Hindutva's Entry into a 'Hindu Province': Early Years of RSS in Orissa

Orissa retains some unique features of Hinduism manifested in particular in the Jagannath cult. Structures of pre-colonial legitimacy were reinvented by colonialism, acquiesced to by the nationalist and the post-colonial leadership/discourses and appropriated by an identity-seeking Hindu upper caste-middle class. Together these offered a congenial climate for the development of Hindutva. This paper broadly outlines the cultural, social and political climate of Orissa at the time of the entry of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and examines how this organisation, intelligently and strategically, interacted with and adapted itself to the peculiar conditions in this 'Hindu province' during the early years of its existence in the state.

by Pralay Kanungo

Various regional traditions constitute the core of Indiaís tradition. A region is not just a specific physical entity. More importantly, it involves historical, linguistic, cultural, social, structural, and/or the interrelations among these kind of variables.1 Hence, it becomes important to understand how the homogenising and overarching ideology of Hindutva manifests itself in different regional contexts. Jaffrelot2 makes an exhaustive and excellent study of central India, while Hansen3 focuses on Maharashtra, Jayaprasad4 on Kerala, and Rudd5 on West Bengal. Though Hindutva has made deep inroads into Orissa, there is hardly any study explaining how and why this phenomenon has had such an immense impact on this region. This paper broadly outlines the cultural, social and political climate of Orissa at the time of the entry of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the fountainhead of Hindutva, and examines how this organisation has, intelligently and strategically, interacted with and adapted itself to the peculiar conditions in this ëHindu provinceí during the early years of its existence in the state.

I

Orissa: Diversities and Contradictions in a ëHindu Provinceí

The formal starting point of this history is 1936, when the province was created, uniting most of the Oriya-speaking territories. Since this coincided with the carving out of a separate Muslim province ó Sindh ó it appeared as if Orissa had been created only to appease the Hindus.6 Indeed, this act had wider intellectual meaning for a section of the Oriya middle class, which not only embraced it but also internalised it.7 The colonial census, which polarised religious identities in the subcontinent,8 indicated that Orissa was predominantly Hindu. This was emphatically reinforced by the census department of free India as well; the 1991 Census puts the ëHinduí population of Orissa at 94.67 per cent.9 Thus, working on these assumptions ó colonial categorisations, the perceptions of a section of the Oriya middle class, and free Indiaís census assessments ó the RSS regards Orissa as a ëHindu provinceí. Hence, it is pertinent to outline some of the features of this ëHindu provinceí and examine how Hindutva fits in here.

The early history of modern Orissa remains rather obscure. The territories that constitute the present-day state were known under various names in different historical periods: Utkala, Kalinga, Kosala and Udra. Orissaís topography and geography shaped its history to a large extent. It comprises mainly two regions: the coastal plains and the highlands. If the forests and mountains of the highlands made the region inaccessible, the river system of the coastal plains was not friendly either. This gave the impression that Orissa ìwas always terra incognita, by reason of its geographical position, and local circumstances.î10 Besides this, in comparison to north and central India, parts of Orissa came under ëMuslim ruleí three centuries later, in 1568. Even the victorious general of Akbar reportedly did not find it a ìfit subject for conquest, or for schemes of human ambition.î11 Thus, Orissaís geography and topography helped to preserve its indigenous cultural identity to a large extent. But at the same time it remained very much connected with its neighbours, absorbing a series of cultural waves from the north and the south into its indigenous culture; Aryans and dravidians both intermingled here with the natives. The Sadhabas of coastal Orissa, a sea-faring community, established enduring commercial as well as cultural links with south-east Asia, particularly Indonesia.

The Kapila Samhita describes Orissa as the ëHoly Landí of the Hindus: ìOf all the regions of the earth India is the noblest; and of all the countries of India, Utkala boasts the highest renown. From end to end it is one vast region of pilgrimage.î12 But Orissa had also experienced the strong influence of both Jainism and Buddhism. The Khandagiri and Udayagiri inscriptions reveal that Jainism flourished here much before the advent of Buddhism. According to Jain literary sources, the king of Kalinga was a disciple of Parsavnatha (eighth century BC), the 23rd Tirthankara, and Mahavira himself had visited Kalinga. Jainism reached its peak during Kharavelaís reign (first century BC), after which it slowly died out. Buddhist literature claims that after the Buddhaís death, one of his tooth-relics was carried to the capital of Kalinga. Buddhism spread extensively in Orissa after the Kalinga War (third century BC) and remained predominant till the fifth century AD, particularly in Odra, Kalinga and Kosala, and then gradually disappeared by the 10th century AD. Saivism triumphed over Buddhism in the fifth century AD; an Asokan pillar was converted into a colossal shivling at the Bhaskaresvra temple in Bhubaneswar, indicating a violent struggle between the two faiths. The Madalapanji, the chronicle of the Jagannath temple, records that the Ganga rulers, the great patrons of brahmanical Hinduism, persecuted the Buddhists. Along with persecuting non-Hindus, attempts were also made to assimilate them into the Hindu fold. Jayadevaís Gita Govinda (12th century AD) describes the Buddha as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu. Although both Buddhism and Jainism completely disappeared from Orissa, their legacy of non-violence and religious meditation deeply influenced its people.

Consequently, Hinduism in Orissa had never been a monolithic discourse; rather it represented a confluence of diverse cults and sects, such as Saivism, Vaishnavism, Tantrism and Saktism, reflecting a marvellous mosaic: sanskritic and non-sanskritic, all-India and regional/local,13 textual and popular,14 urban and village.15 The coastal region and the river valleys were home to innumerable Hindu temples and monuments, all testifying to the magnificent indigenous architectural genius. This assertive sub-region had strictly upheld brahmanical traditions and the rituals of ceremonial purity. It was also

home to many repugnant superstitions16 and obnoxious caste prejudices for centuries; the dominant caste Hindus like the brahmanas, the karanas, and the khandayats controlled the lives of the subaltern lower castes and the untouchables.17

In contrast to the coastal plains, a fairly large adivasi population lived/lives in the forests and highland areas throughout Orissaís history. Even today, the state has as many as 62 adivasi communities, which constitute roughly one-fourth of its population.18 The adivasi population is substantial in districts like Mayurbhanj (57.9 per cent), Koraput (54.3 per cent), Sundargarh (50.7 per cent), Keonjhar (44.5 per cent) and Phulbani (37.3 per cent). These adivasis have their own pantheon of gods and goddesses and their own shamanic practices.19 In contrast to the brahmanical vedic rituals, some adivasi communities like the khonds practised ëmeriahí or human sacrifices till the mid-19th century. Hence, in Orissa the gods of brahmanism are worshipped along with the minor deities outside the brahmanical pantheon, and the great traditions coexist with the little traditions.

The most significant feature, however, is the unique position of Jagannath of Puri in the religio-cultural and political traditions of Orissa. Although the cult has a rather recent history, its ëancientnessí is projected since it is a major component of the process of homogenisation.20 Though Jagannath is identified as ëOrissaís god/cultí there are major complexities that need to be delineated. First, although Puri is the chief seat of brahmanical power in eastern India, Jagannath has a strong adivasi connection.21 It is widely believed that originally the savaras worshipped Jagannath as Nilamadhaba in the Nilakandara (Blue Caves). The iconography also speaks of the adivasi origin of the ëtrinityí ó Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra. Further, the etymology of Madalapanji suggests its roots in the Mundari word ëmudalaí, which means ìto establish with evidence, confront with proof.î22 Thus, the Hinduisation of Orissa needs to be seen as a two-way process in which not only were some features of Hinduism incorporated into the adivasi cults, but also vice versa. Second, the decision of Anantavarman Codaganga, a saivite, to build a temple in Puri in the middle of the 12th century for Jagannath, an incarnation of Vishnu, was based on political considerations; it was a pragmatic response to the rising tide of Vaisnavism in Orissa. Thus, from its very inception, the cult of Jagannath was conceived of as a legitimising agency for the rulers of Orissa.23 Eventually, Aanangabhima III dedicated the Orissan empire to Jagannath and proclaimed himself as godís ëdeputyí (ërauttaí). Jagannath was elevated as ëthe king of the kingdom of Orissaí (Madalapanji); a similar description is found in the ëKanchi Kaverií, the legendary poem of Purusottama Das. Not surprisingly, all those who ruled Orissa ó the Mughals, the Marathas and the English East India Company ó sought legitimacy and hegemonic control by acknowledging the supra-temporal authority of Jagannath, at least notionally.

The emergence of a virtual ëcommon senseí (going back to the colonial period) makes it appear that since the Afghan subjugation of Orissa in 1568, Jagannath emerged as a key player in the political arena of the province. After this ëdrubbingí, the Oriya-speaking territory was divided into several political and administrative units, which split further during the periods of Mughal, Maratha and British rule. However, throughout these

centuries Jagannath remained a potent rallying symbol, reinforcing the collective regional and ethnic identity of the territorially fragmented Oriyas. Consequently, an identity incorporating Jagannath as a crucial unifying element took shape.24

Inventing Identities: ëOriyaí, ëHinduí and ëIndianí

The quest for uniting the Oriya-speaking areas into a single territory gained momentum in the late 19th century. The search for Oriya identity found a powerful expression in Oriya literature and the Oriya language agitation. Two other variants of identity also emerged during this period: ëHinduí identity and ëIndianí identity. Thus, Orissa experienced the interplay of three types of identities that developed around three forms of nationalism: Oriya, Hindu and Indian.25

Radhanath Rayís epic Mahajatra and Ramashankar Rayís play ëKanchi Kaverií projected a sort of vague ëHinduí nation. As Orissa had a predominantly Hindu population and since Jagannath was a powerful symbol of Oriya identity, obviously, these perceptions did not much distinguish between Hindu nationalism and Oriya nationalism. Even the advocates of Indian nationalism in Orissa, like Gopabandhu Das, swore by Jagannath. As Das wrote: ìIf the world were a tank and India a lotus in it, then the filament of that lotus would be the holy Nilacala (Puri).î26 Gopabandhu, a devout Hindu, became president of the Hindu Mahasabhaís Orissa branch in 1927. For Madhusudan Das, an ardent champion of Oriya nationalism, Jagannath was not merely a Hindu deity but was also an embodiment of the Oriya nation. Das, a Christian, was twice elected president of the All India Christian Association. However, his religious faith did not stand in the way of his efforts to unify the Oriya-speaking tracts, with Jagannath as the pivot. In 1928 he passionately appealed to all Oriyas to utter in one voice, ëSave us, Lord Jagannathí and to pray to him to end the darkness and usher in a period of progress and prosperity.

Thus, all the three variants of identity complemented each other and were woven around Jagannath and his cult. Consequently, Oriya identity was shaped not only by the Hindu religion but also by a host of other elements, including Orissaís specific regional and cultural traditions in which Jagannath was made to play a crucial symbolic role. This identity could be harmonised with the broader ëIndianí identity as well as with the search for autonomy that saw the formation of the province.27 This symbolically freighted tradition has continuities even today and remains an important component of the process of political mobilisation.28

Non-Hindu ëOthersí

Let us now examine the way in which non-Hindus have been located in the social landscape of Orissa, a feature that perhaps explains why the task of the RSS has been made relatively easy. What we will illustrate here is the way in which a history of Orissa has been virtually invented, and also examine the problems and complexities raised by

drawing upon colonialist and nationalist representations in the reconstruction of this history.

Muslims

As this history reveals, Orissaís permanent relationship with Muslims began only in 1568 when Kalapahar, the general of the Afghan ruler of Bengal, defeated Mukunda Deva, the last independent Hindu king of Orissa. The Mughals replaced the Afghans in 1578 and continued to rule for about two centuries.29 In 1751, Orissa passed into the hands of the Marathas30 and it finally came under the British in 1803. The ëMuslim conquestí of Orissa was not only late chronologically compared to other regions of India, but it also failed to attain the strength and permanence as it did in neighbouring Bengal.31 Islam failed to penetrate among the native population. The minuscule Muslim population of Orissa included a few people of Afghan descent, but the rest were largely the descendants of common soldiers, camp followers and low-caste converts.32 It does not appear, however, ìthat the Mohammedans or any other invaders, ever completely occupied or colonised the province, which still remains one of those in which Hindu manners are preserved in their greatest purity, and where the smallest proportion of Mohammedans is to be foundî.33 Thus, unlike Bengal, 34 in Orissa, conversions did not take place on a large scale; Islam could make few converts in this ëstronghold of Hinduismí. As this history shows, during the two centuries of the Muslim occupation of Orissa, Lord Jagannath and Puri were subjected to attacks beginning from the time of Kalapahar,35 and continuing under Mutquad Khan (during Shah Jahanís reign) and Taki Khan (during Aurangzebís reign). Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that temples had been the natural sites for the contestation of kingly authority well before the advent of the Turks in India.36 In the 1460s, Kapilendra, the founder of the Suryavamshi Gajapati dynasty in Orissa, sacked both Saiva and Vaisnava temples in the Kaveri delta in the course of conquering the Tamil country.37 Thus, an act of temple desecration sometimes was also an act of asserting power over the enemy king.

Moreover, there were exceptions, even during the period of ëMuslimí rule. The Mughal emperors, from Akbar onwards, began to treat temples within their sovereign territory as state property and undertook to protect both the physical structures as well as their brahman functionaries.38 Akbarís commander Mansingh forced the Afghans to undertake a guarantee not to attack the Jagannath temple. Mansinghís wife built the Mukti Mandap, the seat of brahman authority, inside the temple. Mir Habib, the confidant of Murshid Quli Khan, also promoted the cause of the Jagannath Temple. Although he embraced Islam, the Raja of Khurda Rama Chandra Deva II (18th century) tried to protect Jagannath from falling into the hands of the invading army of the Subedar of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Interestingly, as the Madalapanji records, he was allowed to perform ritual services to Jagannath despite being a convert.

Moreover, Sufism gained popularity in Orissa and led to the emergence of the Satya-Pir tradition.39 Even today Hindus worship Satyanarayan and Pir together, an example of the synthesis of Hinduism and Sufism in the province.40 Large numbers of Hindus visit Sufi

shrines like Kadam Rasul in Cuttack and Bukhari Sahib in Kaipadar, near Khurda. Even today one can see a few wandering fakirs, the Sufi followers, who have been unfortunately forced into begging. ëMuslimí rule also left an indelible imprint on Oriya language and literature. Many Persian and Arabic words remained foreign no longer and were very much internalised by Oriya writers and readers.41 Before the 18th century, their use by Oriya writers was negligible, probably for two reasons: either because of their bitterness towards Muslim rule or due to their insufficient knowledge of these languages. However, in the late 18th century they began using these words more frequently. Fakirmohan Senapati, the father of modern Oriya literature, used many Persian and Arabic words like ëmamlaí, ëchalaní, ëlaikí, ëgafliyatií, ëadmií, ëdaulatí, ëmehenatí, ëkhodí, ëmalikí, ëbabadí, ëkhatarí, ëdastakhatí, ëlashí, ëpeshí, ëtarafí, ëkhalasí, ëtadarakhí, ëustadí, and ëmeherbanií in his novels and stories.42 Salbeg, a very popular Oriya poet, who had a Mughal (Muslim) father and a Brahman mother, composed innumerable bhajans dedicated to Jagannath, which are recited every morning at the Jagannath temple even today.

Furthermore, the Hindu-Muslim relationship was not one-sided. Muslims, who were mainly local converts, continued to observe some of their old religio-cultural practices. Though the urban Muslims consciously adopted Persian, the Muslims of rural Orissa retained Oriya as their mother tongue. Even the Persian used by the urban Muslims was heavily loaded with Oriya, thus creating a distinct local variant of Persian. At certain places Muslims continued (and still continue) to be associated with certain Hindu religious practices. For instance, during Durga Puja, the ëkatwalí of Tapang in Khurda district, a Muslim, actively participates in the Hindu rituals. Sporting a ëpagrií and a ëtilakí, he leads the religious procession to his home where the goddess accepts ëbhogaí (offerings).

These instances of a syncretic culture do not of course deny the occasional assertion of ëHinduí identity over the Muslims. However, Hindus and Muslims by and large lived in peace and harmony in Orissa. In contrast, the rationale of Hindutva is primarily based upon the reification of enemy symbols: the demonisation of minorities like the Muslims and the Christians as the ëotherí. As the Muslim population is very small in Orissa, Hindutva does not find here a tailor-made ground for its easy propagation, prompting the RSS to assert that its expansion in Orissa is not based on an anti-Muslim thrust. The Orissa unit claims to be more positive and constructive in its approach than its counterparts in other provinces where Muslims are found in substantial numbers.43 However, this projection seems to be only partially true if one closely examines the history of the various stages in the evolution of Hindutva in Orissa.

Christians

Coastal Orissa came in contact with Christian missionaries towards the end of the 18th century when it became a maritime centre for European traders ó English, French, Dutch, Danes and Portuguese. A Catholic church came up in Jaleswar and a Wesleyan church in Ganjam. The Serampore missionaries of Bengal translated the New Testament and a few

other Christian tracts into Oriya and sent a Bengali convert to Cuttack and Puri to distribute literature and preach Christianity, but with no success.

When the British took control of Orissa from the Marathas in 1803, Lord Wellesley, the governor general, issued instructions ìto employ every possible precaution to preserve the respect due to the Pagoda, and to the religious prejudices of the brahmins and the pilgrims.î44 The British were pragmatic enough to take over the ësuperintendence and managementí of the Puri temple and to continue with the Maratha practice of collecting the pilgrim tax. The missionaries, on the other hand, vehemently opposed the governmentís association with the temple and put constant pressure on it to sever its connection with idolatry. They ridiculed the pilgrimage to Jagannath as ëthe greatest scourgeí and deplored the gruesome acts of self-immolation and the many deaths that occurred during the car festival, citing highly exaggerated statistics. To them, Jagannath epitomised ëvice, suffering, loss of life and other evilsí and the governmentís decision to become the ëchurch wardení of Hindu deities was ëunchristianí. After a long struggle, the missionaries finally succeeded; in 1856 the government severed all connections and formalised its decision to hand over the superintendence and management of the temple to the raja of Khurda.

Though the sole aim of the missionaries was to evangelise Orissa, it became a Herculean task to find a convert among the followers of Jagannath. The first mission was set up in Orissa in 1822, but it took six years to convert a native. In 1827 Erun Senapati, a Telugu-Oriya weaver, was baptised; but in a real sense the first Oriya convert was Gangadhar Sarangi, a brahman of Tangi in Cuttack district. Gangadhar, who was baptised in 1828, was a disciple of Sadhusundar Das, a Hindu ascetic who preached monotheism and anti-idolatry. Though Christianity impressed Das and he encouraged his followers to read Christian theology, he himself never wanted to be converted. However, some of his followers embraced Christianity, boosting the morale of the early missionaries. But Orissa never experienced a large-scale conversion to Christianity. Initially, each convert had to be won individually. And contrary to conventional wisdom, most of the early converts were from the upper castes and their motive was not material gain. They converted only after a thorough reading of the Christian scriptures and comparing these with the Hindu shastras. Subsequently, the missionaries won some converts through their schools and orphanages. In later stages, they moved into the tribal areas where they had a better success rate. And here, unlike the early stages of the evangelisation movement, the decision to convert was based on many motivations, including the material.

The missionaries confronted many obstacles in their attempt to evangelise Orissa: rigid social customs, illiteracy, unfavourable climate, lack of communication, and more importantly, the overarching spiritual influence of Jagannath. Undaunted by these heavy odds the missionaries continued their work. They vehemently attacked idolatry, female infanticide and human sacrifice; educated the illiterate; opened asylums, orphanages and hospitals for the poor, the homeless, and the sick; and served the destitute during famines. Their evangelical mission ushered in a new Oriya literary movement. The Reverend A Sutton compiled an Oriya-English grammar, an Oriya Dictionary, translated Gita Govinda, Amarkosa, Batrish Singhasan, and edited the Oriya Gazette; W C Lacey

composed Oriya Grammar and J Phillip authored Geography of Orissa. A number of newspapers and journals sprang up. The missionaries opened schools and hospitals in the inaccessible tribal areas. Though evangelisation was their primary objective, their philanthropic role also needs to be underlined.

Thus, Hindu-Muslim and Hindu-Christian encounters in Orissa, despite occasional hostility, were never inimical. There was no large-scale conversion among Oriyas either to Islam or Christianity, and Muslims and Christians hardly ever appeared threatening to Hindus in terms of their numbers or their ëothernessí, since both these communities, despite their different religions, were part of the same Oriya cultural traditions. Against this backdrop, it is interesting to observe how Hindutva made its entry into present-day Orissa.

II

Hindutva and the Jagannath Culture

The RSS considers the Jagannath-Oriya-Hindu-Indian interconnection an ideal framework for the spread of Hindutva. It understands very well the positive implications of the pre-colonial/colonial/Oriya Hindu upper caste-middle class construction of the Jagannath cult and its symbolic importance in the religious, social, cultural and political life of the Oriyas. Hence, it depicts the culture of Orissa as Jagannath Sanskruti because this overarching culture surpasses and dominates all other sects and little traditions. True, many counter traditions and critiques like the Mahima Dharma did emerge, but ultimately these were absorbed into the broad fold of the Jagannath cult.45 Hence, the RSS realises the futility of projecting Hindutva as an alternative; it claims, rather wisely, its ideological affinity with the Jagannath culture.46

The RSS characterises Jagannath as a ëvanavasií (tribal) deity and Orissa as a vanavasi province; the Oriyas, it believes, possess a vanavasi character, still retaining the primitive innocence, simplicity and honesty of a tribal society. Hence, the RSS claims to find the popular character (ëlok charitraí) of Orissa receptive to its ideology. What perhaps guides this line of thinking is that it is easier to influence the bulk of the poor, illiterate, deeply religious, unassuming and non-assertive people of this economically backward province. However, the Oriya character, if such a thing does exist, should not be seen as monolithic and unchanging. Within Orissa, it not only differs from one region to another, but also varies from one class to the other. Moreover, peopleís character is not fixed and immutable; it very much changes over time. While Kingsford47 praised the courage and fearlessness shown in 1730 by the peasant militia of Balasore district, A. Stirling48 characterised the Oriyas in the plains as the most mild, quiet, inoffensive, and easily managed people in the Companyís provinces. If one could speak of a monolithic Oriya character at all, then it must be conceded that it has been shaped by a host of factors: topography and the furies of nature, emergence and decline of different religious sects and cults, long absence of an encompassing dynastic rule, fragmentation and annexation of its territory, strong influence of neo-Vaisnavism under Chaitanya, tyrannies of

Muslims, Marathas and native Hindu rajas, British colonial intervention, struggle for an Oriya identity, Indian freedom movement, and the post-colonial experience. Hence, the formation of the Oriya character is the result of a complex historical process, and is not based on a fondly imagined unspoiled, pure and innocent vanavasi identity, as the RSS romantically portrays.

The RSS further argues that bhakti (devotion) constitutes the core of the Jagannath culture and that the Oriyas are devout Hindus. As devotion to the nation is the theme of Hindutva, the RSS regards this ideology to be in consonance with Oriya traditions. However, the RSS differentiates between these two forms of bhakti. As a senior pracharak observes, though the Oriyas are a deeply spiritual people, they emphasise the personal aspect of religion, and hence they concentrate on puja (worship), bhajan (devotional song), upavas (fasting), etc, for the self-realisation of god and for personal salvation. But they do not display a similar devotion to the nation. The major challenge for the RSS is to channelise the devotional and spiritual energy of the Oriyas towards the Hindu Rashtra. Surely, bhakti constitutes the core of the Jagannath tradition, demanding the devoteeís personal identification with and submergence into the Lord. The Bhaktisutra of Narada defines this as parama prema, highest love for the Lord, possessing immortality in itself, ìgaining which a person becomes perfect, immortal and satisfied, attaining which a person does not desire anything, does not hate, does not exult, does not exert himself or herself (in furtherance of self-interest).î49 Though the RSS demands bhakti or a complete surrender to the Hindu nation, there exists a fundamental difference; while the Jagannath tradition is broad and flexible and allows the maximum philosophical and ontological autonomy to the devotee to attain selfless spiritual bliss, the political Hinduism of the RSS variety is precariously narrow and rigid, training its followers to tread the mundane path into the murky world of desire, conflict, hatred and ëothernessí.

Samanwaya (harmony) and catholicism remain at the core of the Jagannath culture as well as of Hindutva, claims the RSS, since both are integrationist in nature. The RSS argues that there is no polarisation of castes despite the prevalence of the caste system in Orissa. While the interplay of caste politics is intense in other provinces, the RSS does not find it a threat here; hence, it is easier to propagate Hindutva. True, every Hindu sect and creed can seek shelter under the broad canopy of Jagannath, but there is also an extended list of exclusion.50 The temple not only prohibited entry to Muslims, Christians and Jews, but it also shut its door to low caste Hindus, flesh-eating aboriginals and even ëfallení women ó practices which reveal a close resemblance between brahmanical Hinduism and Hindutva. But this exclusion was partly based on the notion of purity and pollution in religious practices, and is certainly not akin to Hindutvaís cerebral engagement with the ëotherí. Philosophically, Jagannath (Lord of the Universe) symbolises everything that is broad and universal. He lives in Badadeula (grand temple), strolls along the Badadanda (grand road), bathes in the Mahodadhi (grand ocean) and eats Mahaprasad (grand food). Even in practice, Mahaprasad, the rice that has once been placed before the god can never cease to be pure nor lose its reflected sanctity. ìThe lowest may demand it from, or give it to, the highest. Its sanctity overleaps the barriers, not only of caste, but of race and hostile faiths; and a Puri priest will stand the test of receiving the food from a Christianís hand.î51 Jagannath is patitpavan, the god of the

down-trodden; he comes out on the street during the rath yatra, breaking all barriers of caste, creed and even religion. In contrast to Jagannathís message of universal brotherhood and love, Hindutva propagates a limited vision of the saffron brotherhood and its catholicism does not even embrace all the Hindu sects and traditions, but is confined only to the believers in the Hindu Rashtra. More importantly, these two traditions vary significantly in their approaches towards the non-Hindus. Hence, it would be useful to examine the evolution of communal politics in Orissa.

III

Emergence of Communal Politics: Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League

Soon after its creation in 1936, Orissa also experienced the competitive communal politics that characterised this period. The capital Cuttack obviously became the epicentre. The Orissa branch of the Muslim League was opened in Cuttack in February 1938. Fazlul Haque, chief minister of Bengal, addressed the Muslim Students Conference in Cuttack on May 20 and 21, 1938, calling for the creation of a compact organisation. The Jamait-ul-ulema organised a meeting in Salepur, Cuttack district in December. Nor were the Hindus silent. On January 24, 1940, the Hindu Mahasabha opened a branch in Puri, the famous Hindu pilgrimage centre, with the raja of Madhupur as its president. Just a month later the Orissa branch of the Muslim League became affiliated to the All-India Muslim League.52

Pro-war and anti-war politics caught up in Orissa as well. The All Utkal Hindu Mahasabha strongly criticised the Congress policy of non-violence, advocated assistance to the government in its war efforts and also called for the enrolment of Hindu youth in the army. In a meeting held in Cuttack on September 15, 1941, Manmohan Choudhury, a Hindu Mahasabha leader from Bengal, called upon the Hindus to strengthen organisations like the Ram Sena and the Mahabir Dal for the advancement of military power and underlined the necessity of establishing a national militia in every district to protect the legitimate interests of Hindus. The Muslim Leagueís response was identical. Nawab Ismail Khan, Choudhury Kaliquat Zamam and Muhammad Isa Khan of the All India Muslim Defence Committee arrived in Cuttack on May 15, 1942 and contacted the prominent Muslims of the town. They opened a branch of the Defence Committee and appealed to the Muslim youth to enrol. The visitors explained the Pakistan scheme to the Muslims and exhorted them to open branches of the Muslim League to safeguard the interests of their community. The Hindu Mahasabha was no less active; Sadasiva Nanda Sharma, its organising secretary, toured different parts of Orissa in September-October 1943, urging Hindus to organise and assert their religious, political and cultural rights. The All India Hindu Dharma Seva Sangha was formed in Puri53 in May 1944; the Sangha called upon Hindu youth to enlist in the army in large numbers ìso that they might be equal to the Muslims in military achievementsî and also ìadvocated measures for doing away with untouchability and reconversion of ex-Hindus.î54

Some Muslims observed Direct Action Day on August 16, 1946 in Cuttack and characterised the Congress as a Hindu organisation. The meeting called upon the Orissa Muslim title holders to renounce their titles in protest against the Cabinet Mission Plan. The Muslim League organised meetings and processions in Sambalpur and Balasore seeking Muslim support for Jinnah. In its meetings held on September 16 and 17, 1946, its working committee passed a resolution urging the Bihar government to take measures for the relief and rehabilitation of riot-affected Muslims and began raising money for the victims. The atmosphere was further surcharged after the riots in East Bengal and Calcutta in October 1946. A section of Hindus in Orissa proposed to form a Hindu militia and set up defence committees in each village. Printed leaflets in Oriya entitled ëjatir dakaí (communityís call) were circulated in Cuttack urging Hindus ìto boycott Muslims in all respects.î As a result, panic spread among the Muslims. Protesting against the Noakhali riots, the Hindus did not celebrate Diwali with their customary gusto in most parts of Orissa and instead observed hartals in many places. Some Hindus urged the Muslims of Orissa to appeal to the Muslims of Bengal ìto refrain from indulging in communal riots as it might lead to disastrous consequences in Orissaî, where the Muslims were in a minority.55 In 1947 the Muslim League in Orissa decided to collect a sum of Rs 20,000 to set up its own press and also to raise a ëPakistan Fundí. It also set up a committee to acquaint the members of the constituent assembly from Orissa with their grievances.

It is clear that much of the Hindu-Muslim tension arose primarily in response to communal situations outside Orissa. Unlike people in other provinces, the Oriyas were neither violent nor vicious and hardly harboured communal hatred. On certain occasions, tensions between the two communities did emerge as a result of internal socio-economic dynamics. For example, during the 1943 famine, the conflict between the Muslims wage earners and the Hindu landlords in Bhadrak resulted in police firing on a ëMuslimí gathering which obstructed a ëHinduí procession.56 Moreover, all Muslims did not support Muslim communal politics. For instance, in June 1939 the Muslim Youngmenís Organisation was formed in Balasore ìfor lending service to the Communists when neededî; the ëNationalistí Muslims, in a meeting held in Cuttack on April 4, 1940, ìcondemned the communal policy of Jinnahî and extended support to the Congress.57 Similarly, a large majority of Hindus shunned the Hindu communal politics of the Hindu Mahasabha. As a result, despite the occasional eruption of communal tensions, ìto the immortal credit of Orissa,Önot a single drop of human blood was shed on her sacred soilî.58

RSS in Orissa

Meanwhile, the RSS was looking to make its entry into this recently created province. But due to its expanding activities in west, north-west and north India, there were not enough pracharaks to begin full-fledged work in Orissa. Hence, at this stage it could not treat Orissa as a separate province (prant) from its organisational standpoint. However, during the 1940s, the pracharaks working in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar initiated Sangh work in the border areas of Orissa which abutted their state boundaries.59

Anantalal Shrivastav introduced a shakha in Sambalpur in western Orissa and Purnananda Swami in Ganjam in southern Orissa. Mukund Rao Moonje, a nephew of B S Moonje, came from Bilaspur, Madhya Pradesh to start a unit (shakha) in Cuttack. These initial organising activities received a severe jolt after Mahatma Gandhiís assassination and the subsequent banning of the RSS. The large-scale arrests of the RSS cadres all over the country created fear and panic among its sympathisers in Orissa. Even some active supporters severed their links with this organisation.

Soon after the lifting of the ban in 1949, the RSS declared Orissa as a separate province (prant) and Golwalkar deputed Baburao Paldhikar60 as the first prant pracharak. When Paldhikar reached Orissa there was practically no RSS presence in the state. He arrived in Cuttack, the political and commercial centre of Orissa, and made this city his base of operations. He hired a one-room tenement in the Jaunliapati marwari basa (rest house). Mukund Rao Moonje introduced him to some non-Oriya businessmen who were RSS sympathisers. Paldhikar started a morning shakha at the Marwari Club grounds of Manik Ghosh Bazar.

Disseminating Hindutva

Initial Strategy of Penetration

Paldhikar adopted the usual style of RSS operations in a new area ó establishing and extending its sphere of influence through the local notables (ëbishista byaktisí).61 In accordance with his strategy, he first met Nilakantha Das, an important political figure who had been a member of the central legislative assembly for more than two decades (1924-45). Nilakantha was initially sceptical, but Paldhikar was able to convince him of the RSS mission. His second meeting was with Godavaris Misra, a noted educationist and a former minister of Orissa. Paldhikar found that he had a soft corner for the RSS. Godavaris provided him with a list of prominent Oriya educationists and lawyers.62 Accordingly, Paldhikar contacted Jadumani Mangaraj, Laxminarayan Sahu and other notables and found them quite favourably inclined towards the rss. None of these notables blamed the rss for Gandhiís assassination; and to Paldhikarís surprise Mangaraj even went to the extent of describing Nathuram Godse as God Se (from god).63

Why were these notables sympathetically inclined towards the RSS? Their socio-political background probably influenced their decision. Nilakantha and Godavaris belonged to the powerful brahman community of Sakhigopal of Puri; Mangaraj64 belonged to the militant khandayat (kshatriya) caste; and Sahu hailed from a resourceful native trading community. All of them were also Congress dissidents. Nilakantha and Godavaris were Swarajists and also had links with the Hindu Mahasabha. Nilakantha was expelled from the Congress in 1941 for his propaganda against Gandhiís policy of non-violence and for advocating participation in the British war effort.65 In 1941, he was instrumental in forming a coalition government with the Muslim League in Orissa on the advice of Subhas Chandra Bose.66 Along with Godavaris he actively campaigned for raising subscriptions to the war fund. In 1943, Nilakantha was elected president of the Utkal

Provincial Hindu Mahasabha67 and made an unsuccessful attempt to bring the entire Swaraj Party in Orissa into the fold of the Hindu Mahasabha. In 1944, while the Congress supported Rajgopalachariís proposal for Hindu-Muslim unity, the notable exceptions in Orissa included Nilakantha Das and Laxminarayan Sahu.68

Nilakantha provided some tangible help to the infant organisation; he permitted the RSS to hold shakhas on his Navbharat Press grounds at Banka Bazar, Cuttack. Reciprocating the gesture, the RSS invited Nilakantha to preside over its prestigious Vijaya Dasmi Utsav held in Nagpur in October 1950. This was significant for the RSS for two reasons: first, the participation of a well known Congressman in its major annual function, soon after the lifting of the ban, would erase the taint of its alleged involvement in Gandhiís assassination to some extent; and second, close association with a leading Oriya notable would help the RSS to gain the benefit of his socio-political links in the state, where it was struggling to establish a foothold. Nilakantha accepted the invitation, and Golwalkar himself received his guest of honour at the Nagpur railway station. Nilakanthaís speech was inspiring to the RSS.69 He said that the term Hindu was not communal; it was only another name for Arya which means shreshtha or the highest. It stands for ìall that is good and noble in life and there was no reason why we should be ashamed of calling ourselves Hindus.î Nilakantha reminded his audience that the Bhonslas of Nagpur had saved Utkal province from being overrun by ëalien raidersí. He predicted great glory for the organisation: ìThe RSS, born in Nagpur, was once again going to be the redeemerî, with this difference, that this time it will be the ìsaviour not only of Utkal province but of the whole Indiaî.70 Here it is pertinent to briefly examine the place of Maratha rule in the history of Orissa, a somewhat controversial subject. Colonial historiography refers to Maratha ëmisrule, oppression and bloodshedí and describes the advent of the Berar Marathas as ëthe greatest of all calamitiesí.71 However, the Madalapanji is silent on this aspect; rather it mentions, though briefly, the contributions and grants made by the Marathas to the Jagannath Temple and their help to the raja of Khurda. The Marathas, as Stietencron observes, ìenergetically patronised a revival of Hindu cultureî in Orissa.72 It is interesting to note that the debate between the Socialists and the RSS in Orissa also occasionally refers to Maratha rule; while the RSS attacks the bigotry of the Mughals, the Socialists remind them of the terror perpetrated by the Maratha bargis which is still fresh in the collective memory of the Oriyas.73

Another Oriya notable Prana Krishna Parija, a distinguished scientist and educationist, also presided over the Vijaya Dasmi function in Nagpur. Both Parija and Golwalkar were the products of the Benaras Hindu University. Parija introduced the RSS into Oriya intellectual circles. During Golwalkarís visit to Orissa, he organised a meeting at his residence at which prominent Oriya intellectuals interacted with the RSS chief.74 The third Oriya to preside over this function was Dinabandhu Sahu, a prominent Congressman.

Shaping the Organisation

Besides his liaisons with the Oriya notables and Marwari businessmen, Paldhikar toured extensively and set up new shakhas. While keeping command at the Cuttack headquarters, he strategically positioned an army of efficient non-Oriya, mainly Maharashtrian, pracharaks: Sadanand Pantawane in Balasore, Vasant Rao Bapat in Puri, Vasant Rao Agarkar in Cuttack, Pravakar Shastri in Berhampur, Shridhar Acharya in Bolangir, Narayan Mandal in Rourkela, Chintamani Kavthekar in Sambalpur and Baburao Deshpande in Sundargarh. These dedicated pracharaks interacted with the local notables, established shakhas, and recruited young boys with their innovative methods.75

The RSS in Orissa regularly invited its central leaders and organised public functions to propagate its ideology and encourage the new recruits. Golwalkarís annual visits were quite inspiring and motivated the recruits and activists. These visits also offered useful opportunities to interact with the notables at the state and district levels. Deendayal Upadhyay once addressed a public meeting at the Cuttack Town Hall which was attended by many notables. Deendayalís frail physique and young age did not initially impress Nilakantha, who presided over the meeting. But his speech turned out to be so impressive that Nilakantha endorsed the rss ideology in his presidential address. Godavaris, extending the vote of thanks, suggested that Deendayalís speech be printed and dispatched to prominent Oriya notables.76

In 1956, commemorating the 51st birthday of Golwalkar, the RSS launched a 51-day ëjan samparakí programme and also raised a fund (ësampark nidhií) from the public. The Orissa unit organised an impressive function in Baripada town in which many ëprant pracharaksí and ëprant sanghchalaksí participated. L N Sahu wrote a small pamphlet on Golwalkar. At the all-India level, the RSS contacted more than 40 lakh people and collected a sum of Rs 21 lakhs. The Orissa unit reached out to 23,000 adults and contributed Rs 9,417.77 The notables and the Marwari businessmen facilitated the collection.

During the 1966 ëgo raksha andolaní the RSS undertook a campaign and reportedly collected more than 20 million signatures from around the country. It was easy to mobilise popular support on the issue as the cow is venerated all over the state. Incidentally, the Orissa government had already passed the Orissa Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act in 1960. Nilakantha and other notables took the initiative in the signature drive; reportedly the governor of Orissa was the first signatory to the memorandum.

Side by side, the RSS laid the foundation of the Sangh parivar. In 1964, Deendayal Upadhyay started the Orissa unit of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) in Jharsuguda and appointed Shridhar Acharya, a veteran pracharak, as the state organising secretary. Also in the same year the RSS launched Rashtradeepa, an Oriya weekly, to propagate its ideology. In 1967, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) inaugurated its Orissa unit by organising the first state conference in Puri. Saroj Mitra, a pracharak, was appointed the state organising secretary. In 1966, about a hundred delegates from Orissa went to Prayag to attend the first Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) conference, which incidentally was inaugurated by Bishwanath Das, governor of Uttar Pradesh, an Oriya who was also a prominent congressman and Vedic scholar. The VHP opened its Orissa

chapter soon after, with Kanakalata Devi, the Rajmata of the former feudatory state of Narasinghpur, as the president and Bhupendra Kumar Basu, then prant karyavah of the RSS, as the vice president. A RSS pracharak Raghunath Sethi was appointed as the secretary and a well known businessman Narasingh Das Bhavsingha became the treasurer. The executive committee comprised many distinguished personalities. The VHP organised the first state conference in Chandikhol in 1968 and constituted a reception committee under the chairmanship of an influential baba, Bhairabananda.78 Pabitra Mohan Pradhan, deputy chief minister in the Swatantra-Jana Congress government, inaugurated the conference and promised to act against the Christian missionaries who were engaged in conversion activities.79 Next year, Puri was the venue of the second VHP conference, emulating the Chandikhol pattern ó providing a platform for sadhus, feudal chiefs, politicians, businessmen, bureaucrats, notables, and above all RSS activists.

The Sangh parivar entered into the tribal areas through the VHP. With the aim of ëHinduisingí the tribals and to counter the activities of Christian missionaries, it deputed a Hindu missionary Laxmanananda Saraswati80 and a Harijan RSS pracharak Raghunath Sethi to the tribal district of Phulbani.81 The state government passed the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act 1967 and introduced penal provisions for those who converted or attempted to convert by use of force, fraud or allurement/inducement. While the Orissa Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act 1960 encouraged the RSS to step up its anti-Muslim campaign, the 1967 Act provided a convenient handle to intensify anti-Christian propaganda.

Communal Riots and the Possibilities

Rourkela and Cuttack

Although communal tensions had existed between Hindus and Muslims in the 1940s, Orissa did not witness any communal riots. For the first time, in March 1964, it experienced a communal riot in the industrial town of Rourkela. Special trains carrying East Pakistani Hindu refugees from Howrah, West Bengal to Madhya Pradesh had been stopping at Rourkela to take on food supplies. During this stopover the refugees narrated their tragic experiences to the public as the government encouraged people to offer foodstuff to the passengers. The RSS took the lead in supplying food to the refugees, an act for which it gained much publicity. On March 11, some RSS men ìused a loudspeaker on the railway platform in order to appeal and arouse Hindu sentiments and openly condemned Pakistan and its policiesî.82 This practice went on for almost a week, brewing tension. The spread of rumours further complicated matters. The trouble began on March 18 and the climax was reached on March 20. Hindu crowds comprising Punjabis, Biharis, Bengalis, Oriyas and Adivasis attacked the Muslims. In this communal riot 72 people were reportedly killed. The RSS blamed the Muslims for what they regarded as an unprovoked attack on the refugees and accused them of causing the riots. But it was the RSS which had provoked the Hindus against the Muslims. All the RSS pracharaks, including Paldhikar and Deshpande, were arrested.83

Cuttack, the commercial capital of Orissa, experienced the second major riot. Curiously, this riot was the result of a Supreme Court judgment. The Hindus of Alkund and Nuagaon villages in Jajpur sub-division filed a writ demanding the right to play music before a mosque and pleaded that they should not be bound by the agreement between the two communities reached in 1931 which denied the Hindus this right. The Supreme Court, in a verdict delivered on October 29, 1968, allowed the Hindus to take out both religious and non-religious processions to the accompaniment of music on the highways passing through these villages subject to the magistrateís directions and traffic regulations.84 This judgment came during the Kartikeswar Puja. The Hindus deliberately delayed the immersion procession to enjoy this newly bestowed right. The Muslims of Cuttack opposed this judgment, arguing that there was no tradition of playing music before the mosques in the city. However, after negotiations, they allowed the immersion procession to pass in front of their masjids.

After a week, on November 25, 1968, some football players of Christ College were allegedly stoned and beaten up by Muslims near the Sutahat Masjid, Cuttack. Then the riots spread throughout the city. Unlike the Rourkela riots, there was hardly any killing in Cuttack.85 A different trend was noticed here; the rioters were mainly engaged in looting and setting fire to the shops and houses of Muslims.86 Though the leaders of the opposition parties mainly blamed anti-social elements for the riots, the CPI leader Lokanath Choudhury denounced the role of the RSS and criticised a provocative article published in its mouthpiece, Rashtradeepa.87 However, R N Singhdeo, chief minister of the Swatantra-Jana Congress government, exonerated the RSS and the BJS of these charges.88

These riots undoubtedly rejuvenated the RSS, at least in some important urban centres like Cuttack. Shakhas multiplied and attracted increasing numbers of urban Hindu boys. The urban middle and lower middle classes began to appreciate the discipline of the swayamsevaks, their behaviour and mannerisms and above all their organised strength aimed at defending Hindus in case of a Muslim attack. Soon after these riots the RSS tightened up its organisation in Orissa. The Orissa RSS was singled out for national recognition when Golwalkar visited its training camp (ësangha shiksha vargaí) in Rourkela in 1967 and conferred on it the status of an independent camp. Henceforth, the swayamsevaks no longer needed to go out of the state for training. Native Oriya pracharaks had already started replacing their non-Oriya counterparts.90 Realising its growing strength, the central RSS leadership recognised Orissa as a developed province in 1970 and appointed Bhupendra Kumar Basu89 as the first sanghchalak and Harihar Nanda, a dedicated Oriya pracharak, as the ëprant karyavahí.

Expansion

The rejuvenated RSS started expanding in the 1970s, particularly after Balasaheb Deoras became the ësarsanghchalakí. The Orissa unit activated its affiliates: the BJS, the ABVP and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) in accordance with the Deoras strategy.91 The BJS had a negligible support base in Orissa; and the BMS had hardly any presence.

However, the ABVP was emerging as a promising affiliate. The Sangh parivar in Orissa joined the movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan in accordance with the central directive; the BJS and the ABVP became very active. Soon after the Emergency was declared many leaders and members of the Sangh parivar were arrested; Basu was jailed but Paldhikar went underground. The RSS cadres undertook satyagraha at various places and courted arrest. The RSS leaders who were underground ran an efficient propaganda network. They translated, printed and distributed anti-Indira Gandhi pamphlets among the students, intellectuals, officials and other educated sections, building up a strong anti-Congress public opinion. They organised secret late night meetings in temples and other places where the police would not normally enter and maintained close contacts with other anti-Emergency political forces, including the Socialists, the Gandhians, and even the communists.

The anti-Emergency agitation established the political credentials of the Sangh parivar in Orissa. The leaders of the ABVP, after their release from jail, captured the studentsí unions in important colleges and universities. Four members of the BJS were elected to the Orissa legislative assembly as Janata Party candidates in 1977; Biswabhushan Harichandan, president of the erstwhile Orissa BJS, became a cabinet minister. The RSS brought in some talented young non-Oriya pracharaks to expedite its expansion drive in this favourable political climate. Shyamji Gupta was appointed the ësah-prant pracharakí in 1978; he demonstrated his ability by organising a jamboree in Cuttack in 1981, in which 10,000 swayamsevaks participated. Suryakant Kelkar, another dynamic young pracharak, was appointed organising secretary of the ABVP.

Thus, the RSS entered Orissa relatively late and pursued a policy of ëadhocismí till the late 1960s. Due to the Marwari connection and an over dependence on non-Oriya pracharaks, the RSS acquired a negative image as a ëMarwari organisationí, thereby receiving a lukewarm response in Orissa. Moreover, its elite-centric approach, although it paid dividends at the time of its entry, failed to carry its message beyond the upper caste-middle class confines. As a result, it had a very slow growth, being restricted mainly to some urban pockets. But the communal riots in Rourkela and Cuttack, in a sense, rejuvenated the RSS and spurred its expansion. The RSS consolidated its organisational machinery, recruited Oriya pracharaks, and strengthened its links with civil society through its affiliates the BJS, the VHP, the BMS, and the ABVP. But the political fallout of the Emergency provided the ideal opportunity for its rapid expansion.

Patronage and Resistance

In its infancy, the RSS received crucial political and social patronage from the leading Oriya notables belonging to the conservative socio-political segment and economic patronage from the Marwari businessmen. In the phase of rejuvenation, particularly during the Cuttack riots, it managed to get a clean chit from the chief minister R N Singhdeo; in fact, many ministers in his Swatantra-Jana Congress government were sympathetic to the RSS. In the phase of expansion, the RSS received patronage from Hare Krushna Mahtab, a veteran Congressman who had earlier been Orissaís chief

minister, a central minister, and the governor of Maharashtra. Mahtab, himself a fitness freak, always appreciated the body-building culture and the discipline of the RSS. He drew even closer to the RSS during the Emergency; some swayamsevaks who were lodged along with Mahtab in Bhanjanagar jail endeared themselves to him by keeping him constant company and extending personal services to him. After his release, Mahtab praised the role of the RSS in his popular column ëGaan Majlisí and provided them with generous coverage in his newspaper Prajatantra. Mahtab presided over important RSS functions, attended the camps, and helped its cadres in many ways. He even wore its uniform and wielded the lathi (ganavesh) and joined the RSS rally in Cuttack in 1981. Mahtab remained a strong RSS patron till his death. Well-known Sarvodaya leaders like Malati Choudhury and Rama Devi also became RSS sympathisers mainly due to its role during the Emergency. Association with these leaders enhanced its respectability.

Despite this patronage the RSS faced resistance from a section of Congressmen and Socialists. As Paldhikar recollects, many freedom fighters and Congressmen shut their doors, accusing his organisation of Gandhiís murder. The stiff opposition mainly came from the Socialists, a key figure being Bishwanath Pandit.92 In the early 1950s, the RSS leader Baba Saheb Apte was scheduled to address a public meeting at Ramachandra Bhawan, Cuttack. Pandit and other Socialists occupied the hall before the commencement of the meeting, shouted ëGandhijiís murderers, go backí, and prevented Apteís entry. Though Paldhikar along with a few swayamsevaks entered the venue forcibly, the meeting had to be cancelled. During the Rourkela riots, Biren Mitraís Congress government ordered the arrests of the RSS pracharaks. Nandini Satpathy, the Congress chief minister during the Emergency, also had many leaders and cadres of the RSS arrested. But patronage to Hindutva certainly far outweighed the resistance to it.

Conclusion

As this paper shows, the history of the early years of Hindutva in the ëHindu provinceí of Orissa, despite being similar in many respects to its history in other provinces, is quite novel in its own way. Orissa, a region of many diversities and contradictions, still retains some unique features of Hinduism, manifested in particular in the Jagannath cult. What we saw were the ways in which structures of pre-colonial legitimacy were reinvented by colonialism, acquiesced to by the nationalist and the post-colonial leadership/discourses, and appropriated by an identity-seeking Hindu upper caste-middle class. Together these offered a congenial climate for the development of Hindutva. In fact, an influential section of the Congress which courted the Hindu Mahasabha provided succour to the RSS as well, facilitating its entry into Orissa. However, Hindutva experienced a rapid expansion only after the communal riots, a completely new experience for the people of Orissa. Organisational ingenuity, crucial political patronage, and unconventional political experiments during the Emergency also contributed significantly towards establishing Hindutva in Orissa.

Notes

1 See Bernard S Cohn (1966): ëRegions Subjective and Objective: Their Relation to the Study of Modern Indian History and Societyí in Robert I Crane (ed), Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies: An Exploratory Study, Monographs and Occasional Papers Series, Monograph Number Five, Duke University, Durham.

2 Christophe Jaffrelot (1996): The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s: Strategies of Identity-Building, Implantation and Mobilisation [with special reference to Central India], Viking, Delhi.

3 Thomas Blom Hansen (1999): The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

4 K Jayaprasad (1991): RSS and Hindu Nationalism: Inroads in a Leftist Stronghold, Deep and Deep, New Delhi.

5 Arild Engelsmen Rudd (1996): ëContradictions and Ambivalence in the Hindu Nationalist Discourse in West Bengalí in Stein Tonnesson and Hans Antlov (eds), Asian Forms of the Nation, Curzon Press, Surrey, pp 150-80.

6 In fact, the retreating colonial bureaucracy located it along this framework. For example, governor Trivedi described Orissa as a ëHindu provinceí in his letter to Lord Wavell. Cited in Biswamoy Pati (1993): Resisting Domination: Peasants, Tribals and the National Movement in Orissa 1920-50, Manohar, New Delhi, fn no 105, p 241.

7 As outlined, politically it was ëa by-product of the then new province of Sindí, with poor Orissa being ìthrown out by the English rulers as a Hindu province to pander and palliate the communal propensities of the Indian people in the process of dividing them to ruleî. Pandit Nilakantha Das (1959): ëOriya Language and Cultureí, Orissa Historical Research Journal, Vol 8, No 1, April, p 39.

8 See Kenneth W Jones (1981): ëReligious Identity and the Indian Censusí in N G Barrier (ed), The Census in British India: New Perspectives, Manohar, New Delhi, pp 73-101.

9 Thus, the population in terms of religion in 1991 was as follows: Hindus 94.67 per cent, Christians 2.10 per cent, Muslims 1.83 per cent, Sikhs 0.05 per cent, Buddhists 0.03 per cent, Jains 0.02 per cent, and others 1.30 per cent. Among the states, only Himachal Pradesh has a higher percentage of Hindus, i e, 95.90 per cent.

10 Mano Mohan Ganguly (1912): Orissa and Her Remains: Ancient and Medieval (District Puri), Eastern Book House, Patna, 1987, p 6.

11 W W Hunter (1956): ëJagannathí in W W Hunter, Andrew Sterling, John Beams, N K Sahu, A History of Orissa, Vol I, Sushil Gupta (India), Calcutta, p 5.

12 Kapila Samhita, Chapter 1, Verses 8-9. Quoted in W W Hunter, ëJagannathí, ibid, p 3.

13 See M N Srinivas (1952): Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India, Asia, Bombay.

14 See L S S OíMalley (1935): Popular Hinduism: The Religion of the Masses, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and C J Fuller (1992): The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India, Penguin, New Delhi.

15 McKim Marriot (ed) (1955): Village India: Studies in the Little Community, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

16 Though Oriya society is quite superstitious even today, an exaggerated interpretation is given in F B Laurie (1850): Orissa, The Garden of Superstition and Idolatry: Including an Account of British Connexion with the Temple of Jagannath, R N Bhattacharya, Calcutta, 2000, 2nd rpt.

17 According to the 1991 Census, the scheduled castes constituted 16.2 per cent of the population of Orissa.

18 According to the 1991 Census, the scheduled tribes constituted 22.2 per cent of the population of Orissa, with the major tribes being the khonds, kols, santals, savaras, and gonds.

19 For a description of the religious beliefs and practices of the Hill Saoras of Ganjam and Koraput, see Verrier Elwin (1955): The Religion of an Indian Tribe, Oxford University Press, Bombay.

20 See Anncharlott Eschmann et al (eds) (1986): The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa, Manohar, New Delhi; Hermann Kulke and Burkhard Schnepel (eds) (2001): Jagannath Revisited: Studying Society, Religion and the State in Orissa, Manohar, New Delhi; Ishita Banerjee Dube (2001): Divine Affairs: Religion, Pilgrimage, and the State in Colonial and Postcolonial India, Shimla, IIAS.

21 Prasanna K Nayak (2001): ëJagannath and the Adivasis: Reconsidering the Cult and Its Traditionsí in Hermann Kulke and Burkhard Schnepel (eds), Jagannath Revisited, op cit, pp 25-48.

22 Biswajit Mohanty (2000): ëPolitics of Rehabilitation: A Case Study of the Indravati Projectí, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Delhi, p 78.

23 Hermann Kulke, ëEarly Royal Patronage of the Jagannath Cultí in A Eschmann et al (eds), The Cult of Jagannath, op cit, pp 139-55.

24 Prior to the colonial period the Oriyas did not have a strong consciousness of their identity. See B N Mohapatra (1996): ëWays of ìBelongingî: The Kanchi Kaveri Legend and the Construction of Oriya Identityí, Studies in History, Vol 12, No 2, ns, pp 203-21.

25 For a discussion on these three forms of nationalism, see G N Dash, ëJagannath and Oriya Nationalismí in A Eschmann et al (eds), The Cult of Jagannath, op cit, pp 359-74.

26 Gopabandhu Das (1923): Bandira Atmakatha, Cuttack, quoted in G N Dash, ibid.

27 See Bishnu Narayan Mohapatra (1990): ëThe Politics of Oriya Nationalism 1903-1936í, Unpublished DPhil. thesis, Oxford University, p 187.

28 For instance, Mahatma Gandhiís decision to start his padyatra from Puri was perhaps influenced by the Jagannath factor. The raja of Parlakhemundi, after taking his oath as the first prime minister of Orissa in 1937 (in the interim ministry), visited the Jagannath Temple although his ancestors had stopped visiting Puri due to dynastic rivalry. Biju Patnaik, one of the architects of modern Orissa, sought directions from Jagannath before his bid to return to political power in the state in 1990. J B Patnaik, who served as chief minister for a long time, has composed many poems dedicated to Jagannath.

29 For details, see Bhabani Charan Ray (1989): Mughal-Orissa: Itihas O Sanskruti (in Oriya), Vidyapuri, Cuttack.

30 For a sympathetic account of Maratha rule in Orissa, see B C Ray (1993): New Lights on Maratha Orissa, L Ray, Bhubaneswar.

31 L S S OíMalley (1984), Bengal District Gazetteers, Puri, rpt, Usha, New Delhi, p 73.

32 Ibid.

33 Brajasundar Das, comp, Orissa in Hamiltonís Hindostan (1820), p 7.

34 See Richard Eaton (1993): The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier: 1204-1760, University of California Press, Berkeley, Chapter 5: ëMass Conversion to Islam: Theories and Protagonistsí, pp 113-36.

35 In the popular perception of Oriyas, Kalapahar is a destroyer of idols. See G N Dash, ëKalapahar, the Iconoclast: The Making and Message of a Legendary Tradition: Reconversions in Medieval Orissa and Bengalí in Hermann Kulke and Burkhard Schnepel (eds), Jagannath Revisited, op cit, pp 227-51.

36 Richard Eaton (2000): Essays on Islam and Indian History, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p 107.

37 Ibid, p 106.

38 Ibid, p 116.

39 The Satya Pir tradition also exists in Bengal. See Tony K Stewart (1995): ëSatya Pir: Muslim Holy Man and Hindu Godí in David S Lopez, Jr (ed), Religions of India in Practice, Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp 578-97.

40 However, like Bengal, Muslims in Orissa have almost ceased to worship Satya Pir, perhaps conceiving this as an impediment to their identity. Conversely, the Hindus continue with this practice as Satya Pir could be ëcomfortably accommodatedí into the hegemonic theological structure of the vaisnava avatara theory, ibid, p 580.

41 For a glossary of such words, see Bansidhar Mohanty and K B Tripathi (1967), ëPerso-Arabic Influence on Oriyaí, Orissa Historical Research Journal, Vol XV, Nos 1 and 2, pp 65-112.

42 See Biswamoy Pati (2001): ëThe High-Low Dialectic in Fakirmohanaís Chaman Athaguntha: Popular Culture, Literature and Society in Late 19th Century Orissaí in his Situating Social History: Orissa (1800-1997), Orient Longman, New Delhi, pp 26-49.

43 RSS leaders observe that due to this reason the growth of the RSS in Orissa is slow, but it is steady and consistent without any sudden fluctuation in membership.

44 See Dasarathi Swaro (1990): The Christian Missionaries in Orissa: Their Impact on Nineteenth Century Society, Punthi Pustak, Calcutta, p 92.

45 A Eschmann, ëMahima Dharma: An Autochthonous Hindu Reform Movementí in A Eschmann et al (eds), The Cult of Jagannath, op cit. Also see Subhakanta Behera (1997): ëJagannath and Alekh: A Study in Juxtapositioní, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XXXII, Nos 33 and 34, August 16-23, pp 2096-97.

46 In its formative years, the RSSs could not penetrate into Orissa due to its failure to gauge the hold of the Jagannath cult among the Oriyas. Interview with Bhupendra Kumar Basu, the first prant sanghchalak of Orissa.

47 D H Kingsford, Settlement Report of Balasore, quoted in L S S OíMalley (1933): Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers, Cuttack, 2nd edition, E R J R Cousins, Patna, p 58.

48 A Stirling (1822): An Account (Geographical, Statistical and Historical) of Orissa Proper or Cuttack, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1904, p 25.

49 Quoted in Klaus K Klostermaier (1989): A Survey of Hinduism, State University of New York, Albany, p 211.

50 See L S S OíMalley, Bengal District Gazetteers, Puri, op cit, p 98.

51 W W Hunter (1877): A Statistical Account of Bengal: District of Puri and the Orissa Tributary States, Vol XIX, Trubner and Co, London, rpt, D K Publishing Company, Delhi, 1976, pp 42-43.

52 H K Mahtab, chief ed (1957): History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa, Vol IV (1930-47), State Committee for Compilation of History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa, Cuttack, pp 55-56.

53 Sushil Chandra De, comp (1966): Diary of Political Events in Orissa: April 1, 1936-August 15, 1964, The Committee for Compilation of ëWhoís Whoí of the Freedom Movement, Bhubaneswar, p 51.

54 Ibid, p 55.

55 H K Mahtab, chief ed, History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa, Vol IV (1930-47), op cit, pp 132-33.

56 Biswamoy Pati, Resisting Domination, op cit, p 221.

57 Sushil Chandra De, comp, Diary of Political Events in Orissa, op cit, pp 27, 30.

58 H K Mahtab (1960): The History of Orissa, Vol II, Prajatantra Prachara Samiti, Cuttack, p 456.

59 Interview with Baburao Deshpande, the senior Maharashtrian pracharak in Orissa.

60 Paldhikar was born in 1921 in Arvi, Maharashtra. Hedgewarís visit to his hometown inspired him to join the RSS. After graduating from Nagpurís Maurice College in 1940, he became a pracharak and left for Punjab where he spent a decade. In 1949, Golwalkar sent him to Orissa as the first prant pracharak. Paldhikar is known as the founder (pratisthata) of the Orissa RSS.

61 Jaffrelot discusses how the RSS made its entry into central India through the local notables. See Christophe Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, op cit.

62 The name of Harihar Singh Mardaraj, an erstwhile feudatory chief, figured in this list. Paldhikar persuaded him to become nagar sanghchalak of Cuttack city. Interview with Baburao Paldhikar.

63 Interview with Baburao Paldhikar.

64 Mangaraj presided over the Khandayat Conference held in April 1947 at Bhubaneswar.

65 H K Mahtab, chief ed, History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa, Vol IV (1930-47), op cit, p 71.

66 See Nilkantha Das Papers, NMML, New Delhi.

67 Hindu Mahasabha Papers, File No 17 (1943), NMML, New Delhi. In 1943, the total primary membership in the province was 2,507. Ibid. To enlist new members and to do publicity work, the All India Hindu Mahasabha paid monthly remuneration to a retired publicity officer of the Orissa government. See ëOrissa Provincial Hindu Sabha Papersí, Hindu Mahasabha Papers, File No 58, NMML, New Delhi.

68 H K Mahtab, chief ed, History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa, Vol IV (1930-47), op cit, p 107.

69 For the text of this speech, see Hitavada, October 20, 1950.

70 Ibid, p 7.

71 Revd A Sutton (1850): Orissa and its Evangelisation, Derby, England, p 48; also see A Stirling, An Account (Geographical, Statistical and Historical) of Orissa Proper or Cuttack, op cit, p viii.

72 Heinrich von Stietencron, ëA Congregation of Gods: The Dolamelana Festival in Orissaí, in Herman Kulke and Burkhard Schnepel (eds), Jagannath Revisited, op cit, p 398.

73 The British constructed a negative image of Bargi to perpetuate their policy of ëdivide and ruleí. See B C Ray (1995): New Light on Maratha Orissa, L Ray, Bhubaneswar, p xv.

74 Interview with Baburao Paldhikar.

75 For more on RSS pracharaks, see Pralay Kanungo, ëPracharaks of Hindu Rashtraí, Contemporary India, Vol 1, No 2, April-June 2002, pp 175-97.

76 Interview with Baburao Paldhikar.

77 Shri Guruji: Man and His Mission [On the Occasion of His 51st Birthday] (1956): Bharat Prakashan, Delhi, pp 91-92.

78 In Orissa babas and gurus enjoy considerable clout among politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen. Bhairabanandaís selection was very useful for purposes of fund raising and in cultivating the right contacts for the future. Moreover, he was sympathetic towards the RSS. For more on the links between gurus and Hindu nationalism, see Lise McKean, Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996.

79 See Arun Kumar Panda (1990): ëOdissare Vishwa Hindu Parishadara Agragatira Itikathaí, Hindu Vishwa (Oriya Section), Vol 25, No 12, August, pp 27-30.

80 Laxmanananda, an inmate of an ashram in the Himalayan foothills, participated in the goraksha andolan. Then he joined the VHP and came to Orissa. After consulting the RSS

leaders he set up his base in Chakapada, Phulbani. For more on his mission, see Pralay Kanungo (2002): RSSís Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan, Manohar, New Delhi, Chapter V.

81 Phulbani has been bifurcated into two districts: Kondhmal and Boudh. Kondhmal (Phulbani) has the following population ratio: scheduled tribes, 54.23 per cent; scheduled castes, 18.20 per cent; and general category, 27.57 per cent. See Panchayati Raj Department Publication (1994): Government of Orissa, Bhubaneswar.

82 See B B Chatterjee, P N Singh, G R S Rao (1967): Riots in Rourkela: A Psychological Study, Popular Book Services, New Delhi, p 30.

83 The government of Orissa served a legal notice to Paldhikar. Despite his reply he was jailed for four months. Later he was released on Nilakanthaís intervention. Baburao Deshpande was imprisoned for 11 months. After his release he was externed from Orissa for a year.

84 Quoted in Samaj, December 5, 1968, p 2.

85 Some analysts blame the non-Oriya communities in the industrial city for the Rourkela killings. They argue that Cuttack did not witness such killings because of their absence, thereby suggesting that the Oriyas are a docile people.

86 During the violence 59 houses and 106 shops were looted and set on fire. Samaj, December 12, 1968.

87 Samaj, December 13, 1968.

88 Ibid.

89 Basu was born in 1913 in a Bengali zamindar family of Cuttack district. Vivekanandaís ideal inspired him in his childhood. After completing his study of the law, he started his practice. The ëexemplary disciplineí of the swayamsevaks impressed Basu. His association with the RSS began when Paldhikar approached him to become the secretary of the Orissa unit of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial Committee. Basu successfully managed the fund-collection drive; the government of Orissa donated a sum of 1 lakh rupees. But Golwalkarís stay at his house proved to be decisive; Basu was deeply impressed by his personality, intelligence and punctuality. At Golwalkarís suggestion he attended an OTC at Vardhman. First, he was appointed nagar sanghchalak of Cuttack, then prant karyavah in 1964, and finally prant sanghchalak in 1970, a post which he relinquished in 1999 due to ill health. Basu was not a nominal RSS head; along with Paldhikar he masterminded the RSS strategy in Orissa.

90 Jagdish Patnaik was the first Oriya pracharak.

91 For details on the Deoras strategy, see Pralay Kanungo, RSSís Tryst with Politics, op cit, Chapter VI: ëQuest for Political Power: Balasaheb Deorasí, pp 178-223.

92 Pandit, whose grandfather had migrated from Kashmir, was a freedom fighter and a committed socialist. He remained a bachelor and led a spartan life, dedicating himself to the cause of the scavengers and sweepers. Pandit, a devout Hindu, rejected the RSSís Ram but had complete faith in Gandhiís Ram, whom he described as the poor manís god. He opposed the RSS because he held them responsible for Gandhiís assassination. Interview with Bishwanath Pandit.