



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET  
LITTERATUR, IDÉHISTORIA OCH RELIGION

# Violence against Christians in India

A discursive study of two Indian English newspapers

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Termin: VT12  
Kurs: RKT140, Examensarbete för  
kandidatexamen, 15hp  
Nivå: Kandidatnivå  
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## **Abstract**

Persecution of Christians in India has increased drastically during the last fifteen years, hundreds have been murdered, thousands injured and numerous driven from their homes. In this situation news media has an important role: they have the means to either reproduce an agenda that leads to persecution or resist such an agenda. This study explores in what way violence and harassment against Christians is constructed in two of the largest Indian English newspapers. By subjecting twenty articles, published during a period of one and a half month, to a critical discourse analysis following findings were made. The construction of the persecution of Christians is mainly characterized by two discourses. The first is influenced by Indian secularism, and expressed primarily by Christians and Christian organizations. In this discourse Christians are recognized as an Indian minority which the state is legally bound to protect. However, the state is charged to be ignoring the situation as well as being actively part of the persecution. The second discourse foremost deals with the motive for the attacks: conversion. Christians are accused for forcing or alluring people to convert to Christianity and are as a result attacked. This discourse is clearly influence by a Hindu nationalism ideology. This means that the news coverage of violence and harassments against Christians, construct a scenario which reproduces an agenda that could worsen the situation for Christians, but simultaneously enables Christians to express their critique and concerns in public media.

*Keywords:* Christianity in India; Violence against Christians; News Media; Critical Discourse Analysis.

Abstract

Key Words

Abbreviations

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## **Abbreviations**

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| AICC  | All Indian Christian Council                                  |
| BJP   | Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's party)                |
| CBCI  | Catholic Bishop' Conference of India                          |
| CSF   | Catholic Secular Forum  |
| GCIC  | Global Council of Indian Christians                           |
| IFKCA | International Federation of Karnataka Christian Associations  |
| RSS   | Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Organization) |
| VHP   | Viśva Hindu Pariṣad (World Hindu Council)                     |

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

As a child I loved stories. Through them I was able to be part of other worlds, look into different epochs of time, even to become another person. As I grew older I realized that stories were not only found in books and movies, stories were told at all times. At the breakfast table my mother told me stories of life, in the classroom my teachers told me stories from the past and at the eight o'clock news I took part of stories from all around the world. The stories created and constructed my world. As I learned to become critical I realized that, like the books I read as a child, all stories that circulated in society were told from a certain perspective. Stories could not easily be categorized as true or false, as they always were dependent on their narrator's perception.

One group of very influential storytellers in our time is journalists. As we are not able to in person take part of what is happening around the globe we are in the hands of their stories. There is no time to validate all the information that comes to us; we have to trust the persons producing our daily news. But are they not, as we, hopelessly colored by their own personal stories and doomed to perceive the world through those glasses? I am not claiming that there is no quality difference in journalism, it certainly is, but that we have to be aware of that there is no neutral or objective way of talking about reality.

The focus of this study is to examine how English Indian newspapers tell the story of violence and harassment against Christians in India. The aim is not to evaluate if the stories reflect what is really happening, instead what is in focus is in what way the phenomenon is constructed and presented.

In today's information society news media is an important instant from which people get knowledge about religion as well as how they perceive it. News agencies have the potential to make different information available for their readers. And what they choose to present affects what the public know and think, but also eventually how they treat different denominations and religious movements. A one-sided report or misinformation is potential of creating tension, even persecution and bigotry (Stout, 2012: 97). Therefore this area of research, news media's coverage of religious groups, is of vital importance.

## **1.2 Objective and Research Question**

The objective of this study is to examine in what way violence against Christians is constructed in Indian English newspapers. Since Christians are a persecuted group in contemporary India, the media cover of them is a burning question, as it has to mean to either reproduce an agenda that leads to persecution or resist such an agenda. I want to bring attention to how journalists, conscious or unconscious, always choose a *certain* way to report news; that there is no objective or neutral way of reporting about a religious group. This aim resulted in following research questions:

- In what way is violence and harassment against Christians constructed in Indian English newspapers?
- Which ideologies are reproduced through the articles' discourse?

## **1.3 Previous Research**

For a long period religious studies relating to the South Asian subcontinent focused mainly on the "Hindu India", with the result that non-Hindu groups (among them Christians) were given less attention. Even today there are relatively few studies with a general perspective on Christianity in India. A large number of historical studies on specific groups or regions are though available, however these are often scattered and the quality vary (Robinson, 2003:13). The issue of anti-Christian violence is found in works with both a general and narrowed perspective, though usually not treated separately but interwoven in the text as a part of the situation for Christians (e.g. Frykenberg, 2008 and Robinson, 2003). The subject is also found in many works regarding Hindu nationalism, though more attention in most cases is given to tensions between Hindi and Muslim groups (e.g. Bhatt, 2001 and Jaffrelot, 1996).

Only three newly published dissertations (Appeliyil, 2009, PrabhuSingh, 2008 and Zagardu, 2011) were found dealing specifically with violence and harassment against Christians. Their focus however laid at understanding the socio-political origins of anti-Christian violence and the Hindu nationalistic movement's impact on the Christian community. This study's perspective differs as it deals with how violence against Christians is constructed in newspapers. No studies have been found in the specific area.

According to Daniel A. Stout there is a general lack of studies concerning news and religion, which is noteworthy in light of the increasing interest of the interacting between religion and media. The absence is in particular the case when it comes to in what way religious groups are depicted in news (Stout, 2012:104). This became apparent in a search done in March 2012 in *Journal of Religion and Media* archive from 2002 to 2012. Few articles were found concerning newspapers covering of religion and not a single was found regarding Indian newspapers' cover of a religious group in India.

Consequently this study seems to be part of two rather unexplored areas: anti-Christian violence in India and newspapers coverage of religious groups. Moreover not a single research seems to have been conducted in the particular subject of Indian English newspapers reporting of violence against Christians. As Christians in India are a persecuted group and news media plays an important part in the public sphere of creating public opinion, this study is of importance. The media construction of the community has the potential to reproduce an agenda that leads to persecution or resist such an agenda.

## **1.4 Disposition**

The thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter has two aims: firstly to introduce the subject and position the area in relation to previous research. Secondly to clearly define the objective of the study and present the research questions.

The second chapter deals with the theoretical perspective of the study and the method being used, which is a critical discourse analysis. In this chapter the analysis scheme as well as an introduction to the primary material are found.

In the third chapter three portraits of Christianity in India is described and discussed, with the intention to show that there are several discourses circling in present day India of who Christians are. As there is no single way of constructing Christians, or any other religious group, journalists conscious or unconscious choose a *certain way* in how they write their articles. To give the reader a better understanding of the particular perspectives, short introductions to their origins are presented.

In the fourth chapter the articles that constitute the primary material are introduced. They have been categorized according to the topic of their lead story in order that an overview



may be acquired. In the end of the chapter some important conclusions are drawn concerning the effects which the types of articles and their content will have on the discourse.

The fifth chapter is this study's main chapter, where the analysis is presented; the results that have risen as the newspapers articles were subjected to a critical discourse analyses are described as well as discussed. The chapter is structured after the different components of the construction of violence against Christians: the exposed – Christians, the agent behind, the violence and harassments itself and the motive. As the study brings special consideration to how different ideologies are reproduced in the articles there is a particular discussion in the matter.

The last chapter is the concluding chapter in which the most important findings and some final remarks are presented. At last suggestion on further study and research is given.

## 2. THEORY AND METHOD

### 2.1 Discourse Theory

The theoretical approach and method used in this study is a discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a form of qualitative text analysis where theory and method are closely related. It is based on certain philosophical premises regarding the role of language in the “construction” of the world. However the term “discourse” is often applied, both outside and inside the academic field, without any definition which has made its meaning unclear. A primary definition of “discourse” is offered by Marianne Winther Jorgensen and Louise Philips as a *certain* way of speaking and understanding reality. (Winther Jorgensen & Philips, 2007:7-10). “A certain way”, implies that there are several possibilities to understand and speak about reality, with different demarcation the world could be apprehended differently. A discourse is therefore never objective or neutral; it determines how we constructed meaning about the world and ourselves. This definition will be used in the study.

Another way of thinking about discourse is offered by the French philosopher Michael Foucault (b. 1926), who has been one of the most important scholars in the development of discourse theory. He describes it as “*practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak*” (Foucault, 1972:49). A discourse is hence more than words or concepts that can be analyzed in isolation; it is something that *produces* reality. In the same work as cited (“The Archaeology of Knowledge”) Foucault set out to investigate several different epochs and their use of rules and premises to decide what is to be regarded as truth and what is not. He concludes that the dominant view of the period constructs these presumptions and upholds them by a specific use of language, a specific discourse. For Foucault truth is thus something that society produce, something discursively constructed. He is consequently not interested in which discourse that in an accurate way represents the “real world”, but rather in how a discourse becomes dominant and is upheld (Mills, 2004:17). Like Foucault my interest do not lie in whether newspaper articles that are part of this study give an accurate picture of what “really happens”. Instead I am interested in what way violence and harassment against Christians is *constructed*. But in contrast to Foucault I do not regard society as subjected to *one* dominant discourse, but instead consisting of several which (sometimes) stand in conflict to each other. My point of departure is therefore not to find the “dominant” discourse and understand how it is upheld, but rather to understand in what way

(no matter if it is through one or several discourse) violence and harassment against Christians is constructed.

A critique against discourse theory is that its approach towards language, as something constructed and constructive, causes truth to dissolve. As all verbal structures are regarded to be part of a certain discourse, it is argued that truth can never be expressed objectively. However few scholars in the discursive field would claim that there is no truth at all. The point is that talking about “absolute” truth is complicated since there is no obligated link between objects and words; as we speak we lay meaning and values in words and we thereby so to speak “create” the world. So it is not about dissolving truth, but rather bringing self-awareness by showing that a value free way of using language and thereby doing research is not possible.

In the religious field a discursive approach has not yet been thoroughly established, though it has during the last two decades become more common. Three scholars that have contributed to a discursive understanding of religion are Robert Wuthnow (b. 1946), Hans G. Kippenberg (b. 1939) and Kocku von Stuckard (b. 1966). Wuthnow, one of the first scholars of religion to adopt a discursive approach, argued that a very important task of historical studies is to analyze the relationship between a social movement’s discourse and its context; in other words to contextualize discourses. Kippenberg and Von Stuckard were more radical in their approach and suggested that the study of religion should be restricted to focus primarily on the discursive character of religion (Tessman, 2012: 26-27,30).

## **2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis**

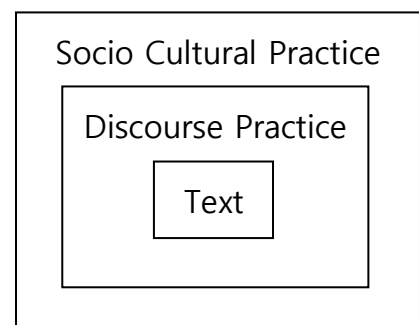
It is a certain kind of discourse analysis that will be used as a method in this study, namely a critical discourse analysis. There is no uniform understanding of what this method should comprise; nevertheless Jorgensen and Philips argue that the following five common features are characteristic of the approach. a) All social and cultural processes partly encompass a linguistic-discursive character. This means that phenomena that are commonly perceived as non-textual (e.g. pictures, behaviors, clothes etc) are regarded as having a linguistic-discursive character, since they (like texts) are social practice that contribute to the construction of the social world. b) discourse is a social practice that is both constructed and constructive, i.e. a discourse is social constructed as well as part of constructing reality c) the language usage in social interactions is submitted to a concrete text analyses d) a

discursive practice is a social action with ideological effects: it inevitably reproduces norms, values and power configurations e) for that reason a critical discourse analysis doesn't concede itself to be political neutral, as it tries to reveal the function a discourse play in constructing and upholding of oppressive power configurations (Winther Jorgensen & Philips, 2007:67-70).

My approach in this study contains these five features. As it is obvious that the material being analyzed is of "linguistic-discursive character", there will be no further explanation about the first assumption. Likewise it is apparent that material will be "submitted to a concrete text analyses". However point b); d) and e) may need some clarifying. In this study it is presumed (b) that the articles are a social construction as they are written by a person in a certain social context. At the same time they are part of creating – constructing – reality, by reproducing a certain representation of violence against Christians. Point d) and e) are closely intervened. I will presuppose that the articles will contain ideological effects as they are a discursive practice, and further I will try to reveal in what way the discourse have in the upholding of oppressive power configurations. Therefore neither the newspapers account nor my own analysis will be considered being political neutral.

A critique that has emerged as a reaction to the last two assumptions (d and e) is that since all discourses have ideological effects, critique must also be part of an unequal power configuration. Who is then able to distinguished between statements that oppose oppression and those that accomplice with it? As stated I do not regard my critique to be political neutral. However what is criticized is not that anybody is part of a discourse with ideological effects, but the notion within an ideology to assume that there are statements which are invariable and not possible to be understood in any other way.

One of the leading critical discourse analysts, Norman Fairclough, has in the book "Media Discourse" created a framework for critical discourse analysis of a communicative event. Fairclough distinguishes three dimensions of a communicative event, which he has called "text", "discourse practice" and "social cultural practice" (their relationship is displayed in the figure). A "text" may be oral or written and is at the center of the analysis. The "discourse practice" implies the



process of text production as well as its consumption, and the “socio cultural practice” is the context in which the communicative event is part of (Fairclough, 1995:57). In this study the primarily focus is on *text*, but also selective on the *socio cultural practice* (chapter 4). However, the process in which *text* is produced and consumed will not be part of the study. It should be clarified that there is no self-evident correlation between the ideological effects that may be revealed in my analysis and the way in which the articles are actually read by the audience. For the later an audience reception study is needed.

### **2.3 Material and Selection**

In contrast to many other methods a discourse analysis treats very different kinds of material equally. This does not mean that all material is regarded as equally reliable. However different kinds of materials can be of equal interest for a research, as the importance do not lie in a text’s reliability but in its nature as social constructed and its function as constructive. Therefore a public investigation and a teenage-magazine could be of equal interest as an investigation material, since both claim to say something about reality (Börjesson & Palmblad, 2007:16-17). As stated newspaper articles will be used as the primary material in this study. News in newspapers is as all other verbal structures part of a discourse, as they pose a certain construction of the social reality. Consequently articles are not a random combination of words, they are structured out of a greater language and society formations (Berglez, 2010:272-273).

The primary material consists of 20 articles from the online edition of Times of India and The Hindu, which were published as well as collected between December 28 2011 and February 12 2012. This period represent the initial phase of the study and consequently the period of collection of material. Articles published before 28 December 2011 were excluded since I sought the material to be as up to date as possible. Times of India and The Hindu were chosen because they are two of the largest newspapers in India, and they not only reach numerous people but also cover up stories from all over India. Naturally the discourses will be colored by the newspapers political sympathies. Wordpress.org described the Hindu as left-leaning and Times of India as conservative (Wordpress, 2012). There are thus differences between their approaches, which could be of interest to compare – however, this will not be done in this study. I am well aware of that an investigation of smaller newspapers, local newspapers or newspapers in other languages than English would probably offer a different result - an issue that will be approached in the last chapter.

Two main criteria's were used in the selection process. The first was that the article's lead story should be in some way related to violence and harassment against Christians. Therefore if an article did only mention the issue it was sifted out. On the other hand the articles are not limited to report only immediate situations of violence, but do also contain stories of protests, arrests, interviews with victims etc. The second main criterion was that it should be clear that the violence or harassment were directed towards Christians because they were Christians. This means that articles have been ignore when Christians happens, among others, to have been subjected violence or maltreatment.

## **2.4 Procedure and Analyze Scheme**

Each article has been analyzed separately in accordance with the analysis scheme presented below. To acquire an overview of the articles, as well as a better understanding of the relationship between the stories and the discourses, the articles were categorized in accordance to their lead story (which is presented in chapter 5). Thereafter tendencies, reoccurring issues and agents that were given special attention were particularly overlooked. Finally the results were compiled to the presentation in chapter 6.

The analysis schema is in a high degree based on a questioner shaped by Peter Berglez. It is constructed to be used as a critical discourse analysis for newspapers articles (Berglez, 2010:277-279). Only a few modifications have been made to scheme that it may better conform the material and the objective of the study: C (g), D (g) and F as well as part of C (e) and D (a). The analysis scheme consists of six different parts that aims to draw attention to both the macro-level, the text's all-embracing characteristics (e.g. it's thematic and schematic structure), and the micro-level, the discourse's in detail (e.g. wording and implicit meanings).

### **A. General Questions**

- (a) What is the main content of the article?
- (b) Is there any supplementary pictures?
- (c) How long is the article?

### **B. Thematically structure**

What is the article's main theme and what subordinate themes are found?

### C. Schematically Structure

- (a) What do the heading and main paragraph convey?
- (b) Which agents figure in the article and what do they represent?
- (c) What historical background of the occurrence is given an account for and from which agent's comments and/or actions?
- (d) What causes and effects are expressed, in what way and by whom?
- (e) Towards whom or what are the agent's comments aimed to?
- (f) Who are/is given the right to summarize and/or make the core conclusion about the occurrence? Who has interpretative prerogative?
- (g) What is the article's main conflict, which agents are involved and how is it constructed?

### D. Micro analyze of the article

- (a) Does the reader require prior knowledge and/or understanding in order to understand the article? Is something "left out" in the article?
- (b) Is there an implicit meaning concealed in the text, which the reader is assume to fill out?
- (c) Does the article contain redundant and irrelevant information?
- (d) How are the central incidents, agents and places constructed?
- (e) Examine the agents' and journalist's wording.
- (f) What alternative headings are possible?
- (g) Is somebody constructed as "the other" in the article?

### E. Socio-cultural contextualization

In what way do the discourses of the article part of, reproduce, negotiate or oppose particular ideological processes?

### F. Summary

### 3. PORTRAITS OF CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

As this study aims to examine in what way violence and harassment against Christians is *constructed* in newspaper articles, this background chapter will not contain a history over Christianity in India, but instead consist of three understandings of Christians in India. The purpose is not to give a comprehensive presentation of the three perspectives, but rather to illustrate that there are several different ways Christians are perceived in contemporary Indian. By doing this I would like to draw attention to the fact there are several possibilities of how a journalist can describe and construct the Christian community in his or hers writing. There is no conform picture which she or he is bound to abide by. Consequently when journalists write about violence against Christians they, conscious or unconscious, choose *a certain way* (a discourse) to describe the phenomena.

The three portraits of Christians that will be presented are: the Congress Party's, the Hindutva movement's and the Christian community's. I have chosen these three perspectives as they are central to how Christians are regarded in present-day India.

#### 3.1 The Congress party and the Constitution

To understand the official discourse of India's leading party - the Congress Party - regarding the Christian population, we have to return to middle of the twentieth century and the independence movement. This movement, which the Congress Party lead, was without a doubt nationalistic; however its characteristics did not lie in the idea of a suppressed identity to be born, but in anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. Instead of creating nationalism through referring to one language and one religion (as has been done in Europe), the country was unified through anti-imperialism, based on a critique against the colonial rule and its economic effects on *all* Indians (Kesavan, 2003). In this process of becoming an independent country, it was important for the Congress Party to demonstrate that multi-faceted India could be unified under one umbrella. This led to a sort of Noah's ark effect when it came to religion and religious groups: all kinds of different religions were to be included. An Indian type of secularism was created, which did not mean keeping religion at a distance, but to equally welcome and acknowledge every religious group. Religious groups were guaranteed not only freedom to practice religion, but also to propagate it and to establish schools which were given the same economic support as the public ones. Through the Indian secularism the Congress Party managed to draw support from a great variety of



groups in their aim to throw out the British colonial power. The party may have failed in keeping all Muslims on board, but the idea of an (Indian) secular state was written into the Constitution. (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1988:78). The Congress Party's "nationalism", which became its ideology, was thus secular. India was regarded as consisting of a Hindu majority *and* several other religious minorities, where one was Christianity. Hence, Christians were regarded (at least rhetorically) as an inherent part of the country. This construction of Christians (and other minorities) in India is still strong in present-time India and secularism is a prevailing method for the Congress Party to gather support from a wide range of different groups (Kesevan, 2003).

However, even if minorities were given rights and protection against oppression in the Constitution, there were certain formulations that lay a foundation for discrimination. According to the Constitution a "Hindu" is a person who is Hindu, Buddhist, Jain or Sikh by religion and "any other person domiciled in territories to which this Act extends, who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion...". This means that all Indians are "Hindu", apart from those who belong to a religion which have originated outside India. Later when additional Acts was implemented, "sanctions" for people converting to a not "Hindu" religion were found. For example, the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act from 1956, states that if a person cease to be "Hindu" their spouse has the right to adopt or give in adoption a common child without approval of the other parent (Robinsson, 2003:18-19).

Hence, there is something dubious about the Congress Party's politics. They claim to be a party with a (Indian) secular ideology, with equal concern for all religions. A party for everybody, no matter what religion the person belong to, i.e. a national party. But on the other hand laws were early implemented under Congress rule, which clearly discriminate people belonging to a religion that originates outside of India. An implicit construction of "Hindus" and "alien" Indians was done, moreover the legislation encourage people to stay "Hindu". These demarcation marks (who is "Hindu" and who is not") is obviously a construction, if other lines were drawn (e.g. that those with Indian citizenship are "Hindu") Christians could be within the "stock". But as it is now, Christians are constructed as a minority which is not as "Indian" as the majority. One consequences of this will be presented below.

### 3.2 In the Eyes of the Hindutva Movement

The word “Hindutva” is derived from the two words: “Hindu” and “tatva” (principle), and is often understood as “Hinduness”, the principles or essence of being a Hindu (Appelleyil, 2009:31). Robert Eric Frykenberg argues that Hindutva” is a melding of Hindu fascism and Hindu fundamentalism (Frykenberg, 2008: 473). With this he means that it is profoundly religious, as well as a political form of nationalism with violent tendencies.

The ideology has its roots in the Hindu nationalistic movements which began during the nineteenth century. The movement was initiated by high caste Hindus, such as Arya Samaj, as a reaction against the British colonial power and Christian mission. These two institutions were regarded as threatening the traditional social order and culture of Hindus (Jaffrelot, 1996:11). Due to the mass conversions to Christianity during the century, the Christian population increased while the Hindu population was decreasing. As a reaction a discourse was shaped that pictured conversion as a demographic threat towards the country, a way of arguing that returned with renewed strength during the 1990s (Bhatt, 2001:21).

However it was not until the 1920s that the Hindutva doctrines were more clearly crystallized. During this decade the famous book “Hindutva: Who is a Hindu”, by Vinayal Damodar Savarkar, was published, which became a foundational text for the nationalistic Hindutva movement (Jaffrelot, 1996:). Savarkar constructed three identity marks for a “Hindu”: the land, the blood and the culture. To be a “Hindu” one should have a citizenship within the geographical territory of India, share the common blood by being a descendent to Hindu parents and share the *sanskriti* “common Hindu culture” (Bhatt, 2001:94-96). Christians (and Muslims) may share the territory and blood with Hindus, but they were not part of the same culture (as they belonged to a “foreign” religion). Even if Christianity had been present in India for at least 1600 years, it was regarded as alien because it had its roots in other parts of the world. And as India was considered belonging to the “Hindus”, Christians in their eyes became a second-class citizens. The way of talking about Christians (and other minorities) is and has been aggressive, e.g. Madhav Sadashiv Golwalker (one of the founders of RSS) has described Christians as “cancer” within the “Hindu body” (Bhatt, 2001:130).

This discourse of Christians as a “foreign people” living within the borders of Indian and threatening the traditional (Hindu) order and culture, has mainly been spread by three

interlinked organizations: RSS, BJP and VHP. RSS was founded in the 1920s and is today a large organization with several millions of members. Their activities in present day India, stretches from reconversion campaigns (mostly directed towards Christians and adivasi communities) to rewriting of school books in accordance with the “Hindu” view of history (Bhatt, 2001:114). Between 1949 and 1965 several new organizations were founded by RSS, whereof two were VHP and the political party BJS (which would later evolve to BJP).

VHP’s objective was to strengthen the Hindu society and protect and propagate Hindu values, they are described by Frykenberg as a “militant missionary agency”. VHP has over the years been involved in many brutal campaigns against Christians and Muslims in the name of promoting “Hindu” values (Frykenberg, 2009:476-477).

BJP began its rise to power in the 1980s and is the only party which has been able to challenge the Congress Party on a national level. By cultivating a national “Hindu” vote bank they are trying to increase their support. Their attitude towards Christians has varied slightly since the establishment, but they have always been clearly influenced by the Hindutva movement’s ideas (Bhatt, 2001:174).

### **3.3 A Dual Self-identity**

The Christian community in India is one of the most ancient forms of non-Western Christianity. Data suggest that from the third or fourth century a well-established Christian community was present in South India. However within the Indian Christian community there is a strong tradition, called the Thomas tradition, which dates the arriving of Christianity to the first century. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, is commonly believed to have arrived on the southeast coast of India around the same time as Peter appeared in Rome (Frykenberg, 2008:114-115).

The earliest literary account of the apostle and his missionary work in India is found in “Act of Thomas” (a text which originates outside India). It begins with the disciples’ decision to act on their lord’s command to “go into the whole world and proclaim the good news”. As they divided different areas between themselves, the lot to go to India fell on Thomas. At first he objected, but was later convinced by a revelation of his Lord Jesus. Thereafter the story continues to describe Thomas’ encounter with India and ends with his martyrdom (Frykenberg, 2008:95-96).

The historicity of the ancient text may be questionable but the tradition has deep roots among Christians in India. There is still a living community claiming to be the descendents of Thomas first convert, called Thomas Christians (Robinson 2003:38). This group is of importance for the identity of Indian Christians, as it suggests that Christianity is something very old and deeply inherent within the subcontinent. Thomas Christians transcend the stereotypes of Christianity as something “foreign” or “colonial”, which have circulated in India for the last 150 years. The Hindutva moment may regard Christians as alien, but the Christian respon is that long before Islam, British rule, Protestant mission or modern Hinduism was present in India, there was an established Christian community in the country. (Mallampalli, 2006:423).

As the Christian community in India is largely heterogeneous, to draw further generalizations about their self-understanding complicated. One may say that the diversity of Christians in India reflects the Indian diversity. Depending on variables such as cast background, specific contexts and domination the self-identity varies. There is a huge difference between a manly high caste member of the Thomas Church in Kerala and a newly converted woman from an adivasi background in Orissa. However, there is at least one more common denominator between Christians in India which is that they bare a strong sense of dual identity by being both Christians and Indians. For example, they are both part of a religion which claims to be universal and transcends ethnicity and nationality, and at the same time they are part of a culture where the particular birth (jat) of a person is both a crucial part of the self-understanding, as well as how that person is regarded by society. (Frykenberg, 2008:457).

This dual self-understanding has always characterized Christians in India, however since 1900s it has been a vital question. As the independences movement was clearly anti-colonial, suspiciousness emerged against anything foreign. As a consequence many churches felt there was a need to “Indianise”. For some this involved making the church and its practices more “Hindu”. For others it was a question of a higher representation of Indians within the leadership of the church and Christian organizations (Mallampalli, 2006:427).

One of India’s most famous Christian missionaries sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1928), is a clearl example of this dual-identity. Born Sikh, he became a Christian due to a vision as a teenager. When he shared his plan to adopt a new religion with his parents they were very

angry, and when he cut his hair he became an outcast. Nevertheless he decided to become a *sadhu* (in Hinduism an ascetic wandering monk), a “Christian sadhu”. He thereafter spent his life wandering and travelling in his saffron robes preaching the Christians gospel (Thompson, 2011). Sundar Sing explained his belief in that “Indians need the Water of Life, but not the European cup”. His last years became characterized by controversies; where a common critique was the sadhu approved of being called *swami* (lord), which many thought drew attention from their real Lord (Frykenberg, 2008:415).

## 4. PRESENTATION OF THE ARTICLES

This chapter is a presentation of the newspaper articles which constitute the primary material of this study. So that the reader may easily acquire an overview of the material, the articles have been categorized in accordance to their lead story. The categorization resulted in five groups, which have been entitled: “A – With Focus on Reports”, “B - Christians Accused for (forced) Conversion”, “C - Protests, Condemnations and Critique”, “D - Victims in Focus” and “E - Arrests”. The presentation will draw attention to both similarities and dissimilarities within the groups.

There are two main reasons for the presentation. Firstly to display what kinds of articles that are published regarding violence against Christians, and thereby give the reader an insight to what kind of stories have been analyzed. Secondly, the *construction* of violence against Christians will respond to what kinds of stories are published and their content as well as the agents given opportunity to express their opinion. Therefore it is of vital concern that these factors are taken into account in the analysis.

The chapter will close with a conclusion concerning the kinds of articles that are published and how it will affect the discourse.

### 4.1 A – With Focus on Reports

The two articles in this category bring attention to newly published reports (by CSF and GCIC) regarding violence and harassment against Christians. The immediate concern is the situation in the particular state where the articles are published: Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. By referring to statistics the journalist portrays the maltreatment as extensively, e.g. *nearly 2141 Christians were affected in various forms of violence against the community...*” In both articles a few persons are allowed to comment the reports, their reactions differ. The Home Minister in Madhya Pradesh denies that any such incidents occur. A researcher argues that *“the rise in these attacks is a danger sign for the democratic values of the country*, and a priest narrates how the police have started to act on RSS’s and VHP’s behalf. In this group two motives are mentioned for the attacks, whereas the dominant is “conversion” and the other a recent trend where Christian workers are tagged as Naxalites.

## **4.2 B - Christians Accused for (forced) Conversion**

In the majority of the articles Christians are, in some way, accused for (forced) conversions; however the three articles in this category have the topic as their lead story. Two of the articles are constructed mainly out of comments and claims from Hindu organizations who urged the police to take action against Christians. Christians are accused among other things for “*brainwashing*” “*gullible*” people and preaching the Bible. The third article differs. With an ironic tone the journalist describes an interrogation by the Minority Commission (!) of (Christian) victims of a violent attack in their home that have been accused for (forced) conversion. At the hearing the victims were told that they should not complain that they have been attacked if they are real Christians, as “*Jesus has shed his blood to forgive others*”. Further a woman narrates how the police at the arrival at the crime scene ask her how many lakhs she had been given to become a Christian. As the irony is distinctive, an implicit critique emerges against the Minority Commission.

## **4.3 C - Protests, Condemnations and Critique**

The most common kind of stories regarding violence and harassment against Christians, which were published during the time of collection, dealt with Christians protesting about a certain incident or making remarks of critique and condemnation. In the majority of the ten articles the driving agent is a Christian organization, who tends to be given interpretative prerogative. The critique is mostly a reaction on a specific incident, e.g. destruction of churches, beatings of pastors or illegal house raids. But as the articles goes on the critique turns into worries about the state’s ability (and desire) to protect minority groups as well as implication that this may be a threat to India as a democratic state. “*If we allow this then you will have parallel systems which is not possible in a democratic country*”, “*we are seeing hate campaigns, even anti-conversion laws by States that are anti-constitutional*”.

It is noteworthy that the agents executing the violence rarely are mentioned or criticized in this group. Instead it is the state that is regarded bearing the outmost responsibility for what is happening, as well as being criticized for misbehavior. Politicians, the police as well as the judiciary are accused for being part of a system which allow such violence, and in some cases even encourage it.

#### **4.4 D - Victims in Focus**

What unifies the four articles in this category is their focus on individual victims that has been exposed to violence or harassment, as a consequence the stories personal and distinctive in their character. One pictures a Dalit Christian family whom were attacked during an anniversary celebration. Another a pastor who has after many years of systematical ill-treatment started a trust and two contain stories from Kashmir (were a outbreak of persecution emerge after a pastor was accused by a Sharia court for luring Muslim boys to Christianity). In the two first-named articles the victim's stories dominates the articles, however those concerning Kashmir gives room to additional perspectives.

As the four articles are lengthy and complex it is difficult to present a general picture of them. A recurring matter is though conversion. It is because somebody has converted or is alleged for being part of another person's conversion that the violence and harassment have occurred. In the articles from Kashmir Christian organizations are given opportunity to answer the alleged. A spokesman for AICC states: *"A fact finding team which went to Srinagar...found no evidence of force or fraud in baptisms that have been carried out over a period of time. Each baptism has been proved to be voluntary"*

#### **4.5 E - Arrests**

The picture that emerge from the articles indicate that violence and harassment against Christians is extensively, in this light it is noteworthy that only one article's lead story centers around an arrest. Three men are caught for distributing *"defamatory pamphlets against Christian clergy"*. They are accused among other things for (Section 153 A) promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion. The main responsible person is identified as "Donald", but there is no information about his motive or background. However, the crime is picture as serious: after compliments from a priest, the three men were promptly arrested by the police and charged under seven sections.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

From this contain categorization it is clear that the construction of violence and harassment against Christians foremost consist of articles narrating Christian organizations protesting against and criticizing the state, group (C). Since these articles often give interpretive prerogative to the Christians organizations, it will color the discourse. However the articles



in the group B as well as two of the more personal stories contain strong accusations against Christians which most likely will compose a contrast picture of the Christian organizations.

Moreover there is a lack of information about the agents executing the violence and harassment, partly as a consequence that only one article deals with an arrest. It is also noteworthy that the subject “conversion” reappears in all categories except E. This indicates that it is a vital matter when violence and harassment against Christians is discussed in the public forum. Concerning the violence and harassment itself, there is no clear picture of what kind of violence that is most widespread. However systematic oppressions (such as denial of burial rights, or prevention of employment) seems to be less common than direct violence. Even if allotment among the articles is unequal, the themes they cover are quite broad.

However it is noteworthy in the light of the considerable critique against the state, that no article mentions what the state aims to do to change the situation. Together with the not mention agents who execute the violence this creates a hole in the overall picture.

## 5. ANALYSIS

The objective of this study is to examine in what way violence and harassments against Christians is *constructed* in Indian English newspapers, with special consideration to the ideologies that are reproduced through the articles' discourse. My primary material consisted of twenty articles published between December 28 2011 and February 13 2012 in Times of Indian and The Hindu. For each article, I have conducted a critical discourse analysis and compared and collocated the results. This chapter is a presentation of my analysis.

The structure of the presentation is built on the different components in the construction of violence and harassment against Christians. Firstly, Christians are presented within the construction of the victim. There are two main discourses concerning this group that will be described and discussed. Thereafter follows the construction of the guilty. However since the agents executing the violence are rarely mentioned in the articles, the discussion will mainly focus on the agent regarded as blameworthy, the state. Even though there is no clear "violent agent" in the articles, there is a clear motive which reoccurs in the majority of the articles, conversion. This is discussed at length as it is a vital part of the construction of violence against Christians. After the discussion about conversion, follows a presentation of the construction of the violence and harassment itself. Lastly the two main ideologies, that influence the discourse - Indian Secularism and Hindu nationalism - which is presented. The different parts are thereafter summarized.

### 5.1 Constructing Christians

The research questions of this study position Christians in India as victims of violence. Some of the most common characteristics associated with the "victim role" are probably helplessness and suffering. However the general discourse concerning Christians emerging from the articles is an energetic and political well-aware group. Christians are not merely telling stories of how they were attacked or how difficult their situation is, rather the majority of the articles depict Christians "in action", as they try to effect their situation. For example a "*racial profiling*" in Madhya Pradesh caused Christians to go to the Chief Minister and protest. In Manipur, converted Christians who were exposed to systematic marginalization set up an organization to improve their situation.

In part, the depiction of Christians as “active” responds to the kind of articles published on violence against Christians, namely the over-representation of Christians protesting and criticizing. But on the other hand, this portrait of Christians is not limited to these articles. In fact only one article picture (a group of) Christians in the more typical victim role.

At the same time the discourse concerning Christians clearly depicts them as a group that does not have the actual power or opportunities, to comprehensively change their situation. They are dependent on the state (e.g. receiving protecting from the police and creating public opinion to stop persecution). From this perspective they are typical victims, vulnerable and exposed, as they are dependent on the states good will.

The two aspects discussed above are general characteristic attached to Christians in the articles. However when it comes to constructing the identity of Christians (who they are) two dominant viewpoints emerges. The two different perspectives are discussed below and have been entitled “An Indian Minority” and “A Spreading Threat”.

### ***5.1.1 An Indian Minority***

According to India’s Constitution, Christians are an Indian Minority with legal rights to be protected and the freedom to practice their religion. In this discourse Christians are regarded as an inherent part of India. They are a group the state has promised to take responsibility for. In several of the articles, especially those that contain comments from Christian organizations, there are echoes of this discourse. *“Working towards resolutions of critical issues that affect minorities...”, “The only way to deal with this situation where minorities were living under constant shadow of fear...”* Christians reproduce the way the Constitution constructs them and use it as a springboard to claim their legal rights. When the state fails to protect the Christian minority, it is regarded as a failure of India to be a democratic state: *“The rise of attacks is a danger sign for democratic values of our country” said researcher Ram Puniyani, pointing out that democracy and secularism in a country were determined by how safe minority communities were.”*

It is not surprising that Christians constructs themselves in the minority idiom. It is one of the more effective ways to attain hearing as it responds to the largest political party’s discourse. In addition, by referring to themselves as a minority they remind society of their legal rights. As pointed out in the background chapter, there could be a danger in

strengthening this discourse. Any majority or minority is a construction created out of *certain* demarcation marks, e.g. India's Constitution marks out Christians as "not Hindu" or "alien" due to their religious beliefs. Reproducing this discourse may reinforce the Hindutva movement's picture of Christians as a religious and alien threat that is growing within the country. If a different demarcation was used, such as income or geographical lines, Christians as a religious group would not be singled out, but instead integrated into other groups that are regarded as truly "Indian".

### ***5.1.2 A Spreading Threat***

Another tendency in the construction of Christians is to picture them as a spreading threat, primarily due to conversion. This alludes to the Hindutva movement's portrayal of Christians. The idea is not often explicitly stated. However, it is implicit in most of the articles as they contain stories of Christian's reactions against these ideas. A fear seems to exist in the society that Christians as a community will expand due to conversion, while other (religious) groups decrease, due to conversion. For example the president of the Federation of Human Rights' Organizations remarks: *"There is no empirical basis to the charge that population of the minorities is on the rise because of religious conversion. Those who make such baseless accusations are trying to create a wrong impression in the minds of common people."*

In this discourse, the Christian community is pictured as growing as a consequence of *forced* conversation or allurements. The most "common method" alleged is bribing, but other means, such as *"sex and booze"* is sometimes mentioned. Christians are furthermore accused of targeting "vulnerable" people, e.g. *"gullible people"* and youth. However, there is not a single trustworthy example in the articles that this is happening (see "The Controversy over Conversion").

In the articles I have examined, these accusations are never articulated by the journalists themselves, but are part of interviews or citations. In other words, the journalists never explicitly express that they support these allegations. On the other hand they rarely comment on if there is truth in the accusations, which compel the readers to decide for themselves. Because journalists don't attempt opposing these accusations (and not even clarifying if there is truth in them), they are part of reproducing the discourse of Christians as a growing threat.

None of the articles analyzed explain why a growing Christian minority is a threat to the Indian society. However, there seems to be an interest keeping this belief alive. It is not possible to draw any further conclusions “Christians as a threat” from the articles, but it seems like many different groups of society has an interest in maintaining this picture, from “common” village people to high-ranking politicians.

### **5.1.3 The Caste Issue**

A central issue in most works concerning Christians in India is how the caste system affects the Christian community. In the light of the fact that half of India’s Christians come from a dalit background and between 15-20% from an adivasi background (Robinson, 2003:29), it is not seem strange that it is an vital question.

However, in the twenty articles analyzed, “cast” was only mentioned in four, and it was only a central aspect in one (the article about the Dalit family which had been attacked). The other articles bring up the issue in following contexts (a) persecution against Christian adivasi villages has become more widespread (b) a Christian family being interrogated is identified as “*Hindu Chalti*” (a caste classified as a Scheduled Caste) (c) CBCI criticizing the government for delaying the response on issues concerning “*Dalit Christians*”.

The cast issue does not seem to be as central to the newspapers’ construction of Christians in India as for scholars. It is noteworthy, however that in contrast to the general depiction of Christians (in the articles) as energetic, persons with dalit or avarna background are in a higher degree portrayed as victims. This is clear in the article about the Dalit family.

## **5.2 Who to Blame?**

The research questions of this study depict Christians as exposed to violence and harassment, but state nothing of the agent behind these actions. In like manner, the articles are vague about who these agents are. They have therefore been named “The Unknown”. A few times “Hindu groups” or “Muslims” are though mentioned as standing behind the violence. These two “groups” are therefore discussed separately. There is a distinct discourse in the articles of whom outmost bares the guilt for the violent actions and harassment against Christians, namely the state. The discussion of this agent makes up the largest part of this section of the presentation.

### ***5.2.1 The State***

A consistent argument in the construction of violence against Christians is that the state is responsible and blameworthy. The majority of articles (thirteen out of twenty), contribute to this picture. The charges can generally be divided into two categories: accusations that the state is to *passive* (not taking responsibility) and claims that the state is *actively* part of the persecution against Christians.

The latter critique is not as frequent as the first, and in all cases except one utter by a person representing a Christian organization. The police are accused for destroying evidence from crime-scenes, BJP for being “inter-linked” with violent groups and tax officials for conducting illegal raids. The general secretary for CBCI even claims that some of the anti-conversations laws that have been implemented by a few states are in violation of the country’s Constitution. In other words, that some states are actively opposing fundamental laws.

The critique that the state is passive draws mainly on three observations: (1) political silence over violent attacks, (2) that the police and the judiciary are not acting “effectively” and (3) the delay of implementing laws against communal violence. In contrast to the critique regarding an “active persecuting state”, the critique against the state as passive is not only presented by Christians, but also by journalists and “non-Christians”. For example a retired High Court judge claims: *“The function of the lower judiciary was particularly disappointing when it came to dealing with communal cases”*. And when a sharia court expelled two pastors from Kashmir, the journalist stated: *Although this court has no legal sanctity, political parties has remained silent.*

Despite the great amount of critique against the state, comments from politicians appear only four times in the articles. They include (a) the interrogation of violated Christians by the Minority Commission (!) (b) a comment by a tax official who executed a raid against a priest, saying he was only following orders from the headquarters (c) a BJP politician’s (the vice president for a Minority Cell) allegation of for “conversation” against a pastor whom been harassed and (d) the Home Ministers of Madhya Pradesh denial that any attacks against churches had occurred (despite a new report stating 15 attacks in the state during 2011). The last case is followed by following account from the journalist *“When asked for comment on*

*the case involving RSS and VHP supporters destroying of Bibles and beating up a pastor besides looting the place, the home minister disconnected the phone.”*

The above comments and actions by politicians affirm the picture of the state as actively being part of the persecution against Christians. The discourse concerning the state is thus predominantly negative in the articles. The state is pictured as ignoring the problem by being passive, as well as being a part of the problem by actively participating in the persecution. It is also noteworthy that no article contains a story of how the state is planning to take action against the harassment and violence. This strengthens the picture of the passive state.

It should be mentioned that there are four exceptions where a public authority is pictured of doing something to oppose the violence. In three instances the police is described arresting suspects. In another article the Chief Minister in Madhya Pradesh intervened on a “*racial profiling of Christians*” after protests.

### **5.2.2 The Unknown**

There is limited amount of information in the articles about the agents that actually execute the violence. As mentioned, these agents are identified as “Hindu groups” or “Muslims” a few times, but aside from these identification marks only three other attributes occur: “*non-Christians*”, “*tax officials*” and “*gang members from Sarjapur*”. There is thus no uniform discourse of an existing violent agent. This may resemble the content categorization that displayed that only one out of twenty articles has an arrest as the main topic. However a major conclusion among scholars is that there is a clear relationship between an increasing persecution against minorities in India and the growing influence of Hindu nationalistic groups (e.g. Frykenberg, 2008; Bhatt, 2001). It does not seem to be a problem for researches to find out who lies behind these actions, but for journalist it nearly seems impossible. There could be many reasons behind this difficulty journalist seem to have, e.g. that the police do not dispense information or that it is self-evident for both writer and reader who stands behind the actions. Irrespective of the reason behind this lack of information, it makes these agents invisible and thereby impossible to create public opinion against. The two newspapers are thus clearly (no matter if it is consciously or unconsciously) part of a process of creating an unknown violent agent, whom critique cannot reach.

### **5.2.3 BJP and “Hindu Groups”**

BJP is not a frequently topic in the articles; however when they are mentioned there is a distinct discourse about them. The picture that emerges of the party clearly connects them with the violence and harassment against Christians, e.g. *“Mr. Rajashekhar said that the rule of the Bharatiya Janata Party and violence against Christians was “interlinked”*. It is though unclear in what way they are actually connected. The only case brought up among the articles is of a BJP politician accusing a pastor that has been harassed for “conversations”.

The connections between so called “Hindu groups” and violence against Christians are clearer. In two articles Hindu Groups are depicted as lying behind attacks and a twice they make remarks that nearly sound like propaganda message, e .g that Christians are *“targeting gullible people and brainwashing them”*.

Even if BJP and “Hindu groups” are connected to violence against Christians, the point is not made consistently and consequently does not characterize the articles taken as a whole.

### **5.2.4 Muslims**

Within the period the articles were collected a large persecution of Christians broke out in Kashmir. It was caused by a remark from a Sharia court which alleged three pastors for *“luring the valley Muslims to Christianity”*. Three articles contain stories from the area. The Muslim religious establishment is depicted as nurturing and driving the persecution. However, other articles Muslims are depicted as protesting together with Christians against violent attacks, as well as being targets of attacks by Hindu groups. The construction of the relationship between Christians and Muslims is consequently multifaceted. Nevertheless the three articles from Kashmir bring complexity to the often one-sided depiction among scholars, that violence and harassment of Christians is an effect of Hindu Nationalism.

## **5.3 The Violence and Harassments**

In the articles totally 38 *different* cases (some are brought up two times) of violent attacks or some kind of harassment are mentioned. There are various kinds of incidents, from menacing phone calls, to battering, to destruction of property, to systematic oppression (e.g. through denial of burial rights). There is no distinguished discourse that portrays a certain group within the Christian community as more exposed.



In addition to the 38 cases of violent attacks or harassment, the articles bring attention to two new reports (from GCIC and CSF) concerning violence against Christians. There are a few significant differences between these reports and the picture that emerges from the articles, e.g. the report from GCIC claims that Orissa has second largest number of attacks against Christians, but not a single article contain an incident from Orissa (accept the burning of the Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two children in 1999). However, both the reports and the articles depict Christians in Karnataka as most afflicted.

The cause behind the violent attacks or acts of harassment is mostly “conversion” (only on other motive is ones presented which suggest that Christians are targeted as Naxalites). This will be fully discussed under “The Controversy over Conversion”.

As describe above the agents executing the violence are rarely mention, rather the state is the agent whom is blamed for the attacks, as it is not effectively protecting the Christian minority.

#### **5.4 The Controversy over Conversion**

The most recurring issue in the articles is “conversion”; it is the dominant motive for attacking Christians. The term is used as it implies more than an individual adopting a new religion. Strong emotions (especially anger) and value assessments (it is something you can accuse a person being involved in) are associated with the word. It appears to be a common understanding between producer and consumer of the articles that “conversion” is something controversial, that it implicit implies something immoral or illegal: *“the IFKCA has condemned the recent statement of vice-president of BJP Minorities Cell Frankling Monteiro for leveling baseless allegation of conversion”*, *“A few weeks ago, the mere rumor that a few boys in a Ganderbal village had converted led to raids by...”* , *“Even prayer meetings are being accused to be attempts at conversions”*.

The central question concerning an individual’s conversion appears to be who influenced this person to convert and by which means. The influence is regarded as something negative, as a disrespect of a person’s original religion. In addition it seems to circulate a belief in the Indian society that Christians use bribes and other similar means to make people convert. As a consequence, converting (to Christianity) is associated with acts of force or allurement.

#### ***5.4.1 A Lack of Correspondence***

The persons who are claimed to be subjected to “conversation activities” are rarely questioned about their experiences in the articles. When they are, they appear to be surprised that somebody consider their conversion to be forced and denies it. Only ones thus a person “claim” that he was subjected to some kind of coercion. The story is though pictured rather exaggerated, not even the journalist seems to believe in it. A young Muslim boy claims to have been force to drink “*swine blood*” and is claimed to be “*progressively addicted to alcohol, women, money, drugs and the promise of weapons*”. The journalist indicate that the story’s reliability is doubtful: “*The story of Class 10 student reads like a film script*”. If the story is understood to be made-up (like the journalist presents it), not a single article contains a story of a person actually being subjected to *forced* conversion. Consequently there is a lack of correspondents between the discourse concerning conversion and the stories that are actually presented in the articles.

#### ***5.4.2 Different sorts of Christians***

The articles distinguished between Christians involved in “conversion activities” and those who are not. It is apparent that the latter types of Christians are regarded as preferable. Mostly it is pastors or missionaries that are accused for belonging to the first group. It may be expected for religious leaders, and especially missionaries, to seek to increase the number of followers of their religion; however in the articles this is portrayed to be something reprehensible (when it concerns Christians in India). This is probably related to the view of conversions as forced or by means of allurements.

#### ***5.4.3 Why a controversy?***

There are two clues in the articles why conversion is such a controversy. Firstly, as described above, it exist a belief that conversions to Christianity are normally forced or a consequence of allurements. This belief has been established insomuch that it has become the dominant discourse (in the articles) concerning conversion. The consequence of this discourse, inevitable constructs conversion as something controversially, as people are “forced”, “*brainwashed*”, “bribed” to leave there religion behind.

Another clue why conversion is controversial is offered in a remark by the president of the Federation of Human Rights’ Organizations. He rejects the “*charge*” that the population of minorities is on rise because of conversion. Furthermore he argues that there is no

*“empirical basis”* for such a claim and that those who proposed it are *“trying to create a wrong impression in the minds of the common people”*. Even if the statement is an attempt to defend minorities, it is evidently part of a discourse that regards a rising population of minorities as controversial, and reproducing it. By picturing the claim as being a “charge”, it seems to be something blamable. And instead of stating that it should be up to each individual to decide which religion to belong, the president argues that they try to *“create a wrong impression”*. If it was not a controversy he would not have needed to state this, because why would it give a *“wrong impression”*? As early discussed there seem to be a power of interest in not letting the Christian minority grow.

It should be remembered that the Indian society is both culturally and legally structure in a different way than our own. For example the different religious communities in India are governed by different Personal Laws. This means that when a person converts to another religion, it does not only influence the person social surrounding on a private level, but also in a legal perspective. It is in a very substantially way a transition to *another* social group, it therefore becomes more than a question for an individual (Kavunkal, 2005: 235). Another difference is the caste system. These differences are however not part of the construction of violence against Christians in the articles, and therefore not considered in the discussion.

## **5.5 Ideological Echoes**

My objective with this study is to examine in what way violence and harassment against Christians is constructed in Indian English newspapers, as well as inquire into which ideologies are reproduced in the articles. The second question is important as it expose which ideas about Christians that has influence public media, which could be an indication of what thoughts circulating in the Indian society regarding Christians (Fairclough, 1995:2). The analysis has showed that there are primarily two ideologies that are reproduced in the articles: Indian secularism and Hindu nationalism.

### **5.5.1 A Secular Ideology**

An Indian secular discourse is found in the majority of the articles. It is primarily used to construct the identity of Christians in India - as an Indian minority (an inherent minority of India) which the state is responsible for. It is though peculiar that the ideology does not emerge from comments by members of the Congress party (our any other politicians), but from Christians (mostly Christian organizations). In other words, the ideology is not

reproduced by politicians who officially stand behind these ideas, but by Christians and Christian organizations. The ideology is used as well to construct the identity of Indian as a secular and democratic state. Violence against the Christian minority is described as “anti-social elements” - a threat to the values that the Indian state is founded on. For instance in one article a CSF researcher states “*democracy and secularism in a country is determined by how safe minority communities are*”. The state is urged by Christians and Christian organizations to recall this identity and take the responsibility which the Constitution binds them to.

Even though Christian organizations refer to the ruling party’s ideology, they do not seem to obtain any support from other parts of society or be able to create a public opinion concerning their situation. Rather Christians appears to be alone in their struggle for their legal rights of protection to be fulfilled. Only a few journalist express sympathy for their situation. Could this mean that the secular ideology that earlier characterize politics in India have lost support? In the articles there is howsoever only one example of an interview non-Christian supporting it.

Consequently, an Indian secularism discourse is used by Christians for three purposes. Firstly, it is used as a springboard to claim their legal rights (primarily the right to protection). Secondly it is used to construct the identity of the Christian community, as an Indian minority (as they are according to the Constitution) - an integrated part of the Indian society. Lastly the ideology is used by Christian organizations to underline the *identity of India* as a secular and democratic country, and further that a characteristic for such a country it that it takes care its minorities.

### ***5.5.2 Hindu Nationalism***

The strongest indication that the articles are influence by a Hindu Nationalist ideology is the discourse concerning conversion. As earlier stated, there seem to exist an understanding that conversion to Christianity is normally a consequence of force or some kind of allurement. As described in the background chapter this allege is not something new, but an idea that has been propagated by the Hindutva movement for 150 years.

There is though a lack of coherence between the discourse about conversion and incidents reported. This indicates that the discourse do not mirror what is happening, but rather reflect

the increased influence of Hindu nationalist groups and their ideology. The discourse is used as a motive for attacking Christians in the majority of the articles.

It is noteworthy that a Muslim community in Kashmir has adopted the same rhetoric. In fact, the stories from Kashmir contain the strongest accusations concerning forced conversions. A journalist writes “*even educated people this reporter spoke to believe sex, booze and money is the only reason why anyone would convert to Christianity*”. This displays that the discourse normally associated with Hindu nationalism is used by other groups in the Indian society as well.

During the twenty century the Hindu nationalistic ideology has mainly been spread by three organizations: BJP, VHP and RSS. They are all mentioned in the articles and argued to be connected to attacks and marginalization of Christians. However, it seems like (out of the articles) the discourse is upheld and reproduced by a variety of groups and institutions in the Indian society. The ideology appears to have spread far beyond Hindu nationalistic organizations; it has (in the articles) become the dominant way of understanding and talking about conversions.

## **5.6 Summary**

The analysis has showed that there are two ideologies, Indian secularism and Hindu nationalism, that primarily characterize in what way violence and harassment against Christians are constructed (in the two newspapers). Some articles contrast the two perspectives and others give interpretive prerogative to one.

The discourse characterized by Indian secularism depicted Christians as an Indian minority, an inherent part of the Indian society. The focus is mostly on the state, which it criticized for both neglecting their responsibility to care for the Christian population and being actively involved in the persecution of Christians. In other words the state is the center of attention; they are regarded as the ultimate responsible for how a minority is treated in society. Christians are constructed as actively, but alone, fighting for their legal rights to be fulfilled. Almost no attention is given to the executors of the violence and harassments.

When the construction is characterized by a Hindu Nationalism discourse the attention is on Christians as a growing threat within the country. Christians are depicted as through forced

conversations or allurements (in other words by immoral and illegal methods) increasing. It is not clearly articulated why the Christian population is a threat, but there seems to exist an interest in many parts of society to stop the growth. The use of the word “conversion” as something that implies pressure is widespread in the articles, even Christians and Human rights organizations are influenced by this discourse. There is though a lack of correspondence between the discourse concerning conversion and the picture that emerges from the actual stories printed in the newspapers; not a single trustworthy story of a forced conversion is found in the articles. This brings a strong question mark to the allegations.

The analysis also exposes a few other tendencies. In contrast to scholarly work, where caste is often depicted as an important aspect in the persecution of Christians, the articles almost do not mention the issue. Another pattern is that the newspapers' coverage of violence and harassment against Christians seems to be limited to a few states: e.g. a report cited in an article claims that Orissa has the second highest amount of attacks on Christians, but not a single article is found concerning an incident in the state. And lastly the analysis brings attention to that violence and harassment against Christians as well as the discourse concerning conversion, is not limited to a Hindu nationalistic movement within the country (as it often appears like in scholarly work), these two phenomena are found in Kashmir as well (where the majority are Muslims).

## 6. CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Main Findings

In the previous chapter I presented my results from the analysis at length, thus as a conclusion I would like to draw attention to the findings which I regard as most important.

Firstly it has become evident that the most common stories published on the subject concern Christians or Christian organizations reacting with protests and condemnations against violent attacks and as well as an ignorant state. Consequently Christians immensely influence the construction of violence and harassment against Christians in the articles. They commonly use a discourse influenced by Indian secularism, where the Christian community is regarded as an Indian minority which the state has responsibilities towards. The picture that emerges from this discourse is accordingly a country where the public authority is ignoring a relative widespread persecution against a minority which it has promised to protect and care for. However as this discourse is nearly entirely used by Christians and Christian organizations, it appears that they are quite lonely in their struggle.

This leads to the next important finding, which is the construction of the state's role in the persecution of Christians. The state is claimed to be passive to what is happening as well as actively involved in the persecution. This picture is constructed both out of claims from different agents (often Christian organizations) as well as the behavior of politicians described by the journalists. Furthermore the absence of remarks from politicians (supporting the violated Christians and condemning the violence) and the fact that the articles do not contain a single example of what the government is planning to do against the persecution, strengthen this picture.

Another important finding is that the Hindutva movement's discourse concerning conversion seems to have spread and become the dominant way of talking about the phenomena. Accordingly, conversions (to Christianity) are generally regarded as being forced or by allurements. Among scholars this discourse is usually associated with Hindu organizations, but is used in the articles by high rank politicians, human rights organizations, Christian priests, Muslims, common people etc. The discourse does not just seem to have become widespread, but is also the most widely and dominant motive declared for attacking Christians.

The last major finding is that the construction of violence and harassment against Christians in the two newspapers, give the impression that the agents executing the violence are barely known. A few times they are described as belonging to Hindu groups or being Muslims, but in general these agents are rarely described at all. As they are “unknown”, it becomes impossible to create a public opinion against the criminals. The focus is instead aimed at the state which is argued to be the *outmost* guilty.

Out of the analysis my conclusion is that the construction of violence against Christians in Indian English newspapers are both part of reproducing an agenda that could encourage persecution (by using the Hindutva movements discourse concerning conversion), as well as containing an Indian secular discourse that could be used to resist such actions.

## **6.2 Final Remarks**

The method used to answer the study’s research question was a critical discourse analysis. As the research is completed I consider the method to have been accurate to fulfill the objectives.

As explained initially a feature that characterizes a discursive approach is the idea that a discursive practice is a social action with ideological effects, inventible reproducing norms, values and power configurations. Moreover an aspect of doing a critical discourse analysis is to reveal the function a discourse play in the upholding of oppressive power configurations. Therefore as a conclusion of this study I will present and discuss three aspects of the discourses found in the articles that may lead to *or* uphold oppression.

Firstly, I consider it insidious that the executors of the violent actions and harassment are made invisible in the articles. These agents are criminals. They are committing illegal actions according to Indian law. But most seriously they are causing suffering to thousands of people and spreading fear in society. As they are not displayed in public media, there is no possibility to create a public opinion against the crimes they are committing. Times of India and The Hindu are two of the most visited websites in the world, and it could probably make a difference if these agents were identified. At the moment the newspapers are somehow protecting them. If it is an unconscious act they have a possibility to change and thereby bring awareness in India and around the globe, and if it is conscious it is very



alarming. It would mean that two of the largest newspapers in India are systematically protecting criminals.

The second feature I would like to bring attention to is the discourse concerning conversion. It is regarded as something involving force or allurement, which seems to have spread to a big part of the Indian society. This could be a threat against freedom of religion, as it both makes it complicated and perilous for people to adopt a new religion as well as proclaim their own. Some states have already implemented laws that compel people who would like to convert to get approval from the state. The attitudes regarding conversion will not easily be changed, Christians will have to find a way to relate to the discourse; perhaps by constructing a new discourse concerning mission and conversion that is not associated with foreign missionary activities in the past.

Thirdly, one of the most alarming tendencies that have become visible from the analysis is that the government of India does not seem to be very engaged in what is happening to the Christian population. From the articles it appears like no action is taken to hinder the attacks and no efforts are made to influence the public opinion. Rather, the state seems to be part of the persecution of a large minority. India has to tackle the situation of being a country with such a diverse population; dividing the country's population after religious belonging does not seem to be a fruitful and peaceful way.

### **6.3 For Further Study**

There are several questions that have emerged during the research, which could not be answered due to the limitations of time and the primary material. In two vital areas I would suggest further study. Firstly, do forced conversions happen on a bigger scale nowadays, or is this just part of a propaganda against Christians? Information seems to be available only on particular cases (whereas the ones I read showed that no forced conversions had occurred), and there is thus a lack of information on the more general level. If there is some truth in the allegations it is a problem that should be given attention. If it is misinformation it is an important knowledge which could have impact on the way Christians are treated. The other interesting area for further studies would be to investigate the same questions in local newspapers. In one article that was analyzed (“Kashmir zealots push Christians into valley of fear”) there was an extract from the largest English newspaper in Kashmir. It was written like a propaganda story against Christians and when I read the story (at the newspaper's

website) in whole I was rather astonished that it was published in a state's leading English newspaper. As this study is based on two of the largest Indian English newspapers a comparison would be very interesting.

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