohits*, Brahman pilgrimage-priests, vie in Ayodhya, not without violence, for serving the ritual needs of the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims that annually arrive by train and other means of transport. They come to be set free from impurity, sin and sickness; to gain merit by ‘worshipping’ the river Sarayu and bathing in her; to cremate a corpse; to guide the dead across the river of death; or feed the ancestors.<sup>18</sup> They constitute what van der Veer calls the ‘brahmanical complex’ of Ayodhya.

But the pilgrim may also have travelled to ‘behold’ (*darshan*<sup>19</sup>) and worship Lord Rama in order to gain liberation for his soul by ardent devotion (*bhakti*) to him.<sup>20</sup> Van der Veer terms this the ‘spiritual complex’ of [191] Ayodhya. It causes the pilgrim to visit the many temples of Ayodhya and the *sadhus* who run them. He may also choose one of them as his *guru* and become either his lay disciple, or enter into one of the many Ramanandi communities in Ayodhya in order to practise the discipline of the ‘wandering’ (*tyagi*), wrestling (*naga*) or doting (*rasik*) devotee of Ram. That spiritual complex takes two main forms: that of the *nirguna* and the *saguna* devotion to Ram.<sup>21</sup> The first is the ‘advanced’, monistic *bhakti* mode which worships *Ram nirguna*, ‘Rama unqualified’ by conceiving him as the supreme,

<sup>14</sup> Burghart 1982: 362-363; see also Burghart 1983: 643-648; Van der Veer 1982; 1987; 1988: 66-182; 1989; on *nagas*, see also Lorenzen 1978; Bakker 1991: 85-89

<sup>15</sup> One myth tells how Shiva, moved by the penance and devotion of Bhagirath, induced Mother Ganges to descend to earth from a lake in heaven. In order to forestall the world being destroyed by her descent, he brought her down to earth by holding her in the coils of his matted hair. Another myth relates how Brahma moved Vishnu to tears of affection for him by worshipping him immediately after his (Brahma’s) birth from a lotus that had sprung from the navel of Vishnu. Brahma caught Vishnu’s tears in the hollow of his palm and treasured them for ages in a wooden vessel close to his heart until he granted them, as a reward for great devotion, to a son of Manu, the king of Ayodhya. It is believed that they now flow on earth as the river Sarayu (Van der Veer 1988: 2).

<sup>16</sup> Van der Veer 1985: 304-305; 1987: 285; 1988: 2-4

<sup>17</sup> From the Sanskrit word *pandita*, ‘he who has knowledge’, particularly of rituals and sacred texts. It is a common term of address for Brahmins.

<sup>18</sup> Van der Veer 1985; 1988: 79, 183-272; on *tirthayatra*, ‘pilgrimage’, see also Fuller 1992: 205-223

<sup>19</sup> In Hinduism, *darshan*, ‘beholding (a god)’, is a ‘sacramental’ act that is believed to be full of salvific effects in itself. It is believed that the god may be seen in either his statue, when it is worshipped in the temple or when it is carried in a procession through a town, or in a human form – e.g. an *avatar*, like Sai Baba of Putaparthi, or in one’s *guru*, or in a *brahmin*.

<sup>20</sup> In the *Skanda Purana*, Ayodhya is reckoned to be one of the seven places in which one may find liberation (*moksha*) for one’s soul (van der Veer 1985: 308).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Van der Veer 1988: 80-81

transcendent reality (*brahman*). It is believed that he may be beheld in that state by those who practise *jnana*, disciplined contemplation. It is also held that the essence of *Ram nirguna* is contained in his name, *Ram Nam*. Its constant repetition in the mantra *Ram Ramaya Namah*, ‘I bow to Ram’,<sup>22</sup> is believed to bring liberation,<sup>23</sup> for that mantra is regarded as the ‘phonic body’ of the Lord for the believer. The *tyagi* Ramanandi ascetics, who in particular practise this monistic form of *nirguna bhakti*, do not worship Ram in a statue – which presents him in one of his *saguna* forms – by *murti-puja* (‘worship of the form’), but in the shape of small face- and formless *shalagram*, black ammonite stones.<sup>24</sup> They carry these with them on their annual peripatetic tours, when they travel as ‘itinerant monasteries’<sup>25</sup> to the nine major Vaishnavite centres of pilgrimage in North India in order to take part in the major festivals there, some of which celebrate events in the lives of Rama and Sita.<sup>26</sup> Or they accommodate them in their temples in Ayodhya during their stays there, or have become resident there, as most *tyagi* communities have.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from devotion to *Ram nirguna*, the *tyagi* Ramanandi *sadhus* use another major complex of ritual symbols which centres on ashes (*vibhuti*) and fire. A candidate is incorporated into a *tyagijamat*, an itinerant group of *tyagis*, by his *tyagiguru* smearing ash into the palm of the left hand of the disciple and writing *Om* in it. Then he whispers the *guptmantra*, the secret mantra on which he must constantly meditate, into his ear and smears him all over with ashes. A *tyagi* applies ashes to his body each morning, taking them from a live fire. That fire is a dense symbol. It not only represents Brahman/Ram as ultimate reality; the god Agni, [192] who conveys sacrifices to the gods; and the Vedic fire-sacrifices, small and large, which they and Brahmans perform. But it also refers both to the hearths with burning fires which symbolise the state of householder; and the fire of the desires (*kama*) for procreation and wealth (*artha*) that go with that state, which the *tyagis* have renounced. *Tyagis* renounce that state and its passions by interiorising fire through ascetic practices. Building up *tapas*, ‘spiritual heat’, in themselves enables them, they believe, to be both *anagni*, ‘without fire’, and *alamgi*, ‘without fixed abode’, and to acquire the special powers (*siddhis*) which *tapas* is believed to bestow.<sup>28</sup>

The other major mode of *bhakti* to Rama, held to be of equal value by his devotees, is the ‘common’ way: the worship of *Ram saguna*, ‘Rama qualified’, in the ‘phenomenal’ forms (*murti*) in which he is believed to have appeared in the course of Hindu salvation history. It is the ardent devotion to Rama as an *avatar*, or ‘descent’ of the god Vishnu on earth,<sup>29</sup> as a god in heaven,<sup>30</sup> and as he reveals himself in the statues in the temples built to house him on earth. In the *Ramayana* Vishnu is said to have taken human

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Van der Veer 1988: 71, 81

<sup>23</sup> ‘To die with the name of Ram on your lips, as Mahatma Gandhi did, is the only way to reach salvation’, say *tyagi* Ramanandi ascetics (Van der Veer 1988: 94-95, 122-123).

<sup>24</sup> Van der Veer 1988: 94-95, 124, 285, note 9; Burghart 1982: 371

<sup>25</sup> Burghart 1982: 363

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Burghart 1982: 364-367

<sup>27</sup> Van der Veer 1988: 126-130; also 1982: 60-61, 69-70, 75

<sup>28</sup> Van der Veer 1982: 65; 1988: 94, 114-120, 126

<sup>29</sup> As recorded in the *Ramayana*, in the revised standard version of Valmiki (cf. Thapar 1993: 145-147), about Rama as *dharmaraja*, or ideal king, and in the *Ramcharitmanas*, ‘The Lake of the Deeds of Ram’, a version of the *Ramayana* in Hindi by Tulsidas (1532-1623) which became very popular in North India. The latter work formulated the doctrinal basis for the *bhakti* cults of Ram in both its *nirguna* and *saguna* forms (Van der Veer 1988: 80-84). However, many more versions of the *Ramakatha*, ‘story of Ram’, had appeared all over India by 1000 AD, and as far as Bali and China by 1500 AD. Their analysis is important for the history of the evolution of the Rama-complex in different religious, historical and regional settings (cf. Thapar 1993).

<sup>30</sup> Rama devotees hold that Rama did not die but ascended to heaven at the *Svarvadgar ghats*, the ‘Door to Heaven’ stone steps on the river in Ayodhya (Van der Veer 1988: 5, 17, 19). The Ramanandi order developed the cult of Rama as a deity in the early second millennium CE (‘common era’) (Thapar 1993: 151, 153).

shape as Rama long ago by being born to Dasara, king of Kosala, who ruled from Ayodhya, as that king's eldest son by his first wife,<sup>31</sup> and to have won Sita, daughter of the king of Videha, in a contest. Dasara's second wife, however, is said to have tricked Rama into not acceding to the throne upon the death of his father but to have gone, together with Sita and Lakshman, Rama's full brother, into exile in a forest for fourteen years. In exile Rama is said to have battled Ravana, king of Lanka (the South), and his army of *ashuras*, after Ravana had abducted faithful Sita to Lanka in his aerial chariot,<sup>32</sup> [193] With the help of the monkey-god Hanuman, minister and general of Sugriva, king of the monkeys, Rama is told to have freed Sita, to have defeated Ravana, and on his return to Ayodhya to have ascended the throne, which had been faithfully kept for him by his half-brother Bharat. He is believed to have ruled there as the very paradigm of the *dharmarajya*, the king whose strict observance of the prescriptions of *dharma*, brings order, peace, prosperity and happiness to everyone in his realm.

In Hindu time reckoning, however, Rama reigned over a million years ago, in the *treta yuga*, when men were believed to have been much more virtuous than they are in the present *kali* age.<sup>33</sup> His reign, *Ramrajya*, is now regarded as the perfect model for every ruler and subject. Likewise, the matrimonial relationship between Rama and Sita serves as the true paradigm for husbands and wives: husbands must be as loyal and respectful to their wives as Rama was to Sita; wives should be as unquestioningly obedient and subservient to their husbands as Sita was to Rama.<sup>34</sup>

The *rasik* and *naga* Ramanandi *saddhus* and their lay disciples were, however, inspired in particular by the relationships they believe had obtained between the courtiers in the erstwhile palace and Rama and Sita as the royal couple dwelling in it. Laksman and Hanuman, Rama's companions in his battles against Ravana; Bharat who had faithfully kept the throne for Rama; [194] and Sita's female companions (*sa-*

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Thapar 1993: 144 for another summary

<sup>32</sup> These themes are also sources of inspiration to *tyagis*. They view Rama as a wandering ascetic and regard his and their own sojourns in the forest, and the captivity of Sita, as representations of the cosmic journey of the soul away from, and back towards, the supreme reality. They compare his battles with the *ashuras* with the fight of their souls against the fires of attachment (Van der Veer 1988: 83-84, summarizing Gross 1979).

<sup>33</sup> Hindu cosmogony covers an immense span of (imaginary) time. It seems designed to reduce the span of a human life to total insignificance. It is very complex. An important unit in it is a *kalpa*, which is said to equal one day in the life of Brahma, to comprise 4,320,000,000 years and to be followed by a night of Brahma of the same length. Brahma is believed to live one hundred years of 360 Brahma days and nights each. This largest cosmogonic cycle, therefore, would last 311,040,000,000,000 years. After the life of Brahma, the universe is said to disappear into the *nirguna* supreme reality until, from it, some new creator god emerges. During each day of his life, the creator god is believed to re-create the universe, and during each night to gather it back into his body to keep it there in potentiality. Each such a day, or *kalpa*, is said to consist of fourteen *manvantaras*, secondary cycles of 306,720,000 years each, and to begin with the appearance of a new Manu, the progenitor and lawgiver of the human race. Each *kalpa* is said also to contain one thousand *mahayugas*, and each *manvantara* seventy-one. Each *mahayuga* is divided into four *yugas*, or aeons, which are believed to decline progressively in length. They are the *kritayuga*, which is said to last 1,720,000 years; the *tretayuga*, which is thought to last 1,296,000 years; the *dvaparayuga*, with a postulated duration of 864,000 years; and the *kaliyuga* which is attributed only 432,000 years. The decline in time span by a quarter in each *yuga* is matched, it is held, by an equal decline in the observance of *dharma* by men. As piety and morals diminish, so do order and peace in society, as well as the prosperity and happiness of its citizens, it is believed. Humanity is currently believed to live in a seventh *manvantara* and in its *kaliyuga*. Vishnu is thought to have descended as Rama at the close of the *tretayuga* preceding this one. After that he is said to have appeared as Krishna, his eighth incarnation. Krishna again is believed have appeared as *Arjuna* in the *Bhagavadgita*, the centrepiece of India's other major epic, the *Mahabharata*. That story is set in the *dvaparayuga* when morality was already much lower than in Rama's aeon, and war therefore more frequent (Kinsley 1982: 25-36; Van der Veer 1988: 5-6).

<sup>34</sup> See Kinsley 1982: 25-30; van der Veer 1982: 75-76; 1987: 285-286; 1988: 4-5, 80-84, 92-95, 174; Bakker 1991: 89-90. In e.g. Shakta versions of the *Rama-katha*, 'Rama story', Sita plays a very different role (Thapar 1993: 154).

*khis*), who had served Rama and Sita in unobtrusive ways and had prevented their every wish were models of completely self-less, non-erotic devotion for them. The *rasiks* in particular imitated the relationships of Sita's female companions towards Rama by beautifying (*sringar*) his temples with rich cloth and fine scents as their part in, and their contribution to, *Ramlila*, the 'play of Ram'. The naked *nagas*, on the other hand, took their inspiration especially from Hanuman and his army of monkey soldiers.<sup>35</sup>

The religious use by Hindu believers of these putative relationships, which the texts set out for them as models of their 'world' and models for their lives<sup>36</sup> determines the sacred geography of Ayodhya with its thousands of temples, ponds and tanks, which are all connected with the Ram-Sita story. Apart from the temples, in which the *rasik sadhus* reside, it has many *chauks* ('places of ashes'), *chaunis* ('army camps') and *akharas*, 'training camps' or 'gymnasias', in which the *tyagis* and *nagas* live. In addition, there are the several *ghats* (stone steps on the riverside) on which Brahman *pandas* perform rituals for their pilgrim clients. The most important site for 'seeing' (*darshan*) Rama and Sita is the splendid *Kanak Bhavan* ('Golden Palace') temple, which represents the palace where Rama and Sita spent their married life.<sup>37</sup> It stands on *Ramkot*, or *Ramadurga* ('fort of Ram'), the steep hill in the centre of Ayodhya that served in the past as its citadel. The fortress *Hanumangarhi*, which vies with *Kanak Bhavan* for fame, is also on *Ramkot*. It is the central residence of the *nagas*. It is also the temple of Hanuman who is 'even more revered than Ram-Sita'.<sup>38</sup>

The most famous, because most contested, place in Ayodhya, is *Ramjanmabhumi*, 'Ram's birthplace'. It is also situated on *Ramkot*. Traditions emerging in Ayodhya from the middle of the 19th century onwards claim that until 1528 a small temple stood on that site. Hindu pilgrims are said to have flocked to it from perhaps the eleventh or twelfth century onwards, when *Ramabhakti*, the cult of Ram, began to catch on in North India. The mid-nineteenth century Ayodhya traditions mention also that Babur Shah (1483--1530), the founder the Moghul empire in 1526, visited Ayodhya in 1528 and ordered that the Ram temple be demolished<sup>39</sup> and a mosque be built on that site. He is said to have given [195] these orders at the request of two Muslim *fakir*<sup>40</sup> residents of Ayodhya in order to gain their political support.<sup>41</sup> Traditions also have it that another temple, the *Janmasthanamandir*,<sup>42</sup> was built on *Ramkot* nearby the Babri mosque shortly after it had allegedly been built on *Ramjanmabhumi*; and that Hindu pilgrims were allowed to visit *Sitarasoi*, 'Sita's kitchen', which was located in the outer enclosure of the Babri mosque. And that they were also permitted to throw flowers in the *Ramchabutra* pit in front of the mosque over which the sanctum of the former temple was said to have stood.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Van der Veer 1988: 22-23, 71, 75, 78, 81-84, 149-150, 159, 161-165, 168-172

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Geertz 1966: 7; 1973: 93

<sup>37</sup> Van der Veer 1988: 22-23, 161, 273-274

<sup>38</sup> Van der Veer 1988: 23; also 19-27, 151-159; 1982: 59-60

<sup>39</sup> Cf. above note 3

<sup>40</sup> They are named as Khwaja Fazal Abbas Ashikhan, who is said to have become a disciple of *sadhu* Syamanand in order to be taught methods of meditation by him, and Jalal Shah (van der Veer 1988: 20). *Fakirs* were the Muslim *sufi* counterparts of Hindu *sadhus* in North India. They taught doctrines and practised disciplines very similar to those of the monistic forms of *nirguna bhakti* which developed in North India at that time (see Van der Veer 1982: 68-69). The so-called *Sanyasi* rebellion in Bengal, quelled by the British in 1765, was actually incited and led by Muslim *fakirs*, known as *Madaris*, whose outward appearance and behaviour were virtually identical to those of wandering Hindu warrior ascetics or *nagas* (Lorenzen 1978: 72-75).

<sup>41</sup> Van der Veer 1987: 285-286; 1988: 11, 19-21; Bakker 1991: 90; cf. however note 3

<sup>42</sup> *Ram Janmasthan* was often identified by early British authors with the Babri mosque and *Ramjanmabhumi* (Srivastava 1993: 38-42). In many modern press reports, *Jamasthan* serves as a synonym for *Janmabhumi*.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Van der Veer 1988: 21, 22, 37-38. This is the *Ramchabutra*, the raised platform under a tree in the eastern part of the outer enclosure of the *Babrimashid*. Near, in the far corner of the same outer enclosure, stood images of other Hindu gods

From the early eighteenth century onwards, when the Moghul empire was in decline, the cult of Rama spread widely and attracted many pilgrims to Ayodhya. At that time, local warring Shi'a rulers entered into alliances with Hindu *rajputs* and employed thousands of *nagas*, 'warrior ascetics', in their armies. At that time, too, Tulsidas (1532-1623) had just written his *Ramcharitmanas*. It is in this period that Hindu *diwans*, ministers of Shi'a rulers, began to build temples for Ram and Sita in Ayodhya and became important patrons (*jajmans*) of its *pandas* and *sadhus*.<sup>44</sup>

Till that time, most religions of North India had had some stake in Ayodhya.<sup>45</sup> It was a place of pilgrimage, for instance, for Jains who believe that Rishhabdev, the first of their 'preceptors' (*tirthankaras*, 'ford makers'), was born in Ayodhya. Jains had six temples in Ayodhya till the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>46</sup> [196] Buddhists came to Ayodhya because of traditions that the Buddha meditated there. They identify it with Saketa, a town mentioned in Buddhist scriptures.<sup>47</sup> Muslims believed that Noah had been buried in Ayodhya. They also identified Hanuman, as worshipped in *Hanumangarhi*, with Hathile, one of the five *pirs* (Muslim saints) whom they venerated on Hanuman hill.<sup>48</sup>

When Tieffenthaler visited Ayodhya between 1766 and 1771, he recorded traditions about a Hindu fortress *Ramakota* having been destroyed by Aurangzeb or Babur and a mosque with three domes having been built in its place.<sup>49</sup> These traditions may however only reflect the increasing strength of *Ramabhakti* in Ayodhya at that time. Until 1853, Hindu-Muslim relations seem not to have been strained in Ayodhya. The religious strife in Ayodhya before 1800 was between Shaiva *sanyasins* and Vaishava *bairagis* (i.e. Ramanandi *tyagi* ascetics) rather than between Hindus and Muslims.<sup>50</sup>

### *Ayodhya as local confrontation, 1853 - 1980*

In the period between Muslim and British rule, 1853-1858, however, Hindu-Muslim relations in Ayodhya deteriorated gravely. Sunni Muslims, then an assertive 10% minority,<sup>51</sup> proclaimed in 1853,<sup>52</sup> that a mosque had stood in the precincts of *Hanumangarhi* and demanded that Muslims be permitted to

in recent years: Nandi, Ganesh, Parvati, Panchmukhi and Mahadev, which received regular worship (cf. Panikkar 1993: 33; Noorani 1993: 59, 94-95; Ramakrishnan 1993d).

<sup>44</sup> Lorenzen 1978: 69-72; van der Veer 1982: 67-73; 1987: 287-288; 1988: 11, 36-38, 143-145, 150-151, 211-214; Panikkar 1993: 30-31; Srivastava 1993: 39-40, 46, 47

<sup>45</sup> Cf. also Hasan 1993: 112

<sup>46</sup> Srivastava 1993: 38, 46

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Bakker 1984/1986, I: 1-48

<sup>48</sup> Van der Veer 1988: 1, 2, 10, 11, 149-150

<sup>49</sup> Gopal 1993a: 11. Panikkar (1993: 32), however, holds that this tradition dates only from after 1855. It originated, he writes, as a ploy by the *Mahant* ('abbot') of Hanumangarhi to counter the claims on Hanumangarhi staked out by Sunni Muslims. The tradition, however, became established opinion also among the British in Awadh soon after 1866. They were led to believe that Babur Shah had actually visited Ayodhya in 1528 on the basis of documentary 'proof' provided by Leyden in 1819 and Erskine in 1826 (Srivastava 1993: 47, 55, notes 59, 60).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Srivastava 1993: 46-47, 54, note 54

<sup>51</sup> In 1869, the Muslim residents of Ayodhya numbered 2,500 and formed one-third of its population; two-thirds of them were Shi'a, and one-third Sunni (Srivastava 1993: 38-39, 51, note 7). They had 26 mosques in Ayodhya in 1989 (Roy 1989c: 27).

<sup>52</sup> Srivastava (1993: 42) argues that *Hanumangarhi* was attacked in 1853 and not, as is stated by most authors, in 1855.

pray there.<sup>53</sup> When they attacked *Hanumangarhi*, a pitched battle with its Ramanandi *nagas* ensued. The *nagas* drove the attackers back into the Babri mosque, killing seventy. Thereupon Muslim unrest spread through the whole of Awadh (Oudh).<sup>54</sup> To quell it, the British appointed a commission of [197] Hindu and Muslim noblemen to look into the claims of the Sunni Muslims with respect to *Hanumangarhi*. It concluded that the Muslim claim was unfounded. This provoked the Muslims of Awadh into forming an army of 2000 to wage a *jihad* against the *nagas* of Ayodhya. Before it reached Ayodhya, it was stopped by a British regiment in a battle with heavy losses on both sides that lasted for three hours.<sup>55</sup> After the annexation of Awadh on 13 February 1856, the British immediately put up an iron railing between the Babri mosque and the *Ramchabutra* to ensure a separation of worship.<sup>56</sup>

During the remainder of the colonial period, relations between Hindus and Muslims in Ayodhya remained relatively peaceful,<sup>57</sup> notwithstanding the 1855/1856 events and the general rise of tension between Hindus and Muslims in Northern India under British rule. When, from 1893 onwards, the *Gaurakshina Sabha*, 'Cow Protection Movement',<sup>58</sup> tried to prevent Muslims from slaughtering cows on major Muslim feasts, there was violence in several towns in Northern India, of which Ayodhya had its share in 1912 and 1934.<sup>59</sup> Another movement that increased tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the region was the *shuddhi* (reconversion) movement launched by Arya Samaj preachers in the mid-1890s.<sup>60</sup> Again another was the struggle for the recognition of Hindi as an official language in courts and schools next to Urdu, and of *Devanagari* script.<sup>61</sup> One more was the resistance of *Hindu Shabha* ('Hindu Forum') movement after 1907 against the perceived pro-Muslim bias of the British authorities, who instituted separate electorates for Muslims throughout India, even in areas like the Punjab where Muslims formed a majority.<sup>62</sup> [198] Lastly, there was Hindu resistance to forced conversions to Islam on the Malabar coast in the wake of the *Khilafat* movement of 1921;<sup>63</sup> and other incidents.

These tensions were part and parcel of the wider process of the rise of 'communalism' in the public and political life of colonial India because the so-called 'communities' of believers of the several religions of India were organised into distinct power blocks.<sup>64</sup> These 'communities' have a long history in India,<sup>65</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Panikkar 1993: 31-33; Srivastava 1993: 51-52, note 23

<sup>54</sup> At that time an independent kingdom in North India under British 'protection'.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Panikkar 1993: 30-31; Srivastava 1993: 42-44

<sup>56</sup> Van der Veer 1987: 289; 1988: 38-39; Bakker 1991: 93-94

<sup>57</sup> Hasan (1993: 110-114) reports that Faizabad and Ayodhya remained relatively free of Hindu-Muslim strife between 1858 and 1949. Cf. also Roy (1989c: 27-28): 'Not one communal incident has taken place in Ayodhya since 1934'. Cf. also below on the relative lack of interest which Van der Veer (1987: 290-291) found in Ayodhya in the *Ramjan-mabhumimuktiyagna*, the 'sacrifice for the liberation of Rama's place of birth', in late 1984. Only after the demolition of the Babri mosque on 6 December 1992 were the Muslim quarters in Ayodhya attacked by Hindu *kar sevaks* ('volunteers') with ten Muslims being killed and a hundred houses and shops being burned (Ramakrishnan 1993: 13).

<sup>58</sup> See Lütt 1970: 134-147; Freitag 1980; Yang 1980; Becke 1994: 10, 11; Embree 1994: 638-639. Cow riots, however, have a longer history. The earliest one on record occurred in Ahmedabad in 1714 (Janssen 1989: 7).

<sup>59</sup> Van der Veer 1987: 289; 1988: 40; Noorani 1993: 67

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Gold 1991: 552, 564-565; Jaffrelot 1993: 519

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Lütt 1970: 37-52, 148-154; Becke 1994: 10

<sup>62</sup> Jaffrelot 1993: 519

<sup>63</sup> Jaffrelot 1993: 520

<sup>64</sup> They were those of the (high caste or 'twice-born') Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Parsis, the Christians, the Jains, the low castes Hindus (*shudras*, Dalits), the untouchables (pariahs, Harijans), the so-called 'tribals' or 'scheduled tribes' or 'aboriginal' (*adivasi*) communities not integrated into Indian society (some of which live as food gathering nomads in forested hill country) and, much later, the Ambedkarite converts to Buddhism. The Hindus were not one 'community', because Hindus are stratified by the four *varnas*, each of which is divided into numerous *jativads* (caste-communities). Due to the wide gulf separating the 'twice-born' Hindus of the three upper *varnas* from the lowest castes and outcastes (cf. also Mahmood 1993: 732-734; 1994), a united Hindu 'community' is rather a political projection, and programme, of

but became much more visible in the colonial era (1858-1947) when the British administration began to register each person's caste and/or religious affiliation and mentioned these on the identity cards it issued. The British strengthened communalism in other ways. They allocated jobs in the colonial civil service, army, police, courts, schools, universities, and hospitals to each community according to each community's relative size. In 1935 they created special electorates and constituencies for the Hindu and Muslim 'communities' and reserved seats for them in the legislative bodies.<sup>66</sup> They also granted some of these communities their own personal law. And they intervened in order to 'take care' of the other 'legitimate' interests of the lower communities.<sup>67</sup>

[199] Moreover, these 'communities' also gained prominence in Indian public life by the activities of their political and ideological leaders who deliberately fostered these emerging ideologies of separate identity by pursuing policies of 'strategic syncretism'.<sup>68</sup> They did so in two ways. One was by politicising the distinctiveness of the 'communities' in matters of religion,<sup>69</sup> language, social organisation and other elements of culture.<sup>70</sup> The other was by creating organisational structures for mobilising masses for the purpose of convincing their own 'communities' that they were constantly under the threat of unequal treatment, opportunity or privilege and so force them into constant competition with other groups.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, these new opportunities allowed the leaders of the Hindu communal movement, all hailing from the upper castes, to reinforce the leading positions of high castes when these were endangered by reforms or changes in the balance of power between the various social groups.<sup>72</sup>

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high caste and upwards-mobile Hindus (Frykenberg 1994: 603) than a social reality. It has been termed 'organized Hinduism' by Gold (1991a) and 'syndicated Hinduism' by Thapar (1985; 1993: 160). The RSS followed a policy of disregarding caste distinctions within its own rank after the tradition of Indian world renouncers in order to create a more inclusive Hindu community. In Jaffrelot (1993: 521-522)'s view, this RSS policy does not affect the Hindu 'community' at large. Recent developments, presented below, however, seem to indicate that the RSS does have some unifying influence on the Hindus of India.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Mahmood (1993: 723). He strongly defends the view that communalism and religious intolerance have deep roots in upper caste Hinduism and 'present a far more intractable problem than most current dialogue admits' (Mahmood 1993: 737; 1994; cf. also Saberwal 1991: 348-350).

<sup>66</sup> Gold 1991a: 358-359; Thakur 1993: 647; Vithal 1993: 337

<sup>67</sup> Cf. e.g. Gold 1991a: 535-537. The British followed a policy of reforming and reconstructing Indian society in line with their own moral values. They forbade customs such as *sati* ('widow burning') and child marriages, and strengthened the social position of disadvantaged groups, like the low- and out-castes. These measures considerably reinforced the vertical divisions of Indian society along lines of religious identities.

<sup>68</sup> Jaffrelot (1993) shows that early leaders of the Hindu 'communalist movements' developed the building blocks of Hindu nationalism by imitating and assimilating the perceived strong points of other 'communities'. This competitive imitation caused the *Brahma Samaj* and the *Arya Samaj* to invent the traditions of 'the golden dawn of Vedic civilisation', to regard the Upanishads or the Vedas as 'Hindu scripture', and to start the *shuddhi*, re-conversion, movement. The RSS and VHP began to attempt to develop means and structures, including an ecclesiastic structure, by which they might unify the Hindus as a nation and as a religion. Cf. also Thapar 1989; 1993: 159-160; Mahmood 1993: 729.

<sup>69</sup> Gandhi e.g. often referred and appealed in his speeches to *Ramaraja*, the perfect rule of Rama. Hindu symbols were often used by the leaders of the Indian National Congress before 1947 (Janssen 1989: 4, 7).

<sup>70</sup> Cf., e.g., Becke (1994: 11-12, 14-16) on the roles played by Vinayak Damodar Savakar (1883-1966) coining the notions *Hindutva* ('Hindudom') and *Hindu rashtra* ('the Hindu nation'), and Mohammed Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) declaring in 1940 that India contained two separate 'nations', the Hindus and the Muslims. Thereby Jina laid the foundation for the partition of 1947.

<sup>71</sup> Mansingh 1988: 179; see also Bakker 1991: 95. Reform movements like the *Arya Samaj* played a prominent role in these processes; cf. e.g. Lütt 1970: 99-123.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Chatterjee 1993a: 5-6; 1993b: 4, 6, 7; Chibber & Misra 1993; Ghimire 1993: 50; Jaffrelot 1993: 519; Sarkar 1993: 164; Vithal 1993: 337; Yechury 1993: 18, 19. Hansen (1993: 2271), however, contests the view that the Hindu commu-

Until recently, this Indian ‘communalism’ was very much an urban phenomenon. It used ‘religion as the dominant form of identification’,<sup>73</sup> in order to increase boundary consciousness among co-believers<sup>74</sup> for the sake of political, often violent competition with groups defined by a [200] different religion, which a particular ‘community’ saw as its political opponent.<sup>75</sup> In the colonial era (1856-1947), these clashes were mainly between Hindus and Muslims. Though Gandhi tried to prevent rifts between the colonised communities and to use communalism for anti-colonial ends, he failed to forestall that communalism’s inherent divisiveness ended in the bloody partition of the colony into what are now the states of India and Pakistan.<sup>76</sup>

In Ayodhya, cow protection riots had taken place on a large scale in 1912 and again in 1934. In that year, Muslims were prevented from slaughtering bulls at *Bakr-Id*, the Babri mosque was attacked and major damage was done to one of its domes. Hundreds of Muslims were killed and the British army had to intervene.<sup>77</sup> The Partition in 1947 also caused Hindu-Muslim relations in Ayodhya to become more tense again. It caused the Indian government to declare *Ranjanamabhumi* and the *Babrimashid* out of bounds for both Hindus and Muslims and place a guard outside the mosque.<sup>78</sup> Tensions increased further in 1948, when local Congress politicians used the cult of Ram for their own electoral purposes. Thereby they revived ‘the Masjid-Mandir issue which had lain dormant for decades’.<sup>79</sup>

The stage was thus set for the events of late 1949, when, after nine days of continuous reading from the *Ramayana* in front of the *Babrimashid*,<sup>80</sup> a statue of Ram (and one of Sita)<sup>81</sup> were smuggled into the [201] mosque during the night of 22 December.<sup>82</sup> On the following morning they were presented to the public as having miraculously revealed themselves there; and an armed guard was posted near to watch over them. Riots followed. After the riots had been quelled by the police and the army, court orders were issued forbidding both Muslims and Hindus to enter into the Babri mosque. However, when the District

nalist movement of the RSS *sangh parivar* is mainly carried by, and serves the interests of, the *brahmin* and *bania* (trader) communities.

<sup>73</sup> Freitag 1980: 599, note 7. Rudolph & Rudolph (1988: 78) define communalism as ‘the exclusive identification with and commitment to one’s religious or social community’. In their, rather polemic, view, it ‘destroys civil society and the state’; for other such definitions, cf. Becke 1994: 13-16, 22-24.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Becke (1994: 23): ‘Identities are built by demarcation’ (*Identitäten werden gebildet durch Ausgrenzung*).

<sup>75</sup> On these processes, see also Björkman 1988, Rudolph & Rudolph 1988, Saberwal 1991, Khare 1991, Caplan 1991, Jurgensmeyer 1991, Madan 1991; Becke 1994: 13-18; Frykenberg 1994: 600ff

<sup>76</sup> Rudolph & Rudolph 1988: 79; Mansingh 1988: 182-183; Becke 1994: 14-18

<sup>77</sup> Van der Veer 1987: 289; 1988: 40; Noorani 1993: 67

<sup>78</sup> Van der Veer 1994: 662

<sup>79</sup> Hasan 1993: 113

<sup>80</sup> Noorani 1993: 68

<sup>81</sup> Noorani 1993: 67, 78, 79, 80, 94, 95. Most authors, however, refer only to that of Rama (Van der Veer 1987: 289; 1988: 40; Hasan 1993: 114; Thakur 1993: 645) as do the reports (e.g. by the District Magistrate Nayar) quoted in Noorani 1993 (68, 70-71). Others speak of ‘the idols (*sic*) of Rama Lala’ (Rama as a child) without mentioning Sita (Roy 1989c: 27; Vyas 1991: 12; Chatterjee 1992; Anonymous 1993b: 22; Ram 1993). Anonymous (1993a: 134), however, has a picture of the makeshift temple, erected on the rubble of Babri mosque in the night of 6-7 December 1992, which clearly shows two images, and, unclearly, perhaps a third one. The two shown clearly are likely those of Rama and Sita which had been smuggled into the Babri mosque in the night of 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> December 1949. Apart from the two statues in the mosque, another number of images of deities were kept in the outer enclosure of the mosque and given regular worship there (Noorani 1993: 94; Ramakrishnan 1993d; above note 43).

<sup>82</sup> In an interview in Ayodhya on 7 April 1993 granted by the President of the Ramjanmabhumi Temple Construction Trust at Ayodhya, Paramhansa Ramachandra Das, to Andreas Becke, Ramachandra said: ‘The Ram Janmabhoomi movement is not new. I started it in 1949 with the assistance of the District Magistrate of Faizabad. We introduced the Ram idols into this very mosque and brought a petition into the District Court of Faizabad to safeguard our rights to worship Rama [there] and perform our rituals’ (Becke 1994: 20; my translation).

Magistrate, K.K. Nayar, who was an RSS supporter, was ordered to remove the statues from the mosque, he refused to comply.<sup>83</sup> So, they remained in the mosque. This led to lengthy litigation by Muslims to regain, and by Hindus to gain, entrance to the mosque for worship. The courts, however, never reached a verdict on these appeals. The *Ramjannabhumi sevaksamiti*, 'Committee of the servants of Ram's birth-place', was, however, granted permission to perform rites for the Ram statue in the Babri mosque once a year, on the night of 22 December. In addition, this committee commissioned a *sadhu*, Ram Lakhan Saran, to organise uninterrupted devotional singing in front of the Babri mosque which was to continue till Ram was 'liberated from his prison'.<sup>84</sup>

### *Ayodhya as national confrontation* 1984 - 6.12.1992

After independence, the more violent clashes in the national arena were at first not the Hindu-Muslim confrontations, but those between Hindus and Sikhs. They took place in particular in the Punjab and Delhi from early 1980 onwards when Bhindranwale made his violent bid for an independent Kalistan. The Congress government responded with Operation Blue Star on 1st July 1984, the goal of which was to drive him out of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. That in its turn was followed by the murder of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards on 31 October 1984.<sup>85</sup>

From the early 1980s, however, a number of 'incidents' occurred in the national arena [202] that caused the VHP,<sup>86</sup> the RSS affiliate for religious affairs,<sup>87</sup> to begin to develop strategies for turning Ayodhya into the nationwide focus of Hindu-Muslim tensions. One of these was the conversion to Islam of untouchables in Meenakshipuram in South India in 1981.<sup>88</sup> Another was the violent reaction of Muslims in India to the killing of more than one thousand Muslims by 'tribals' at Nellie in Assam in 1984. A

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Noorani 1993: 70-72

<sup>84</sup> Van der Veer 1987: 289-290; 1988: 40-41; Bakker 1991: 97; Noorani 1993: 67

<sup>85</sup> Wallace 1988; Juergensmeyer 1991

<sup>86</sup> The *Vishva Hindu Parisad* (Hindu World Federation) was founded in 1964 in order to unify Hindus in India and abroad, and to promote RSS/VHP goals through an order of missionaries (Andersen & Damle 1987: 133; Janssen 1989: 18; Van der Veer 1994: 553-554sq.; Embree 1994: 638). It propagates the view that Sanskrit is the oldest of all languages, and that Hindu *dharma* is the oldest of mankind's religions. It organises courses in Sanskrit and demands that Sanskrit be made compulsory in all Indian schools. It holds that Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, and *Lingayats* are Hindus. It demands also that the slaughter of cows be forbidden by law. And it claims that all mosques and churches in India were originally Hindu *mandirs* (Janssen 1989: 18-19; cf. also Van der Veer 1994: 657). *Ramjannabhumi* is to the VHP merely the most obvious example of a general 'fact of history'. In 1964, 1966, 1979, and 1982, VHP organised meetings to which leaders of all Hindu 'sects' were invited. The first such *dharmasansad* met in New Delhi from 7 to 9 April 1984 and was attended by 558 delegates from 76 different Hindu religious groups. One of the items discussed was the *Ramjannabhumi* controversy (cf. Janssen 1989: 17). The basis for the participation of Hindu religious leaders of very different hue in the *Ramarathayajna* campaign of late 1984 was laid during this meeting.

<sup>87</sup> Van der Veer (1994: 655) warns against the common view that the VHP is merely an instrument of the RSS. That view 'underestimates the extent to which the VHP goes beyond the RSS in its articulation of what I call "modern Hinduism"'. In his view, the VHP propagates a fundamentally modernist conception of Hinduism that is strongly influenced by Western Orientalist understanding of India (Van der Veer 1994: 656-660). Though the VHP rejects the secular state, it does not reject capitalist development, science, technology, and nationalism, and claims that the 'majority community' should rule the country (Van der Veer 1994: 656, 660-661, 666).

<sup>88</sup> These conversions caused the VHP to make the re-conversion (*paravartan*) of Muslim and Christian lowcastes, pariahs and 'tribals' its major objective. It began to provide these '170 million downtrodden brethren' with schools, hospitals, orphanages, etc. (Janssen 1989: 22; Van der Veer 1994: 654, 655-656, 660).

third was the agitation of Muslims against the ruling of the Supreme Court in 1985 on the Shah Bano case, which they perceived as a secular threat to the *shari'a* in matters of personal law.<sup>89</sup> And a fourth was Muslim agitation in 1988 demanding that Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* be banned as blasphemous of Islam.<sup>90</sup> Muslim agitation against the ruling of the Supreme Court in the Shah Bano case in particular proved a watershed in Hindu-Muslim relations, in that it exposed the inconsistent secularism of the ruling Congress Party.<sup>91</sup> Hindus began to perceive that it demanded that they [203] accept reforms of their religious customs in accordance with the secularism of the state, but allowed the Muslims to continue to be governed by the *shari'a* in matters of personal law. The Congress Party granted it immunity from secular reform for fear of losing the Muslim bloc vote in elections. This became especially apparent when Rajiv Gandhi in 1986 forced the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act through parliament, overruling the decision of Supreme Court in the Shah Bano case.<sup>92</sup>

Between 1984 and 6 December 1992, when the Babri mosque was demolished, the VHP and the BJP planned and executed three nation-wide politico-religious manifestations with Ayodhya as their focus.<sup>93</sup> Their aim was to mobilise the Hindu 'community' to liberate Ram from his 'imprisonment' in the *Ba-brimashid*, demolish the mosque, regain *Ramjanmabhumi*, and to build a temple on it for him. Their ulterior purpose, however, was to gain electoral victories for the BJP, reduce the Muslims to their 'proper place', and establish *Hindutva*, i.e. convert India into a Hindu nation.<sup>94</sup>

#### *The 1983 preliminary: 'Marches' for national integration*

The foundation of these campaigns was laid by the success of the month-long *Ekatmata yagna*, 'sacrifice for unity',<sup>95</sup> from 16 November to 16 December 1983. It was a nationwide fund-raising drive for VHP--missionary and social work under the untouchables.<sup>96</sup> This first major VHP exercise in mass mobilisation brought in 30 million rupees.<sup>97</sup> It was organised by a council of eighty-five religious leaders who represented

virtually every major sect and sub-sect – starting from the followers of Shankara (8th century AD), the Jains, the Naths, the Vaishava sadhus [204] to Sikhs of the Namdhari sub-sect and Buddhists from Ladakh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. [...] Others represented [...] the Arya Samaj.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Andersen & Damle 1987: 134, 238; Rudolph & Rudolph 1988: 84; Madan 1991b: 396-397; Embree 1994: 618

<sup>90</sup> Thakur: 1993: 653-654, 655

<sup>91</sup> Thakur 1993: 650, 655; see also Andersen & Damle 1987: 236; Embree 1994: 619-620, 622-623, 629-635, 637, 643

<sup>92</sup> Thakur 1993: 646-650, 658-660

<sup>93</sup> Van der Veer (1994: 655, 663) presents data which demonstrate 'a direct co-ordination of rituals, agitation, and political maneuvering by a high command made up of BJP, RSS, and VHP leaders and in fact an important overlap of functions', in particular after the electoral victory of 1989.

<sup>94</sup> The Babri mosque, however, served as *pars pro toto*, as the paradigmatic example of what, in the RSS interpretation of Indian history, was a common Muslim practice. It drew up a list of over two thousand mosques erected on the ruins of Hindu temples (Embree 1994: 632).

<sup>95</sup> Van der Veer 1987a: 292; 1994: 653, 661-662. Mitra (1983: 34) translates it as 'integration rite'. It was also termed *Ekatmatayathra*, 'unity pilgrimage' (Andersen & Damle 1987: 135, 238; Janssen 1989: 23).

<sup>96</sup> The VHP termed it *paravartan*, the 'return to [their] original position' of those *Harijans* (untouchables) and *Adivasis* (aboriginals) who had been converted to Islam or Christianity (Badhwar 1986: 35-36); cf. also Embree 1994: 638; van der Veer 1994: 654, 659, 660.

<sup>97</sup> Andersen & Damle 1987: 154; see also 141, 238

<sup>98</sup> Mitra 1983: 36

It consisted of three major *yathras*, 'marches', from and to the four corners of India, and some ninety subsidiary ones (*upayathras*)<sup>99</sup> which at some point joined one of the four major marches. Most of them traversed the regions with the highest incidence of Hindu-Muslim strife and were received with greatest enthusiasm in precisely those regions.<sup>100</sup> At stops in 1700 places,<sup>101</sup> taped religious music was played, prayers were said, and speeches given by VHP-affiliated religious leaders on the dangers to Hinduism by politicians pampering the Muslims.<sup>102</sup> Three major marches and a number of regional ones converged on the RSS headquarters in Nagpur where they arrived on 29 November to celebrate 'the confluence of the three pilgrimages'.<sup>103</sup> The major processions then continued on to their final destinations at the opposite end of India from where it had started.<sup>104</sup> The processions are said to have covered some 85,000 kilometres and to have attracted 60 million participants.<sup>105</sup>

The central features of these processions were two trucks.<sup>106</sup> On one an eight foot high brass vessel (*kalasha*) was installed containing four hundred litres of *gangajal*, water from *Gangamata*, Mother Ganges, India's holiest river,<sup>107</sup> as well as the portrait of *Bharat Mata*, 'Mother [205] India', sitting astride a lion.<sup>108</sup> The other carried a smaller *kalasha* with water from all the other main rivers of India.<sup>109</sup> The water was distributed to temples along the way for use in the ritual bathing (*abhisheka*) of its deities in a *puja*. And it was sold in bottles, thus bringing the water of the Ganges to poor Hindus who might never have the opportunity of travelling to the Ganges itself. It was replenished with water from the local or regional holy rivers, lakes and temple water-tanks. This mixing of holy water from all over India 'symbolized in an immensely direct way for Hindus the unity of Hindu India'.<sup>110</sup> The great success of these processions enabled the VHP to strengthen its network of local branches throughout the country.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Van der Veer (1994: 661) gives their number as 'at least forty-seven'.

<sup>100</sup> Mitra 1983: 34; Janssen 1993: 33-34

<sup>101</sup> Janssen 1989: 6-7, 24-25, 31-37. Mitra (1983: 34) gives 1.800.

<sup>102</sup> With local variations, cf. e.g. Janssen 1989: 41-42; for the content of the speeches, cf. also the VHP pamphlet *India in Danger*, appendix II in Janssen 1989 (43-47).

<sup>103</sup> An explicit reference to the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the (invisible) Sarasvati rivers at Prayag, the most important *tirtha* on the Ganges (Janssen 1989: 28, 34; Eck 1991: 146).

<sup>104</sup> They followed traditional routes: the *Bahgirath rath* from Hardwar, near Gangotri in the Himalaya, to Kanyakumari on the southernmost tip of India; the *Kapil rath* from Gangasagar in Bengal, where the Ganges pours into the Indian Ocean, to Somnath on the western coast of Gujarat; and the *Pasupati rath*, from Kathmandu in Nepal to Rameshvaran, the other southernmost place of pilgrimage (Janssen 1989: 31-37; van der Veer 1994: 661).

<sup>105</sup> Andersen & Damle 1987: 135

<sup>106</sup> The procession from Kathmandu consisted of one truck, two matador vans, and three jeeps (Mitra 1983: 35).

<sup>107</sup> *Kalashas* and (water from the) Ganges both represent immortality as liberation from the cycle of rebirths. The Ganges is the supreme *tirtha*, 'ford' (to immortality), and therefore the supreme goal in life for many devout Hindus. *Kalasha* refers to the myth of the gods churning the milk ocean in order to obtain the nectar of immortality, to its association with blessing, and to the many ways it is used in rituals, e.g. as an an-iconic representation and residence of any god (cf. Janssen 1989: 27-30).

<sup>108</sup> Mitra 1983: 34. In other posters, she has the lion as her mount at her right side, a flying banner in her left hand, her right hand in the posture of teaching, her head surrounded by flames. Thus she stands before the Indian subcontinent without the boundaries of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Tibet, etc. (Janssen 1989: 26-28). Thousands of these posters were sold (Mitra 1983: 35).

<sup>109</sup> Mitra 1983: 34

<sup>110</sup> Van der Veer 1987a: 292; 1994: 662

<sup>111</sup> Van der Veer 1987a: 300. He regards these marches as 'a ritual of national integration' (van der Veer 1994: 661). He points to the parallel of *Bharat Mata* being taken by chariots for a ride throughout her domain, India, to the traditional temple-chariot processions in the major Indian temple towns in which (an image of) the god is taken over his domain in a chariot to confirm his sovereignty over it.

*The VHP Ramarathayagna, 1984-1986*

The first VHP Ayodhya-centred mass-mobilisation was the *Ramjanmabhumimuktiyagna*, the ‘sacrifice for the liberation of Rama’s place of birth’, in late 1984, for which it founded the *Sri Rama Janmabhumi Muktiyagna Samiti*, a council of leaders of diverse ‘Hindu’ religious traditions. It chose the form of a *Ramarathayathra*: a pilgrimage procession proceeding along the road which Ram was believed to have travelled in his chariot<sup>112</sup> in mythical times.<sup>113</sup> It departed from Sitamarthi<sup>114</sup> in Bihar on 25 September 1984 and was to traverse the length of Uttar Pradesh, with Ayodhya and Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, as major campaign sites, and then to proceed to Delhi, the national capital. Its primary [206] purpose was to put pressure on the political parties in the upcoming general election of December 1984 to make them promise that mosques would be cleared from sites held sacred by Hindus and the grounds restored to Hindus for worship. The procession consisted of a number of trucks and cars manned by VHP activists and *sadhus* from all over India. Its main feature was a truck carrying large statues of Ram and Sita and a banner saying *Bharat Mata ki jay*, ‘Mother India, hail’. On its way through Bihar and the eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh, it met with considerable enthusiasm.<sup>115</sup>

Its arrival at Ayodhya, in the evening of 6 October 1984, was witnessed by van der Veer.<sup>116</sup> The procession appeared neither particularly impressive nor militant to him and was given only a lukewarm reception. Ayodhya stirred emotions more in the region than in Ayodhya itself.<sup>117</sup> The mass rally on the banks of the Sarayu on the following day drew only some seven thousand people – reports in the papers and on t.v. inflated this figure to fifty thousand and even one hundred thousand –, who listened to speeches from VHP officers and ‘a seemingly unending row of religious leaders’<sup>118</sup> from many different Hindu religious orders and from regions as far apart as the Punjab and Kerala. These *sadhus* were seated on a platform in front of a large painting representing a fight between Muslims armed with swords and unarmed ascetics. The local religious leaders were conspicuously absent except for one, the abbot of an *akhara* of *nagas* in Ayodhya, who accused the absentees, in a powerful speech, of indifference to Ram’s captivity ‘in a Muslim jail’.<sup>119</sup> The other speakers urged the audience to vote in the coming general election for parties that pledged to remove mosques from *Ramjanmabhumi*, Krishna’s birthplace in Mathura,<sup>120</sup> and from the *Viswanath* temple of Shiva in Benares, and to restore them to Hindus. In view of the long history of violent competition between the orders of Hindu ascetics, the unanimity among the leaders

<sup>112</sup> *Ratha*, (war) chariot. The use of the chariot as a symbol complex, also evokes in the minds of Hindus associations with Krishna, another incarnation of Vishnu, in his role as the charioteer of Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgita*. When gods are taken out of a temple for a procession, they are also carried on *rathas*.

<sup>113</sup> Noorani 1993: 77-78

<sup>114</sup> Sitamarthi is the place where Sita is believed to have been ‘born’ according to some versions of the Rama-story complex, or more precisely where she was found in an earthenware pot in the ploughing fields. Sitamarthi was also the scene of the last major riots, in October 1992, before the Babri mosque was destroyed on 6 December 1992 (Thakur 1993: 656).

<sup>115</sup> Van der Veer 1988: 42

<sup>116</sup> Van der Veer 1987a: 290-291

<sup>117</sup> Cf. also Hasan (1993: 113). This ties in with the fact that Ayodhya is not on a map of districts and towns with a high incidence of Hindu-Muslim violence in Janssen (1989: 7).

<sup>118</sup> Van der Veer 1987a: 293

<sup>119</sup> Ayodhya religious leaders feared gross loss of income if *Ramjanmabhumi* were liberated (van der Veer 1987a: 295-297). Moreover, the *nagas* of Hanumangarhi supported the Congress Party. Another notable absentee was the chairman of the *Ramjanmabhumi-seva* Committee in charge of the annual worship of Ram and the singing in front of the Babri mosque. He had made a political deal with the Congress Party also.

<sup>120</sup> Another major Vaisnava pilgrimage centre in Uttar Pradesh situated on the river Jumna.

of the [207] Vaisnava, Shaiva and Tantrist orders present was remarkable. All were 'peacefully gathered under the banner of a goddess not worshipped by any of them: *Bharat Mata*, Mother India'.<sup>121</sup>

On its journey from Ayodhya to Lucknow, the capital, where a petition was presented to the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the procession met again with a great enthusiasm. Then, on 31st October, Indira Gandhi was murdered by her Sikh bodyguards. That caused a dramatic change in the national political arena: Hindu-Muslim strife was replaced for a brief time by the antagonism of both Hindus and Muslims against the Sikhs. Further 'sacrifice for the liberation of the place of birth of Ram' was pointless. The petition was delivered in Delhi in early December but had no political impact. Rajiv Gandhi won a landslide victory in the elections. The BJP lost heavily. It retained only two of its sixteen seats in parliament.<sup>122</sup>

Although these direct results of the 1984 *Ramjanmabhumimuktiyagna* were very disappointing for the VHP, the VHP Ramjanmabhumi Liberation Committee resumed the *Ramarathayathra* from twenty-five places in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar on 23 October 1985. It organised six processions through the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh and one in Bihar, which scored a major success in early 1986.<sup>123</sup> The portraits they carried of Lord Ram in jail had an electrifying impact on the Hindu-Muslim tensions in the region.<sup>124</sup> The committee had also received support from the first *Dharmasansad*, a 'parliament' of major Hindu national religious leaders, which the VHP had convened in Delhi on 7-8 April 1985.<sup>125</sup> Politicians from several parties had also been nominated on the committee. D-day for the liberation of Ram was fixed on 9 March 1986. The committee also contended that the wide support it received from the people, religious leaders and politicians had enabled it to play a significant role behind the scenes in the legal proceedings early in 1986. Through them the young lawyer U.C. Pandey obtained a court order from the Faizabad judge K.M. Pandey on 1 February 1986 that the gates of the fence around the Babri mosque were to be opened.<sup>126</sup> When they were opened, [208] Hindus streamed into the mosque to worship Lord Ram in his jail within an hour. The court order sparked serious communal violence in the North Indian cities.<sup>127</sup>

#### *The 1989 brick production campaign*

In the election year 1989, the VHP launched its second nation-wide campaign to 'liberate' Ram from his jail. It installed *Ramjanmabhumimuktiyagnasamiti* action committees in all cities and villages of India with more than two thousand inhabitants,<sup>128</sup> and also in the Hindu diaspora. They were charged to supervise in their localities the solemn consecration, by ancient Vedic *shilapuja* ('brick worship'), of *Ramshilas*, 'Ram-bricks' carrying the inscription *Jay Shri Ram*, 'victory to Shri Ram', for the 'rebuilding'

<sup>121</sup> Van der Veer 1987a: 293; cf. also Andersen & Damle 1987: 135-136; Janssen 1989: 26-27; Bonouvrié n.y.: 9

<sup>122</sup> Van der Veer 1987: 297-299; Andersen & Damle 1987: 234

<sup>123</sup> Sankar 1991: 14; Noorani 1993: 78

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Badhwar 1986: 30-32, 36, who also reported that militant Hindu youths increasingly began to sport the *trishul*, the trident as the emblem of the god Shiva; cf. also Roy 1989c: 29; Awasthi & Aiyar 1991: 14; Sankar 1991: 14; Awasthi 1992: 15.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Badhwar 1986: 34

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Noorani 1993: 78-79. Thakur (1993: 665; Becke 1994: 6) and several other commentators hold that Rajiv Gandhi himself had instructed the judge to grant permission for worship in order to appease the Hindu 'community' for having given in to Muslim agitation over the Shah Bano case.

<sup>127</sup> Andersen & Damle 1987: 135-136; van der Veer 1987a: 300, note 5; Bakker 1991: 98; Noorani 1993: 78-80.

<sup>128</sup> The RSS and other *Sangh parivar* affiliates had grown considerably in most regions of India since 1983. In some, they had doubled the number of their local branches (Bardhwar 1986: 34-35).

Ram's temple on *Ramjanmabhumi*; and to collect donations (*shilayagnas*, 'brick sacrifices') for that project from every Hindu household.<sup>129</sup> The 'Ram bricks' were to be transported back to Ayodhya in solemn processions. The first stone was to be laid with due pomp and circumstance on 9 November 1989 to mark the beginning of the re-building of the temple of Ram.<sup>130</sup> No plans, however, were announced for the demolition of the *Babrimashid* in which thousands of Hindus daily had unobstructed *darshan* of the images of Ram and Sita, even though militant Hindu youth movements were publicly demanding that the mosque be destroyed.<sup>131</sup>

The BJP openly backed the VHP brick production campaign and 300,000 bricks were sent out all over India.<sup>132</sup> In Gujarat alone, *shila pujas* were reported to have taken place in 20,000 villages. After the bricks had thus been 'sanctified' in the village temples, they were taken from door to door on decorated palanquins for collecting donations in exchange for coupons with a picture of the proposed Rama temple. The bricks were then collected at the block level centres for *mahayagnas*, ceremonies for [209] the public presentation of large donations and taken in processions to district centres for their solemn transportation to Ayodhya in the first week of November 1989.<sup>133</sup> Their passage through Muslim districts and villages led to bloody riots, particularly in Bihar, with hundreds being killed on both sides.<sup>134</sup>

In an attempt to counter the rising tide of support for the BJP, Rajiv Gandhi's ruling Congress Party gave permission for *shilanyas*, the solemn ritual of laying the foundation stone for the new temple for Ram at Ayodhya, to be performed on 9 November 1989.<sup>135</sup> The stone was to be laid at a distance of sixty meters from the front gate of the Babri mosque. Permission for the building of the temple was, however, refused.

The *shilanyas* rite was performed with due ceremony on 9 November. In order to stress the RSS stated policy that caste divisions must take second place because a united Hindu nation had to be achieved, 'the honour of laying the first brick for the foundation [of the Ram temple] went to a *Harijan* [untouchable, JP] from Bihar, Rameshwar Chopal'.<sup>136</sup> Rajiv Gandhi himself also performed *shilanyas*.<sup>137</sup> To celebrate this victory, Hindu youths marched through the streets of the towns of North India, chanting:

The Hindu, whose blood does not boil, has water in his veins  
Youth, that does not serve *Ramjanmabhumi*, is youth lived in vain

<sup>129</sup> Roy 1989: 26

<sup>130</sup> The model for this action was borrowed from the successful campaign in the previous year in Somnath where, as a result of a similar action a large Hindu temple had been built on a spot where Muslim rulers in the past had destroyed Hindu temples on several occasions (Bakker 1991: 98).

<sup>131</sup> Roy 1989: 27.

<sup>132</sup> Some were also sent to the Hindu diasporas in Canada, the United States, the Caribbean, South Africa, etc. *Shilapujas* were held there, and 'sanctified' bricks were returned by airmail to Ayodhya (van der Veer 1994: 664). One brick was also sent back from the *Rammandir* in The Hague (de Rijk 1994).

<sup>133</sup> Roy 1989b: 18, 19; Sankar 1991: 14

<sup>134</sup> In Bhagalpur, in Bihar, the Muslim population was almost wiped out (van der Veer 1994: 663).

<sup>135</sup> Thakur 1993: 655-656

<sup>136</sup> Roy 1989c: 31. However, after the destruction of the Babri mosque, a section of the Hindu religious leaders, united in the VHP, began to voice dissent from this RSS reformist aim (Chatterjee 1993b: 4, 6; Ghimire 1993).

<sup>137</sup> Thakur 1993: 656

Rajiv's concession and his performing *shilanyas* did not, however, bring the electorate back into fold of the Congress Party. It suffered a major defeat in the November 1989 elections. The BJP went from 2 to 88 seats in the national parliament.<sup>138</sup>

*The 1990-1992 Ramarathayatra and kar sevak campaign*

In September 1990, the third nation-wide mobilisation campaign was launched using Hindu cultural and religious symbols. This time it was organised by the BJP itself as a means of gaining votes in the upcoming elections. With Ram still in his Muslim 'jail', the BJP party leader Advani led a 10,000 kilometre long *Ramrathayatra*, 'pilgrimage in the [210] war chariot of Ram', in a jeep painted as a war chariot on which the lotus flower, the BJP iconic symbol,<sup>139</sup> was prominently displayed. Starting out from Somnath on the Gujurath coast in West India, the march took him through eight states and the Union Territory of Delhi to Ayodhya.<sup>140</sup> Advani exhorted his audiences along the way to demonstrate *Rambhakti*, fervent devotion to Ram, and *lok shakti*, 'people's power', and to follow him to Ayodhya for *SriRamakarseva*, 'voluntary service for Sri Rama', for 'rebuilding' his temple at *Ramjanamabhumi*.<sup>141</sup> The procession's slogan was *mandir wohin banayenge*, 'we will build the temple there, and only there'. It did indeed incite many thousands of volunteers to join him on his *Ramrathayatra*.

When Advani reached Ayodhya on 30 October 1990, he had gathered over one hundred thousand<sup>142</sup> *karsevaks* around him, many of them members of the recently established *Bajrang Dal*, the militant RSS youth movement. Upon entering Ayodhya, they tried to storm the Babri mosque but their path was blocked by the thousands of troops the government of Uttar Pradesh had posted there.<sup>143</sup> Thirty *karsevaks* died at their hands. Some, however, managed to break through, scramble onto the top of the major dome of the mosque, and wave flags from it, which event received world-wide media coverage the next day.<sup>144</sup> Advani was arrested and in the communal violence that followed, hundreds more died.<sup>145</sup>

In the elections in May-June 1991, however, the BJP proved to be riding on popular acclaim,<sup>146</sup> especially in North India where it won a majority in four states: Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. It also did well in the national elections. It gained one-fifth of all the votes and saw its number of seats in parliament rise from 88 to 119.<sup>147</sup> [211] After the elections, the new BJP government of Uttar Pradesh joined the battle. It began to put pressure on Muslims to convert to Hinduism. It refused to order the *karsevaks* to stop their work at Ayodhya as requested by the central government and as it was ordered by the Supreme Court. On October 31 1991, a small number of *karsevaks* managed to

<sup>138</sup> Bakker 1991: 98-101; Fuller 1992: 258-259; Thakur 1993: 655-656

<sup>139</sup> The lotus is also the traditional symbol of liberating knowledge (cf. e.g. Klostermaier 1989: 271-273).

<sup>140</sup> Vyas 1991: 12; Sankar 1991: 15

<sup>141</sup> 'Devotion to Ram' and 'people's power' were also fused symbolically into the *trishul*, trident, the symbol of the terror inspiring god Shiva, which the *karsevaks* were encouraged to carry (Bonouvrié n.y.: 9).

<sup>142</sup> Inflated to half a million in Becke (1994: 7)

<sup>143</sup> That government was headed by Mulayam Singh Yadav, leader of an upwards mobile 'backward' caste (van der Veer 1994: 664).

<sup>144</sup> Reproduced in Anonymous 1993: 24; Gopal 1993b: cover.

<sup>145</sup> Bakker 1991: 101; Thakur 1993: 653

<sup>146</sup> The VHP and BJP effectively exploited the events of 30 October 1990 by circulating videos and cassettes about the attack on the mosque and claiming that the police had killed many more *karsevaks*. After their cremation, the bones and ashes of those killed were taken through the country in ritual pots before their immersion in a sacred river (van der Veer 1994: 664).

<sup>147</sup> Cf. e.g. Awasthi & Ghimire 1992: 15

slip through the security guarding the Babri mosque, hoist a saffron flag on its domes, and inflict minor damage on the building.<sup>148</sup> The BJP moreover announced that it would conduct another nation-wide *Ramarathyagna* in late 1991, from Kanyakumari, on India's southernmost tip, to Srinigar in its utmost North in order to increase pressure on the central government.<sup>149</sup>

In the course of 1992, a deadlock ensued between the central government and the state of Uttar Pradesh, now controlled by the BJP. It put the troops guarding the mosque in an ambiguous position, for they knew that the Uttar Pradesh government was privately committed to destroying the mosque.<sup>150</sup> On 30 and 31 October 1992, a *Dharamsansad* of over 5000 religious leaders, which had gathered in Delhi, announced that *karseva* for the construction of the Ram temple on the spot of the Babri mosque would be resumed on 6 December. All over Northern India, ritual fire services (*Agnishapathdivas*) were held at which *karsevaks* pledged that they would continue to engage in *karseva* till the temple was completed.<sup>151</sup> On the first of December, Advani and the BJP president M.M. Joshi undertook a six day mini *Ramrathayatras*, with Advani starting out from Varanasi and Joshi from Mathura, in order to 'mobilize people against the Centre's injustice'.<sup>152</sup> In this they were greatly assisted by two RSS female leaders, Sadhvi Rithambara and Uma Bharati. In fiery speeches, which were widely circulated, they charged Hindu men who were unwilling to shed their blood for Hindu India, that they had water, not blood, in their veins.<sup>153</sup>

#### *The destruction of the Babri masjid*

These developments, as well as the Hindu sympathies and the known corruption among politicians and senior police officers, were [212] the main reasons why the troops guarding the Babri mosque<sup>154</sup> offered at first only a little resistance, and soon became passive 'spineless spectators'<sup>155</sup> on 6 December 1992. Shortly after 11.00 a.m., some of two to three hundred thousand *karsevaks*,<sup>156</sup> many armed with *trishuls*, the metal tridents of Shiva, began to filter through the cordons of the troops and slip over the walls towards the mosque. In particular, the 40,000 *karsevaks* of the RSS youth movement Bajrang Dal functioned as the 'storm troopers' in taking possession of the mosque and assisting a specially trained force of 1,200<sup>157</sup> in destroying the mosque in less than six hours.<sup>158</sup> That night, many *karsevaks* fanned out into

<sup>148</sup> Pande 1991: 12, 16

<sup>149</sup> Vyas 1991: 12

<sup>150</sup> Thakur 1993: 656, 658

<sup>151</sup> Ramakrishnan 1992b: 18; Ghimire 1992: 33

<sup>152</sup> Ramakrishnan 1992c: 10; 1992d

<sup>153</sup> Embree 1994: 647

<sup>154</sup> The Central Government had also sent quite a large force in November 1992, but that had been quartered in cantonments in Faizabad, at a few miles' distance from the Babri mosque (Awasthi 1992b). On December 6, four battalions of the special Rapid Action Forces were called out at 1.30 p.m., two and a half hours after the attack on the *Babri masjid* had begun. At 2 p.m., when they were at a distance of 2 k from it, the Uttar Pradesh Prime Minister Kalyan Singh ordered the Faizabad District Magistrate R.N. Srivastava to send them back to their barracks. They never arrived at the scene of destruction (Ramakrishnan 1993b: 13; Awasthi & Mahurkar 1992; Sidhu & Awasthi 1992).

<sup>155</sup> Sidhu & Awasthi 1992

<sup>156</sup> Embree (1994: 647) reports their number as 'about sixty thousand' (apart from a motley crowd of *sadhus*, shopkeepers, peasants, and students). Among the *karsevaks* was a separate contingent of five thousand females whose very effective contribution was that of spurring on their male counterparts (Embree 1994: 646-647). Becke (1994: 9, 24) again inflates the number of *karsevaks* to half a million.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Ramakrishnan 1993a; Awasthi & Mahurkar 1992; Badhwar & Ghimire 1992; Thakur 1993: 657. Four of them fell to their deaths and six hundred got injured in the demolition of the domes (Ramakrishnan 1993b: 13; Shankar 1992).

<sup>158</sup> Between 11.00 and 16.49 hours. The first dome collapsed at 1.55 p.m.; the second at 3.30 p.m.; and the main dome at 4.49 p.m. For the chronology of these and the other events on 6, 7, and 8 December 1992, cf. Awasthi 1992: 26-27; Sidhu & Awasthi 1992; Ramakrishnan 1993.

Tehri Bazar, the main Muslim quarter of Ayodhya, killing ten Muslims and burning nearly one hundred houses. At the same time, others built a makeshift temple on the rubble of the mosque and installed the images of Ram and Sita in it.<sup>159</sup> They completed their job on the following day, December 7, by building a five foot high brick wall around it. In the evening of that day, some *karsevaks* already began to leave Ayodhya by special trains. Only at 3.00 a.m. in that night did the troops of the central government arrive to take possession of the disputed area. They met with only a brief show of resistance from a few *karsevaks*. By the end of the next day, all *karsevaks* had left Ayodhya by special trains and busses.

Communal violence, however, followed nation-wide, with [213] seventeen hundred dead and over five thousand wounded.<sup>160</sup> The central government dismissed the BJP governments in the four states the BJP ruled and banned the RSS, the Bajrang Dal, and the VHP. It arrested key VHP and BJP leaders, among them Advani, and forbade the worship of the images of Ram and Sita in the 'temple' on top of the destroyed *Babrimashid*. However, the District Magistrate of Ayodhya lifted the ban on the worship of Ram at *Ramjanmabhumi* already on 2 January 1993. And the central government released Advani and the other leaders within a month.<sup>161</sup>

Ram had been 'freed' from his 'jail'. His 'place of birth' had been restored to the Hindus at a price which Ram, the perfect model of *dharmaraja*, might not have been willing to pay. But then Ram reigned in *tretayuga*, not in this *kali* age. It seems in tune with that age that Hindus converted Rama, traditionally represented as a powerful, but restrained and tender-hearted man, into an aggressive, masculine, warrior god.<sup>162</sup>

### *Seven anti-Durkheimian conclusions*

The analytical perspectives I developed in the chapter on 'Ritual in Pural and Puralist Societies' in this volume<sup>163</sup> allow me to draw seven conclusions from this description of the VHP/BJP rituals of confrontation<sup>164</sup> of 1984, 1989, and 1990-1992. Some of them are incompatible with the traditional emphasis in Durkheimian sociology on the integrative function of ritual.

1. The first is that the Ayodhya rituals of confrontation show that rituals may not only express, maintain, and restore a society's solidarity, as discovered by Durkheimian sociology, but may also be used to destroy it. A ritual may not only (re-)unify a society – even if only temporarily, as in unstable social systems such as Turner's Ndembu – but it may also be used in power contests in order to achieve significant re-adjustments in the balance of power among a society's various factions, as was the case in the Ayodhya 'rituals of confrontation' described above, or even to banish some group permanently from [214] their midst, as in the rituals of exclusion which Chidester (1988) has analysed.

The Ayodhya rituals served both unifying and divisive intentions. They were meant, on the one hand, to overcome the traditional fragmentation of Hindu piety. That piety is divided not only by the numerous

<sup>159</sup> Ramakrishnan 1993b; the statues had been removed from the mosque by the *karsevaks* during the demolition.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Anonymi 1992; Thakur 1993: 645; Embree 1994: 648

<sup>161</sup> Ghimire & Pathak 1992; Ramakrishnan 1993c; Ram 1993; Ghimire 1993: 49; Thakur 1993: 645, 653-654, 656, 658-659

<sup>162</sup> Bhattacharya 1993: 129; Van der Veer 1994b: 178. Cf. also Sarkar (1993: 166) and Hansen (1993: 2271-2272) on the 'Kshatriyaisation' of the image of 'the angry Hindu' through the Ram campaigns.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Platvoet 1996

<sup>164</sup> Sankar 1991: 14; Bhattacharya 1993: 130

traditional *sampradayas* or ‘traditions’ of the past, such as the highly different religiosities of high, low, and out-caste groups; of town and village religion; and of the hundreds of religious orders of *Shaiva*, *Vaishnava*, and *Shakti* persuasion. But it is also divided by traditional and reform Hinduism; the North-South divide; and that of Hindus and ‘heterodox’ religious communities of Indian origin, like the Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs. The *Sangh parivar*’s aim was to replace all these with one, subcontinent-wide,<sup>165</sup> and even world-wide, *sampradaya*: the ‘Hindu community’,<sup>166</sup> culturally and politically united<sup>167</sup> against the religious communities of non-Indian origin, the Muslims and the Christians. It had to become strong enough to put a stop to the conversion of more Indians to these ‘foreign’ religions, and to be able to dictate to them the terms on which their believers would be suffered as residents in India. This it could achieve only after the Hindu majority, politically operating as a militant *Hindutva*, ‘Hindu-dom’ inspired by ‘Hindu-ness’, had turned India into *Hindurashtra*, the strong, modern and unified Hindu nation-state.<sup>168</sup> Bharat Mata, and Ram imprisoned in the *Babrimasjid* in his own capital city of Ayodhya, served as the symbols with which the VHP and BJP managed to mobilise the Hindu masses and forge a political front against the Muslim ‘community’ and against the disinterested liberal Hindus supporting the secular state. That front, established [215] during the 1984-1986, 1989, 1990-1992 campaigns, instilled in many Hindus the feeling that they were ‘a majority who must act like an embattled minority’.<sup>169</sup> Its unexpected success is likely to prove a watershed in India’s political history.<sup>170</sup>

2. The second anti-Durkheimian conclusion is that Ayodhya rituals of contest also show that ritual need not necessarily be a form of customary, conventionalised behaviour merely repeating earlier identical sequences and utterly constrained by them. They show, on the one hand, that rituals may be designed for particular, one-time purposes as events that are not meant to be repeated after their purpose has been achieved. And on the other hand, that the new rituals may be constructed by selecting rather freely and selectively from a large stock of older as well as younger, but never completely new complexes of dense consonant core symbol systems. Upon this ritual repertoire, one draws intuitively and selectively the contents as well as the forms of the new rituals, being both constrained to a degree by these complexes from the past as well as fairly free because they are full of replicating redundancies. Moreover, innovations in form and content are made possible by recent technological developments in e.g. communication and transportation facilities, and are demanded by the new contexts of cultural communication or political

<sup>165</sup> Cf. also Ramachandra Das’ statement in his interview with Andreas Becke on 7 April 1994: ‘We want India to be re-united just as Germany achieved its re-unification. We want Bharat [= the present state of India, JP], Pakistan, and Bangladesh re-united, because these countries constitute India’ (Becke 1994: 20; translation JP).

<sup>166</sup> Cf. the answer in VHP pamphlet *India in Danger* (Appendix 2 in Janssen 1989: 43-47) to the question ‘Who are Hindus?’: ‘The followers of any religion originated in India, like Sanatan Dharma, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, etc., though they may be residing elsewhere in the world, are Hindus’. However, the VHP definition of ‘Hinduism’ is identical to the one in section 25 of India’s Constitution of 1951 (Frykenberg 1994: 609; cf. also Yechury 1993: 16).

<sup>167</sup> Cf. also Chengappa (1993: 32) on the use of the Shaivaite *trishul* in *Ramjannabhumi* campaigns, and the additional demands for the demolition of mosques at Mathura and Kashi/Varanasi in order that temples for Krishna and Shiva might be (re-)built there.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Klostermaier 1989: 33, 173; Gold 1991: 546-551; Bhattacharya 1993: 129-131; Chengappa 1993; Embree 1994: 619, 620, 644; Becke 1994: 11-13, 222-23. On the role of M.S. Golwarkar, the second *Sarsanghchhalak* (Leader for life, 1940-1973) of the RSS, in the formulation of the *Hindutva* ideology and in development of the *Sangh parivar* as the RSS multi-purpose instrument for achieving its goals, cf. Yechury 1993.

<sup>169</sup> Gold 1991: 577

<sup>170</sup> ‘The power unleashed by the *Rammandir* agitation took everybody by surprise, also the RSS and BJP’ (Hansen 1993: 2270). In Hansen’s view, the success of the *Sanghparivar* is not due to careful planning, but to its ‘more belligerent, majoritarian and populist’ answer to the structural transformations of the Indian polity in the 1980s.

competition. I have shown above that the Ayodhya ritual complex consists in a combination of symbols from a brahmanical *tirtha* complex and from the Ram cult of the Ramanandis. The descriptions I presented of these two and of the 1983-1992 events show that the VHP and BJP creatively combined elements from the older – but far from stagnant – Rama-Ayodhya complex with the Ganges-water traditions and the young and still evolving *Bharatmata* symbolism. And that they used them for their one and only purpose: the political unification of the Hindus.<sup>171</sup>

The *Sangh parivar*, the RSS family, was quite familiar with the symbolism of the *Ramarajya*, ‘the rule of Rama’, representing as it did the ideal Hindu society. It had in *Rama* a perfect symbol of the divine king who not only maintained the perfect social order by his just rule, but had also established it by his victories over Ravana and by [216] liberating Sita.<sup>172</sup> The *Sangh parivar* might, therefore, well have confined itself to the use of Rama symbolism in its propagation of the Hindu nation it sought to build. But the VHP in particular accorded a large role to *Bharatmata*, the ‘Mother India’ of India’s national anthem and projected her onto the divine plane. Thereby it accorded her, in the form in which she had been created in colonial time as a politico-religious symbol and instrument for the independence struggle,<sup>173</sup> a new lease of life after independence for the struggle for the Hinduisation of India. She was useful as a symbol of India as a unified nation precisely because she was, as yet, a goddess virtually without temples, cult, traditional myths, or groups of devotees after the traditional, divisive Hindu patterns.<sup>174</sup>

Two reasons seem to have inspired this use. Firstly, RSS needed to project the new political phenomenon, the modern nation-state, and its aspirations as to how it should be ordered, in a traditional manner onto the divine plane without linking it to the deep Hindu religious divisions, past and present. They were especially those between the high and low castes, and between *Sanatan Dharm* – ‘the eternal law’, the modern umbrella term for ‘Hinduism’ – and the other religions of Indian origin: Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. And secondly, they needed to link the struggle for Hindu unity, as expressed in *Bharatmata*, to other powerful symbols of femininity and motherhood in order to connect ‘Mother India’ with that other major symbol at the heart of the 1983 *Ekatmatayajna* campaign, the sacred rivers of India. RSS needed to link *Bharatmata* in particular with the Ganges – worshipped as a major deity in ‘her’ own right – as life-giving and purifying in order to suggest *ad intra* to Hindus of all castes, who were converting to Islam, and even to the untouchables, that a unified Hindu India would shelter them all and protect them as a caring mother.

At the same time, the martial traits of the *Bharatmata* iconography RSS used served eminently to project RSS imperialist ambitions onto her and proclaim them *ad extra*. [217] They were the banner in her

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Van der Veer 1994a: 661-662

<sup>172</sup> See e.g. Andersen & Damle 1987: 34, 35, 93, 229; Gold 1991: 548

<sup>173</sup> The symbol of Bharat Mata was created in 1882 by B.C. Chatterjee as a representation of his motherland Bengal. It was given wide circulation by Aurobindo Ghose who republished it. After Tagore had put it to music and it had been made popular by the use which Nehru made of it in the election campaigns of the National Congress Party on the eve of independence, it was chosen as India’s national anthem despite protests from the Muslim League (Janssen 1989: 26-27; van der Veer 1994a: 661-662; cf. also Embree 1994: 647).

<sup>174</sup> However, Shradhananda, a radical Arya Samaj protagonist of a unified *Hindurashtra* (cf. Gold 1991: 564-566), proposed as early as 1926 ‘to build one Hindu Rashtra mandir in every city and important town [...] devoted to the worship of the three mother-spirits, the Gautamamata [‘Mother Cow’], the Saraswatimata [‘Mother of Knowledge’], and the Bhumimata [‘Motherland goddess’]’ (quoted in Jaffrelot 1993: 524, note 34). The VHP actually may have begun a cult for *Bharatmata*. It built a temple for her in Hardwar, a famous place of pilgrimage on the upper reaches of the Ganges in North India, in 1976. Indira Gandhi is reported to have participated in a ritual in that temple on May 15, 1983 (Badhwar 1986: 28) and to have inaugurated it in October 1983 (Muralidharan 1992a).

left hand, the lion at her side, the flaring flames around her head, and her standing before an undivided subcontinent and projecting herself far beyond it.<sup>175</sup> In Hindu minds, these associate *Bharatmata* with demon-killing Durga.<sup>176</sup> By these associations, *Bharat Mata* also served as another, and therefore redundant transformation of messages sent through the Rama complex, for Rama also is depicted as strong as well as gentle. For he is thought of as not only the powerful martial hero and the perfectly just and impartial king, but also as Sita's tender-hearted husband.

The ideal of *Ramarajya*, the proleptic symbol of *Hindurashtra* as a unified Hindu India, was ritually expressed by further replicating redundancies in several ways. One was the mixing of all its sacred waters and in the nation-wide *yathras*, converging on Nagpur in 1983 and on Ayodhya in the VHP/BJP *Ramrathras* of 1984-1986 and 1989. Another was the bricks sent back to Ayodhya in 1986, and the *kar sevaks* converging on it for the rebuilding of the *Rammandir* in 1989-1992.<sup>177</sup> The desired unity of a Hindu India was also expressed, and to some extent realised, by the remarkable success of the VHP in uniting religious leaders across virtually the whole breadth of non-immigrant Indian religious diversity. It organised them into councils and committees that either authorised and supported the VHP-BJP campaigns or took an active role in them.

Another reason why the VHP complemented the Rama-complex with that of *Bharat Mata*, is that Rama could not, by virtue of his 'imprisonment' in his 'Muslim jail' since 1949, serve as the mythical hero who leads the battle for a unified Hindu nation. Whereas in the *Ramayana*, Rama liberated Sita, it was now Rama who must be liberated. The first campaign to set him free, [218] therefore, set off from 'Sita's birthplace' (Sitamarthi) in Bihar. The caravan of *sadhus* and VHP-officials represented both Sita, Ram's bride, travelling to be married to him, and Hindu India, as *Bharatmata*, on her way to liberate her Lord and restore him to his throne and kingdom. *Ramarajya* would be re-inaugurated by *Bharatmata* defeating 'Ravana' and freeing Ram. The equation of the secular government and the Muslim community with Ravana, the king of the *ashuras*, demons, was clearly implied,<sup>178</sup> as was the comparison of their manner of rule and political influence with the forest, Ravana's kingdom, as the realm of chaos and the inversion of *Ramrajya*. The large painting of armed Muslims slaughtering unarmed *sadhus*, used in the 1984 *Ramjanmabhumimukhtiyagna* replicated the message of the image of the Muslims as the demonic enemy. So did the use of the war chariot in the 1991 BJP *Ramarathayatra*, and the appeal for *karseva*, sacred service in the 'war' to be fought for the conquest of *Ramjanmabhumi*. These symbols served as the consonant and redundant spatio-temporal frames for focusing experience on events in the mythological and his-

<sup>175</sup> On the use of the symbolism of *Bharatmata*, 'Mother India', as the Divine Mother who has been raped by marauding Muslim invaders, and as the motherland which extends from Iran to the Malay Peninsula and from Tibet to Sri Lanka, cf. Andersen & Damle 1987: 77; Janssen 1989: 26-27; Gold 1991: 547-548; Van der Veer 1994a: 666-667; Becke 1994: 12-13.

<sup>176</sup> Bonouvrié n.y.: 9. Durga is a form of Devi, the mother goddess who killed the buffalo demon in mythical times (Klostermaier 1989: 261-261). Cf. also Gold (1991b: 361-367). He 'explains' the RSS combination of carefully planned mass mobilisation campaigns with sporadic outbursts of anti-Muslim mob violence by what he takes, in Durkheimian terms, as the compelling need of Hindus to identify with the encompassing totality of the Hindu nation by occasional outbursts of religious frenzy. These, he holds, have received mythological legitimacy in the Shiva-Kali polarity and in the polarity inherent in Shiva himself; cf. also Embree 1994: 647; Becke 1994: 13, citing Klimkeit 1981: 243-247, 303-305.

<sup>177</sup> The ideal Hindu pilgrimage is the clockwise circumambulation of India by a visit to the four divine 'abodes' (*dhamas*): Badrinath in the Himalaya in the north, Puri on the eastern coast, Rameswaram on the southern coast, and Dwarka on the western coast (Fuller 1992: 206).

<sup>178</sup> E.g., in July 1992, the then Prime Minister of India, P.V. Narasimha Rao, was depicted as Ravana in speeches of VHP leaders to the odd 20.000 *karsevaks* then in Ayodhya (Ramakrishnan 1992: 13, 15). Cf. also Embree (1994: 631-635) on the construction by the RSS of its four categories of enemies: Indian adherents of foreign religions, Communists, Westernised Indians, and unfriendly 'foreign powers' destabilising India with the help of the first three categories.

torical past, especially those in which Hindus, and particularly Hindu temples and ascetics, had suffered at the hands of Muslims in power; or in which Hindus had fought Muslim rulers; or again in which the monkey army of *Hanuman* assisted Ram in defeating Ravana. They also marked Muslims, whether or not in power, as alien intruders, and Indians who had converted to Islam as traitors.

Even though we have little detailed information about the actual religious rituals that were performed in all these campaigns, the messages which were implicit in them and in the wider mobilisation contexts were clear and forcefully transmitted, both *ad intra* and, especially, *ad extra*. Whether the messages *ad extra* were expressed in dignified rituals, in devout or inflammatory speeches, in provocative marches, or in bloody riots, they all forcefully transmitted the overt or implied message, through the indirect and direct fields of ritual communication. The message was that India should be de-secularised and that Muslims should accept the privileged position of Hinduism in India in the form the *Sangh parivar* sought to establish. Or, as an Indian journalist concluded on 6 December 1992, when the last of the [219] three domes of the Babri mosque had collapsed: the BJP political goal was not primarily the building of the *Rammandir*, but the razing of the *Babrimashid*.<sup>179</sup>

3. The third conclusion is clear from the foregoing analysis. These rituals not only served as power strategies, and open ones at that, but also as communicative events. Indeed, they were, in this case, effective strategies of power by the very fact that they sent out loud and clear messages, to ‘friends’ as well as ‘enemies’.<sup>180</sup> The messages and their diverse interpretations in the terms of the various codes – Hindu, Muslim, secular and other – in the minds of the groups addressed, were an essential part of these strategies of power. Apart from overt political aims, they did, of course, also serve covert aims, such as e.g. the RSS ideal of the controlled emancipation of women,<sup>181</sup> and the less covert one of narrowing down the wide gap in Indian society between the upper and lower strata.

4. A fourth conclusion is that the Ayodhya rituals confirm the heuristic and analytic usefulness of an inclusive operational definition of ritual that does not separate ‘religious ritual’, in which postulated unseen beings are addressed, from secular ceremony. In the Ayodhya rituals, the two categories are so completely intertwined, morphologically, content-wise as well as functionally, that they can hardly be separated, either descriptively or analytically. This is very much in line with the Durkheimian concept of the social as the sacred, but belies Durkheim’s analytical dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, or profane.

5. The fifth conclusion is that the Ayodhya rituals prove the analytical usefulness of the performance and performative approaches to ritual. In ritual behaviour symbolic complexes can be dramatically enacted on the political stage for the purpose of evoking powerful sentiments and attitudes, of diverse and even highly antagonistic sorts, in the different groups addressed, and for creating, and at least temporarily constitut-

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<sup>179</sup> Badhwar 1992: 35

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Embree (1994: 646): ‘They [the Muslims, JP] read the demand for the destruction of the Masjid as a code word for the RSS assertion that they were an alien element in India, surviving on Hindu tolerance, not on their rights as people of the land’.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Hansen 1993: 2272. On the attitude of the *Rashtra Sevika Samiti*, the RSS organisation of women, towards the emancipation of women, cf. Embree 1994: 640-642.

ing, [220] significant political ‘realities’.<sup>182</sup> The Ayodhya rituals not only effectively alerted and focused attention onto themselves and the political messages they proclaimed, but also proved also more successful than their planners, or their opponents, ever expected.<sup>183</sup> Ritual not only expresses, sustains and restores the social order, it can also reshape it by performatively constituting new relationships between the persons or groups involved, for shorter or longer periods of time.

6. My one-but-last conclusion is that the family resemblance, or synthetic, type of operational definition, which I have proposed in the other chapter,<sup>184</sup> is borne out by the Ayodhya rituals. They do not contain data refuting that ritual is in fact

collective, interactive, expressive, communicative, symbolic and performative behaviour with both customary and innovative, as well as traditionalising qualities, in which multi-media forms of expression are used, including aesthetic stylisation and theatrical performance, and which is implicitly or explicitly directed towards the achievement of strategic goals which are often integrative in kind but may also have, and be meant to have, explosive effects upsetting the existing balance of power in a given society.

[221]

7. My seventh and final conclusion is that the analytical extensions of this operational definition of ritual for the historical and comparative study of ritual in plural and pluralist societies (developed in the chapter on the analysis of ritual) proved useful in the case of the Ayodhya rituals. Apart from the direct messages they carried, e.g. that the secular government ‘pampered’ the religious minorities, the Muslims in particular, these rituals also sent out messages, which clearly demonised the Muslim community. The concepts of indirect addressees, indirect messages, and indirect, or wider, field of ritual communication, proved useful in the analysis of the Ayodhya rituals, and may be helpful in similar situations of religious plurality. This is also true of the ways in which these direct and indirect messages were received in diverse quarters and the manners in which they were interpreted there on the basis of the different codes of interpretation by which each quarter is ruled. These differences in interpretation, often rooted in past expe-

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<sup>182</sup> However forcefully sent, ritual messages are not by themselves performative. Performative utterances constitute social relationships only by the consent of all involved, the sender, the receiver and the congregation, i.e. by the ‘community’ as a whole. The *ad extra* messages in the Ayodhya rituals of confrontation were instruments of pressure for achieving a political vision. On their success, opinions differ. Van der Veer (1987: 299) correctly holds that ‘Hindu feelings and values are not [static] givens; rather they are the product of a political process’. Chhibber & Misra measured the support for communalism immediately after the destruction of the *Babrimasjid* at Ayodhya by a survey. It was conducted in Delhi and three cities in Uttar Pradesh with a sizeable Muslim population. Measured in terms of castes, support for communalism was highest among the non-Brahmin upper-castes (*dvijas*) (55%), high among the Brahmins (50%) and lowest (45%) among the *non-dvija* castes. Measured in terms of class and occupation, support was high among the middle class, particularly the traders and small businessmen (62%) and white collar workers (60%), but low among students (32%) and labourers (28%). Measured in terms of age, it was highest amongst those over 45 years who had witnessed the partition (63%), and lowest (47%) amongst those below 45 years of age who had not. Chhibber & Misra conclude that ‘communal feelings are most pronounced among [...] particular occupations, age cohorts, and those who believe that the government favours some groups over others. [...] These sentiments are [however] not as widespread as assumed, especially among the younger, post-independence generation’ (Chhibber & Misra 1993: 671-672; Embree 1994: 638, 640, 645). Cf. also Van der Veer (1994a: 664, 665-666; 1994b: 178) on the growing economic and political significance of India’s middle class as a major factor in the Ayodhya events, in particular by its growing share in indigenous tourism, especially to such places as Ayodhya, and the strong boost tourism again received from India’s media industry. The latter produced many Hindu mythological plays in the past few years, the undisputed high point being the serialisation of the *Ramayana* on Indian television in 1987.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Hansen 1993: 2270.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Platvoet 1996

riences and hopes for, or fears of, the future, were an essential mechanism in the unfolding process of the political confrontation between the Hindu and Muslim 'communities', the Indian government, the press, and the Hindus disinclined to support communalism.

*In conclusion*

The rich Ayodhya data presented in this chapter show that it is heuristically more fruitful not to separate religious ritual from secular ceremony. But they also establish that the historical data for the comparative analysis of ritual are so rich and have such complex forms, functions and usages, that we are at present still very far from a sure grasp, in terms of definition and division, of the complex phenomenon of 'ritual'. We are, in brief, still in the pre-paradigmatic stage in the science of ritual, and we are likely to remain there for much longer if scholars of religions continue to regard ritual as a self-evident term not in need of definition, classification and theoretical analysis.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> One of the few exceptions is Snoek 1987.

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